

“BONE OF MY BONES AND FLESH OF MY FLESH¹”: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF CHRISTIANITY, EVOLUTIONARY THEORY, AND THE PROVENANCE OF PATRIARCHY

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While perceived by many as conflicting in nearly every sphere, science and religion both play an important role in the promotion of patriarchal ideologies. *My research has found that neither Christianity nor evolutionary theory are inherently patriarchal, neither do they justify patriarchy. Instead, it is the misinterpretation and misuse of these subjects that contribute to the justification of patriarchy for the deep-seated goal of reproductive power.* I will show this by analyzing theological themes present throughout the Christian scriptures, as well as investigating findings of evolutionary psychology and hominid ancestry. The implication of this study is that there is no valid function for the institution of patriarchy.

The effects of gender inequality are universally felt, whether it is overtly expressed through explicit control of female sexuality, or whether it manifests itself as a covert, systemic issue. Feminists respond to issues like these by first identifying patriarchal ideologies as the primary source of inequality and oppression, especially the oppression of marginalized people including women, racial and ethnic minorities, the poor, and those who do not fit traditional characterizations of masculinity. While feminists differ in their thoughts on the original cause of patriarchy, a common goal of feminism is to not only pinpoint ways in which gender discrimination is perpetuated, but also to identify the origin of this inequality in order to use this knowledge to shift society towards a more equal and inclusive paradigm. This paper will seek to aid in the feminist search for the origin of patriarchy, with specific emphasis on the influence of science and religion in promoting gender divisions.

First, I will analyze male-female dynamics among hominid ancestors in order to determine the validity and origin of patriarchal systems from an evolutionary perspective. I will also conduct a feminist analysis of Biblical text, the issues that are encountered when interpreting the historical text, and compare different Christian traditions and their inclusivity of women in the church in order to determine whether Christianity is inherently patriarchal.

Overt and Systemic Patriarchy

Feminists argue that the institution responsible for widespread oppression of various groups of marginalized people – most notably, women – is ‘The Patriarchy.’ Patriarchy at its core is any form of structural organization – be it social, tribal, familial, political, religious, or others – in which there is an unequal distribution of authority based on gender, with favorability given to males. This, in turn, results in unequal treatment and gender discrimination. Once a patriarchal scheme is

¹ Gen. 2:23, English Standard Version

established, it is often very difficult to displace and reform the system. The way in which patriarchy is expressed is dependent on whether the issue is an overt one within the society, or an underlying, systemic one.

Overt patriarchy can be described as any explicit, unhidden expression of gender discrimination. Figuratively speaking, this form of patriarchy is still exposed on the surface of society. Some examples of overt patriarchy include the denial of basic human rights to women, the explicit control of female sexuality, as well as the distinct control of activity of women. Examples of these types of patriarchal expressions include acts like female genital mutilation, human trafficking – specifically of women and young girls – denial of the right to drive, own land, vote or hold government positions, denial of the right to divorce, normalization of rape or male violence, and in places like Saudi Arabia, the inability to go places without a male chaperone.²

Overt patriarchy is often characteristic of societies in which women do not have the same access to education as men, or in societies where quality education is lacking completely for both men and women. It is also common to see these overt practices in poor and developing societies; for instance, out of the eight nations in which female genital mutilation is practiced at a nearly universal rate (85%+), seven are considered among the “Least Developed Countries” according to the United Nations LDC list.³ These countries also exhibit an extreme lack of adult literacy, improper nutrition, poor access to quality health care or education, economic instability, and a typically higher-than-average mortality for children under the age of five.⁴

In contrast, *systemic patriarchy* is more often characteristic of developed

societies. For the purposes of this paper, systemic patriarchy could best be defined as a covert, patriarchal attitude that, in a way, has diffused under the surface of society as progress is made. For example, western societies have experienced an overall shift in public thought when it comes to a woman’s role in society – now, in general, it is acceptable for a woman to pursue a career outside of the household – yet only 5% of CEOs in the nation’s Fortune 500 companies are women.⁵ Another example is government itself. Although women’s suffrage was attained in 1920, and although 56% of voters are women, only 20% of Senators are women, and only 19% of the House of Representatives is composed of women.⁶

Systemic issues like these are largely affected by gender socialization and gender role propaganda such as through media and entertainment. It is also important to note that although individual cases of extreme misogyny occur in systemically patriarchal societies on an individual basis, this “individual” misogyny is the result of a society’s foundational beliefs – this attitude was not created in a vacuum, but rather adopted from an individual’s environment.

The Inclusivity of Inequality

An essential component to include when addressing the issue of patriarchy and whom it affects is that of *intersectionality*. Intersectionality is valuable to feminism because it acknowledges that the oppressive institution of patriarchy affects not only the female population, but also the population as a whole (at varying degrees). Intersectional feminists assert that cultural patterns of oppression are interrelated, as well as grouped together and influenced by the various oppressive systems of our society.⁷

² The Week UK, 2015

³ United Nations, 2014

⁴ Bruckner and Cortez, 2015

⁵ Stark, 2012

⁶ Pew Research Center, 2015

⁷ Collins, 1990

In other words, although patriarchy is typically thought of as *gender-discrimination*, its consequences are far-reaching and all encompassing. Patriarchal ideologies are not only unfavorable to women, but they are also exclusionary of the gay, transgender, and transsexual communities. Those who do not identify with heteronormativity or cis-gender descriptors often face similar discrimination that women face under the patriarchal system.

Patriarchal ideologies are also thought to discourage traditionally “feminine” behaviors in the male population, which is a form of oppression in itself. For instance, this may prevent a male from pursuing certain interests or developing certain traits due to the humiliation that he may face as a result of surrounding patriarchal pressures. Robert Connell termed this as hegemonic, or a standard of masculinity, that men are constantly measured against, and in turn, requires excessively feminine behavior in women.⁸

The argument follows that anyone who does not fit into the “good ol’ boys club” is susceptible to the discrimination that the patriarchy perpetuates. This, of course, includes as well certain ethnic and racial groups. Therefore, a black female is likely to experience a more intense degree of oppression and discrimination than a white woman. Intersectionality also claims that classism emerges from patriarchal institutions. It is commonly stated that poverty is a woman’s issue; evidence supports this claim. Trends in poverty show that at an early age, there is nearly an equal representation of males and females amongst the poor in the United States. However, once reproductive age is reached among a cohort, there is a dramatic increase in women in poverty, creating a huge

gender-gap in poverty. This gap narrows as age increases, until we reach an elderly population, in which we again see a dramatic widening of the gender gap with a majority of the poor American population composed of women.⁹

The varying degrees of oppression that we observe throughout the population are perpetuated by numerous mechanisms. While the potential methods could include media-produced propaganda and gender socialization; this paper will strictly target the influences of religion and evolutionary theory on patriarchal promotion.

In Consideration of Religion

One establishment that has historically been involved in the justification of patriarchal organization is religion. In the context of this paper, I will specifically address Christianity, as well as briefly touch on other monotheistic religions including Islam and Judaism in order to determine whether there is any apparent trend between monotheism and patriarchal hierarchy. Historically, Christian delivery of a patriarchal message is delivered in a two-pronged approach – female submission to her husband, as well as female submission in the church (which includes restriction from fulfillment of leadership positions).

An important point to consider as we analyze Christianity’s position on women’s roles is that, even within this one religion, there is no single consensus on the issue. The position that Christian individuals take on this subject is largely determined by their tradition of origin and their hermeneutic approach. Those who approach biblical interpretation from a complementarian perspective typically are proponents of the separation of roles between men and women in the church, with a restriction of leadership roles for men only. Egalitarian traditions, on the other hand, are much more favorable

⁸ Connell, 1995

⁹ *ibid.*

towards female leadership and are receptive towards the ordination of women.

Among the most commonly cherry-picked scriptures in support of patriarchy are the verses found in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, and 1 Timothy 2:11-15. Traditionalists argue that these verses serve as evidence for a justified hierarchal organization in which the man is the authority figure while the woman is to support of his leadership. While I will not delve into the various theological analyses of these verses here, I would like to at least discuss the implications of interpreting these verses from a complementarian perspective; this includes issues of gender inequality and discrimination in the church, issues of leadership qualifications, as well as the hermeneutical issues that can arise from interpreting selectively extracted verses as transcultural and making the mistake of not considering their cultural or situational intent. The complementarian position ignores the ontological equality in creation of gender where both are image bearers of God.

Issue of inequality and discrimination in the church

The verses used to support a complementarian perspective imply that women are subordinate to men, and that their place is to support male leadership (when we approach them with hierarchal hermeneutics). Even so, an argument that has commonly been used in justification of the patriarchal arrangement of the church is that while men and women are not ‘unequal,’ they do have different roles to fulfill in the church and in the household. This is only a partially-valid argument. While there are different roles in the church and household – and by natural extension, society – that some individuals are better

suited for certain roles than others, it is more appropriate and accurate for this to be determined on an *individual* basis, rather than on a *gender* basis.

The Bible is clear – amongst men and women there is a mutual and abundant distribution of spiritual gifts, with no distinction between men and women (1 Cor. 12:7-11). An issue that we encounter when we use the argument that there are distinct gender roles in the church is that we are essentially pigeonholing men and women into very limited definitions of their potential, God-given capabilities. This simply does not match up with the Christian view of the kenotic God that frees followers from the socially-constructed limitations placed on them by a corrupt and fallen world.

Another issue with the complementarian argument is that it sounds all too similar to arguments that were historically used to enforce oppressive institutions in the past, like the ‘separate but equal’ mantra used against civil rights movements in America in the first half of the 20th century. Despite the ruling of the Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896,¹⁰ segregation was, in actuality, still discrimination. Based on this logic, it follows that if there is any boundary preventing equal opportunity and treatment, this is *not* equality – no matter how you coat it. Simply put, patriarchy under the guise of complementarity is still not equality.

Issue of leadership qualifications

Another argument commonly used amongst traditionalists is that since Christ was a man, men should follow His example as leaders. While I agree that it is necessary for Christian men to live as servant leaders like Christ, the more important question is, where does this leave women? There is no

¹⁰ Smithsonian National Museum of American History

divinely sent being in the form of a woman in which we have as a model for women to live. Therefore, I would like to assert that the argument that Christ is a model exclusive to men is not valid – Jesus is a model for both men *and* women, despite the gender which He happened to take as an earthly manifestation of His being.

The earthly manifestation of Christ as a man could, perhaps, rather be understood as a powerful statement of the counter-cultural attributes of Jesus in a culture where men by-and-large had social privilege. For instance, in John 4, Jesus talks to a Samaritan, and even more, he talks to a *woman*, which was controversial in itself. In Luke 13:16, Jesus heals a woman on the Sabbath and, after facing criticism from the Pharisees, he explicitly turns the patriarchy on its head by identifying her heir-ship and calling the woman *a daughter of Abraham* (lineage distinction was normally reserved for men). It has also been noted that women commonly traveled from place to place with Jesus and the Twelve to serve as their benefactors (Luke 8:1-3). Jesus also extended the welcome to follow him to women; two that are identified in Luke 8:1-3 and Mark 15:40-41 are Joanna and Salome.¹¹

Implicit to patriarchy is a ‘chain of command’ from the oldest male over the clan; however, Jesus forbade His disciples to rule over one another. They were instead called to exhibit humility and love (Matt. 20:25-28).¹² Jesus was not afraid to break rules imposed on society by religious tradition in order to extend his ministry to those whom were commonly neglected. In contrast, perhaps complementarians often mistake the trees for the forest when they exclude women from serving the church through leadership.

Similarly, it could be argued that Christ manifested himself as a male not due to any theological necessity, but because the culture in which he was born absolutely would not have accepted a female Messiah (despite the fact that even as a man, Jesus as Messiah was still not accepted by all). To assert that because Jesus was a man, all authority figures in the church must be male is to gender God as ‘male.’ However, I would like to assert that God has no gender, and that it is dangerous to the Christian faith to use gendered words when describing God. In the words of the prominent philosopher and theologian Mary Daly, the danger of gendering God is that “If God is male, then the male is God,”¹³ an exclusionary illustration that is commonly conveyed in many of our traditionalist churches.

In the same way that Christ served and led, men and women should *equally* serve and lead – our Christianity should convey a Jesus that is accessible to all. It is not fair to argue that a person is better suited or should be more expected to exercise authority simply because of gender. For instance, in a hypothetical situation in which the decision lie between a man and a woman leading a congregation, and if the woman has clearly been called to do so and is even more spiritually gifted to fulfill the calling than the man, the default should not go to the man just because of his sex. To base a qualification for church leadership on one’s sex is to neglect Paul’s words in Galatians 3:28. As counter-cultural Christians, it is our calling to reject the ascribed statuses that are placed on each other by society and instead, view each other as spiritual beings that are united and equal in Christ. As representatives of Christ on this earth, to state that one requirement for serving the Kingdom of God through church leadership is based on an

¹¹ Belleville and Beck, 2005

¹² Riss, 2005

¹³ Daly, 1973, p.19

earthly, ascribed status like sex is to assert a notion contrary to the Gospel that Christ *does* see male and female, and places more weight on gender than our spiritual identities.

Issue of interpreting the Bible from a strict transcultural perspective

An issue that is commonly encountered in hermeneutics is deciphering text as either transcultural or cultural. Many traditionalists argue that to dismiss certain verses as culturally or circumstantially influenced is to deny the infallibility, inerrancy, and relevancy of divine scripture. Therefore, it is important to clarify that although all scripture is transcultural in its *message*, not all scripture conveys these transcultural messages through transcultural *examples and language*. For instance, if we argued from the logic that all scripture is transcultural, both in its message and examples, then Christians would be able to justify slavery through verses like Ephesians 6:5 and Titus 2:9 (which, for the record, Christians have done in the past).

Hierarchical Christians employ the same logic when interpreting circumstantial scripture as transcultural and using it to dictate the limitations placed on the freedom of women to use their gifts for the edification of the church that slaveholders used when interpreting scripture to justify slavery. Egalitarian Christians are *not* arguing against the divinity of “God-breathed” scripture, however, can we realistically expect this ancient text to be completely immune to the culture and society in which it was written? The question that we as Christians need to ask is whether the core, transcultural message of Christianity encourages this gender-based division of the church body, or whether the verses used in support of patriarchy are simply the result of specific situations that Paul was addressing within the church or

influenced by the culture in which it was written. It is also important to consider that our human interpretation of scripture is not perfect, and the fact that so many expert and prominent theologians are divided on this issue should remind us that this topic, and the correlating biblical evidence, is not nearly as clear-cut and obvious as we would like it to be.

In discerning the true will of God for women in all spheres, it is beneficial to compare verses like those that have traditionally been used in support of male dominance to verses that may send a different message. For instance, we have already discussed how the character of Christ that is reflected in the New Testament defies, rather than enforces patriarchal ideologies. It is valuable to also analyze the actual role of women as presented throughout the Bible, as well as the intended function of marriage. I will also conduct a brief analysis of the history of Christianity in an attempt to pinpoint the origin of complementarity and religious patriarchy. For perspective’s sake, and in order to better populate the spectrum of Christianity, it is also beneficial to discuss the different traditions within Christianity and their respective favorability towards female leadership in the church. Finally, I will briefly investigate any trends that may exist as a commonality of monotheistic religions that may lead to the establishment of patriarchy.

Female representation in the Bible

Traditionalists may be disturbed to find that in the Old Testament, we see a surplus of ordained female authority figures. It is an interesting note to recognize that in a time that was literally centuries behind our modern society in progress and gender equality, well-respected female religious leaders were still to be found. The Bible mentions several strong female leaders

throughout the text, for instance, Exodus 15:20 and Micah 6:4 describes Moses' sister Miriam as an indispensable prophetess that "served Israel well during the wilderness years." Another Old Testament prophetess (Judges 4:4), Deborah was not only a judge (4-5), but also a mother in Israel (5:7). Other prophetesses included Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), exilic prophetesses (Ezekiel 13:17-24), as well as postexilic (Nehemiah 6:14). It is important to note, here, that the foremost ministry role in the Old Testament was that of prophet (or prophetess), and like their male peers, both trustworthy and false ones could be found.

Similarly, in the New Testament we see a considerable amount of women in ministry. For example Priscilla is spoken of as apostolic alongside her husband, Aquila (Acts 18:1-3 and Romans 16:3-4); Mary, Lydia, and Nympha are described of as being overseers of house churches (Acts 12:12; 16:14-15; Colossians 4:15), Junia was considered by Paul as being "outstanding among the apostles" (Romans 16:7); Phoebe in Romans 16:1-2 was not only a patron of Paul, but was also a deacon; 1 Corinthians 11:5 describes female prayer leaders and prophesiers; another female deacon is described in 1 Timothy 3:11; teachers of the Word are described in Acts 18:24-26; Acts 21:9 describes four unmarried, virgin prophetesses; the evangelists Euodia and Syntyche are found in Philippians 4:2-3, who Paul writes have "contended at my *side*" (emphasis added to indicate equality rather than horizontal hierarchy); Mary Magdalene is often acknowledged as the apostle to the apostles in many early Christian writings. In conclusion, while there are a mere three debated verses over the role of women, the numerous verses describing the actions of God-glorifying women seem to speak louder than any gender-based limitations that

traditionalists impose upon the entirety of the Bible.

The origin of religious patriarchy

If there are so many verses that would suggest an equal opportunity for leadership in the church amongst men and women, as compared to a mere handful of verses against women in the church, where did this complementarian perspective first find root in common Christian ideology? For instance, as already discussed, there is significant biblical evidence of women in religious authority positions, and in Brooten's book "Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue," evidence of nineteen Greek and Latin inscriptions in which women bear the titles including "Head of Synagogue", "Elder", "Priestess" and even "Archisysragogos" (the absolute highest office).¹⁴

At the end of the Apostolic Church period, however, a new church hierarchy dominated by men began to emerge, culminating in the Ecclesiastic male orders of the Catholic Church.¹⁵ Women were excluded from clergy roles, and a strict line was drawn not only between men and women in the church, as well as between clergy and laity. Simply put, the development of the male-dominated clergy in Catholicism and the gradual transference of that concept of male clergy roles and male laity leadership roles in Protestantism is responsible for the role of women in the modern church.

Christian traditions and their differing favorability towards female leadership

Despite this, there are several Christian traditions that are much more inclusive to women. "For example, the United Presbyterian Church voted to ordain women as ministers in 1956. Since then, over eighty Protestant traditions including

¹⁴ Brooten, 1982

¹⁵ Rowland, 1991

National Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists, and Episcopalians have joined in on the favorability towards female ordination. Denominations that are still experiencing lag in catching up to reformed egalitarian theology include the Roman Catholic Church, churches of the Southern Baptist Convention, as well as the Churches of Christ.¹⁶

Monotheism and patriarchy

Perhaps patriarchy is a natural effect of monotheism. For example, in the other monotheistic, Abrahamic faiths of Islam and Judaism, we also see instances in which hierarchical ideologies are promoted. One commonality between these monotheistic faiths is their emphasis on female modesty. While traditionalists would argue for this in order not to tempt the opposite sex, biblical egalitarians would most likely be in support of enforcing female modesty for perhaps righteousness reasons, whereas Christian feminists might suggest that this is an example of male control over female sexuality and places the responsibility of men's actions and thoughts on women. Judaism also emphasizes feminine modesty (and in some cases, male modesty as well), and the traditional Islamic veil is utilized to preserve a woman's modesty.

Another common feature of the Abrahamic faiths is that they all enforce pre-marital abstinence. While egalitarians again, may find biblical legitimacy and justification in this with complementarians, feminists may argue that this is an explicit control of female sexuality in order to ensure paternal legitimacy of offspring through the constraints of marriage. Among Orthodox Jews, menstruating women are segregated due to the belief that this aspect of female sexuality is unclean. However, like the Christian faith, there are reformed synagogues in which female ordainment is

allowed. Female genital mutilation is common among Muslim communities in the east, as it is viewed to combat lust and preserve a girl's pre-marital purity. However, while it is believed that this is a religious mandate by those who practice it in the East, many Muslims and scholars in the west insist that female genital mutilation has no basis in the Islamic religion and has rather, been wrongly imposed on the religion by the eastern culture.

Overall, with these examples and hermeneutical considerations in mind, I would like to conclude that while certain traditions all throughout the Abrahamic faiths have perpetuated the oppressive patriarchal institution, this is not the true intent of their religions, and certainly, it is not the true intent of the Gospel. Rather, when we examine the themes present throughout the Gospel and Christ's actions, we see a liberation from socially constructed limitations and hierarchy that speaks louder than misconstrued words. Throughout the Bible, there is a myriad of scriptures describing women as fulfilling equal roles in the church as men, and the inclusion of women that Jesus displays in the New Testament opposes the inferiority that the first-century culture imposed upon women.

Therefore, it is strange that despite women making up the majority of religious participants in most Christian denominations, they would not be permitted to partake in church leadership.¹⁷ While the church body is "not of this world", the body is still *in* the world, and the way that scripture is interpreted influences the way that Christians approach the world and worldly situations. To the complementarians that support societal reform but not reform of the church - female leadership in the church and female leadership in society are *not* mutually exclusive. If Christians approach the issue of church leadership from

¹⁶ Rowland, 1991

¹⁷ Pew Research Center, 2015

a complementarian perspective, then their contributions to society will resemble that of gender inequality and further enforce gender discrimination, rather than that of a counter-cultural and revolutionary movement that works to eradicate oppressive institutions in order to offer the freedom, equality, and abounding love that the Christian religion advertises for the marginalized.

In Consideration of Evolutionary Theory

When analyzing human behavior, it is useful to look to science in an attempt to understand any biological basis for such behavior. Social arrangements like patriarchy are no exceptions. Evolutionary theory could provide answers for whether there exists an ancestral basis for the dominating and submissive attitudes that are necessary for oppressive institutions like patriarchy to function. Historically, evolutionary theory has been used to strictly enforce the traditional family model, complete with the breadwinner father and the submissive housewife.

Some common myths that are often thought to be supported by “science” and evolutionary biology in justification of the validity of patriarchy as an efficient and successful reproductive strategy include the following: (1) men have evolved to control and coerce women, (2) men have evolved to be better leaders than women, (3) the uniquely female role of motherhood has resulted in the selection of nurturing and submissive women, and (4) beauty in females is more reproductively favorable than intelligence. Here, I will analyze each of these misconceptions and how they found popularity in public opinion. I will also compare these claims to what evolutionary theory *actually* reveals about human nature. It is important to note that all of these concepts find root in the sex differences of minimum parental care investment.

Males have evolved to control and coerce women

The idea that men are inherently coercive, constantly waging an internal battle with their obsessive sexual drive is an underlying thought throughout much of society. Women are taught to be wary of men because of this, and sadly, the experiences of many women often support this claim. In a way, this claim is used to justify the ‘natural’ order of patriarchy, for instance, if this is the way that men are genetically ‘programmed’, then patriarchy at least has an evolutionary basis. This argument finds basis in the MCFC model, or, the *males compete/females choose* model.¹⁸

This model emphasizes (and exaggerates) the sexual dimorphism between males and females, and stems from Darwin’s theory of sexual selection (1871). As mentioned earlier, this theory places importance on the differing amount of parental investment that males and females are required to input in order to produce successful offspring. As a result of this, males who are able to reproduce “inexpensively” approach reproduction from a “quantity” approach and compete for female choice through ornamental displays or aggressive intrasexual demonstrations. This form of sexual selection combined with male increased size difference would, in theory, make men more susceptible to coercive and violent behaviors than women, since in certain cases, this type of behavior would benefit them reproductively. Under the MCFC model, males display a greater sexual drive and interest in sexual novelty than females, and as a result of their competition, have shorter lifespans than females. Females on the other hand, apply a “quality” strategy since reproduction is much costlier and time-consuming. This

¹⁸ Stewart-Williams, 2013

results in in the reproductive strategy of female choice.¹⁹

However, while the MCFC model may strictly hold true in many animal species, an alternative model – *mutual mate choice* (MMC) – has found more validity in the field of evolutionary psychology in describing *Homo sapiens* behavior. While the MMC model does not totally discount the biological influences on human behavior that the MCFC proposes, it argues that the emphasized sex differences of the MCFC model are actually much more minimal within the human population. The MMC model asserts that while there is still a degree of dimorphism in humans, we are more *monomorphic* than evolutionary psychology has historically implied. Implications of this are that males also participate in parental investment nearly equally (with the exception of parturient), pair bonding, and child rearing as a form of allo-parenting became more necessary with increasing hominid brain size and dependency of offspring (increase in childhood period). As a result, males also participate in mate choice. This increase in offspring dependency meant that the amount of progeny that men could successfully father in *theory* was not the *reality*. Similarly, under the MMC model, females also engage in female mate competition like males.

It is true that there still exists a modest degree of sexual dimorphism – research has shown that on average, men are much more welcoming of casual sex and sexual novelty than women. However, “from a comparative perspective, we are a relatively monomorphic mammal, with relatively monomorphic minds”²⁰. Therefore, a machismo portrayal of men that is often used to explain corrupt male behavior like adultery, interest in

pornography, and rape should be weighed against the MMC model and perhaps the influence of gender socialization and male violence normalization enforced by patriarchal ideologies.

Males have evolved to be better leaders than women

This thought finds root in the idea that leadership requires strength and, therefore, is associated with masculinity. Some have argued that since men were generally the “hunters” and women were the “gatherers,” that this gives men a competitive edge that women simply do not possess. Again, we see no biological basis justifying this claim – pseudoscience in support of male intellectual and social superiority is not valid. Instead, there may only be different leadership strategies ... men are more likely to resort to ‘control and command’ types of leaderships whereas women tend to lead from a collaborative stance.

While patriarchal societies arbitrarily typically value one strategy over the other, the results show that matriarchal leadership can be equally effective. A meta-analysis to address this debate by quantitatively measuring gender differences in perceptions of leadership effectiveness across 99 independent samples from 95 studies showed that when all leadership contexts are considered, men and women do not differ in perceived leadership effectiveness. In fact, in ratings by others about their female leaders, women are rated significantly more effective than men. In contrast, when self-ratings only are examined, men rate themselves as significantly more effective than women rate themselves.²¹ Apparently, men are far more deluded about their leadership capability than women!

¹⁹ Stewart-Williams, 2013

²⁰ Stewart-Williams, 2013

²¹ Paustian-Underdahl, 2014

The role of motherhood has selected women to be more nurturing and less ambitious than men

Arguably, the greatest difference between males and females is the ability to bear children. While there is truth in the radical feminist argument that this biological difference accounts for much of the gender discrimination and inequality between men and women – childbirth often hinders women from attaining the same social standing as men in the sense that it often removes them from the workplace – in what ways has the original role of women as child-bearers and care-takers influenced the psychologies of women and their differences from men?

To Social Darwinists like Herbert Spencer, the role of motherhood utterly defines women. This concept has historically served as vital ammunition in arguments justifying traditional gender roles and imposing limits on women. Social Darwinism has historically distorted true Darwinism to justify a physiological division of labor by sex. For instance, Spencer argued that because so much energy goes into female reproduction, there must account for an “earlier arrest of individual evolution in women than in men” and constrained mental development in women.²² Due to the popularization of this idea, women went uneducated and became a self-fulfilling prophecy. As well as largely uneducated, “Women were assumed to be ‘naturally’ what patriarchal cultures would socialize them to be: modest, compliant, noncompetitive, and sexually reserved.”²³ Social Darwinists argued that since women were naturally selected and “predestined to be mothers, women were born to be passive and noncompetitive, intuitive rather than

logical.”²⁴ While these false misconceptions were resolved in the early 20th century, it is not uncommon to find derivatives of this thought in public opinion.

In reality, evolutionary theory, and Darwinism asserts that “no adaptation continues to be selected for outside the circumstances that happen to favor it”²⁵. This implies that it is simply inaccurate to group women into one limiting definition of womanhood, because observation does not provide enough evidence to suggest that there is a single definition with which to prescribe to all women. Evolutionary theory shows us that contrary to Herbert Spencer’s misogynist, Victorian distortion of Social Darwinism, women have never been simply “baby factories”²⁶ – their purpose has always been much more extensive than that, although child-bearing is just as an important role as any, if not more so.

Anthropologist Sarah Hrdy claims that the male construction of the perfect mother portrays women as inherently self-sacrificing, and yet in reality, women are typically not nearly as self-sacrificing as this traditional view of motherhood asserts. In fact, self-sacrificing mothers are shown to normally be found only in highly inbred groups or among women who are facing the end of their reproductive career. In addition, human experience shows that there are many cases of women who do not wish to be mothers at all. This fact alone shows us that there is no single definition of womanhood as brought about by the uniquely female role of motherhood. Likewise, we see that motherhood has no influence on female ambition.²⁷ This is even observed in chimpanzee communities where mothers are able to earn respect in her community and build a dynasty for her offspring.²⁸

²² Hrdy, 1999, pg. 14

²³ Hrdy, 1999, pg. 15

²⁴ Hrdy, 1999, pg. 15

²⁵ Hrdy, 1999, pg. 13

²⁶ Hrdy, 1999

²⁷ Hrdy, 1999

²⁸ Smuts, 1995

Beauty in females is more reproductively favorable than intelligence

It is interesting that early Darwinists, whose sexual selection theory²⁹ resembled that of the MCFC model would argue for female beauty as beneficial to their reproductive success; under the MCFC model, males compete for the female choice, often through physical indicators of reproductive fitness such as through symmetry or ornamental displays. Under this model, one would think that it would be more favorable for males to display “beauty” as opposed to the females. However, even under assumptions of sexual selection (as the female reproductive strategy), Social Darwinists and essentialists emphasized the importance of female beauty, and suggested that this was a more successful reproductive strategy than female intelligence. Even today, this rudimentary concept is propagandized in media like magazines, music, and television. The idea that is often unconsciously sold to the female population is that in order to attract a mate and be reproductively successful, women must fulfill unrealistic and culturally dictated ideals of beauty. In turn, women have the potential to become self-fulfilling prophecies of this, perhaps even investing more in beauty than in education.

The fact that in the human population, contrary to the majority of nature, women are the “showier” sex does however support the MCC model. Here, we observe that there is mutual male and female competition for mate choice. Evolutionary theory also reveals that a female’s beauty does not necessarily indicate reproductive success. While beauty may help females attain fertilization and a more diverse selection of mates, beauty will not keep her offspring alive to reach reproductive age. Observations of chimpanzees like the well-known matriarch, Flo, show us that females

in nature must have cunning strategy and intelligence in order to keep their offspring alive long enough to reproduce. The implications of this are interesting when compared to the emphasis on modesty in many cultures. Why would modesty be so emphasized when female beauty allows women to compete for mates? Perhaps male control of displays of female sexuality allows males to ensure paternity.

Evolutionary theory shows us that these claims are merely perpetuated myths promoted by pseudoscience or common misconceptions of evolution. Instead, we only see that male domination and control of women has nothing to do with any evolved traits of men and women – but rather male bias within early evolutionary theory. One exception, though, is that the ability to modify behavior to different environments in order to be more reproductively favorable is an evolved trait that may perhaps lead to male dominance. This type of male-dominating, female-submitting behavior could potentially occur in situations when there is a combination of factors that could allow this type of behavioral response. According to anthropologist Barbara Smuts, there are six factors that contribute to the formation of a patriarchy. These factors consist of a reduction in female allies due to immigration, elaboration of male-male alliances, increased male control over resources, increased hierarchy formation among men, and female strategies that reinforce male control over females.³⁰ While I will not go into detail of these concepts, the general significance of this study is that it emphasizes the importance of philopatry and support structures for females, as well as the importance of women in positions like government and media in order to give a voice to feminism and combat perpetuation language and ideologies. Smut’s research fleshes out the framework that was

²⁹ Darwin, 1859

³⁰ Smuts, 1995

potentially used to build upon the foundation for patriarchy and develop a societal organization from it.

The Provenance of Patriarchy

It is likely that at the foundation of patriarchy and female oppression lies the desire for *reproductive power*. Nevertheless, many questions remain with this hypothesis. Why would men want reproductive power? What is the purpose of this? How is this related to other forms of oppression like racism and xenophobia? What about poverty? What are some modern examples where this desire is more apparent and how does this tie into modern-day examples of female oppression?

The facile and perhaps overly reductionist claim is to conclude that the issue of patriarchy and exploitation boils down to a deep-seated male desire to ensure the survival of one's genes. It is true that mechanisms like rape, male control of resources, male-male alliances, and other manifestations of patriarchy are among the gamut of strategies that are simply no longer needed in highly advanced and industrialized nations where reproductive success is not as difficult to attain as it once was for our Pleistocene ancestors. In societies like these, perhaps it could be argued that patriarchy is manifested more as a systemic issue as opposed to overt control of female sexuality. Even if it is a subtler form of female oppression, why does it still linger in our modern society?

For lower socioeconomic classes and less developed nations, reproductive power is something that is not as guaranteed as it is for those that have access to better health

care or resources to enable the survival of their offspring long enough to reproduce.

CONCLUSION

Neither Christianity nor evolutionary theory has inherent patriarchal implications; rather, complementarian and Social Darwinist interpretations lead to the perpetuation of patriarchal ideologies. Nevertheless, it is valuable to analyze components of society to determine why moves such as these were made in the first place. Not only is it dangerous to pretend that we are blank slates immune to these influences, but it is also important for us to identify the relation that we have to these influences so that we can better approach issues like patriarchal oppression. In the end, science allows us to conclude that natural selection has favored, in humans, the potential to develop and express any one of a wide range of reproductive strategies depending on environmental conditions, and that men and women are more monomorphic than dimorphic.

This issue is just as important – if not more – to understand as Christians because as we reflect on the character of God and compare this to what ideas are permeating society through certain traditions, ideally the inclusivity and freedom from social oppression that Christianity preaches would be practiced in all aspects. Otherwise, our society will continue to perpetuate the seemingly endless cycle of oppression and inequality of disenfranchised peoples including women. Natural selection has neither morals nor values, but we do – we cannot blame a mindless process for societal issues. Instead, we should work to fix them.

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