

Biblical Patriarchy in Doctrine and Practice: An Analysis of Evangelical Christian Homeschooling

Tonya Vander
University of Chicago

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TONYA VANDER is a Master's candidate at the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration with a clinical concentration. She received her bachelor's degree in sociology from the School of General Studies at Columbia University. Her current research interest is in gender and religion. She aspires to become a clinical licensed social worker with a specific focus on women and children trauma victims.

Tonya Vander

BIBLICAL PATRIARCHY IN DOCTRINE AND
PRACTICE: AN ANALYSIS OF EVANGELICAL
CHRISTIAN HOMESCHOOLING

INTRODUCTION

“I spent most of my days while homeschooling trying to figure out how to be a better person, how to be more perfect, how to be a better homeschooler, a better dishwasher, a better everything,” Janine, a mother, reflected on her homeschooling years.¹ In the United States, homeschooled children made up three percent of the population in the 2011-2012 school year.² In addition, two-thirds of all homeschooling families were concerned about the integration of religion in their children’s education as a core reason for choosing homeschool over public school.² Some Evangelical Christian homeschoolers (ECHS) responded to such concerns by tailoring their homeschool curriculum. One movement within Evangelicalism that has gained tremendous momentum and influence among Christian homeschoolers is the Biblical Patriarchy Movement (BPM), a Christian organization that advocates for a hierarchical system where the man is understood to be dominant in both familial and institutional settings. Doug Phillips, one of the leaders of this movement, perceives patriarchy as the key tenet of the BPM. He believes that because

¹ Janine Personal Communication February 12, 2016.

² NCES. (2013) Fast facts tool provides quick answers to many education questions. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=91>

God is male the father is the physical representation of God's divine authority, while the wife's role is submission.³

Data analysis of two of the BPM's leaders' websites, Bill Gothard and Doug Phillips, and ten in-depth interviews with individuals that have participated in ECHS, show that BPM's gender ideologies have had a tremendous influence on ECHS families. The findings from my interviews show that there are gaps between what the official BPM doctrine prescribed and how the families in question practiced those doctrines. Each family navigated gender roles uniquely, this included variance in family rules about dress and dating. However, all informants shared their commitment to sexual abstinence, in accordance with the teachings of the BPM.

EVANGELICAL HOMESCHOOLING AND THE BIBLICAL PATRIARCHY MOVEMENT

There were a number of factors that influenced the development of the ECHS movement, including a collective interest of members to instill their religious beliefs into the day-to-day lives of their children. According to my informants, religion dictated nearly every aspect of their lives. Studies on ECHS at the height of the movement in the 1990s discovered a common drive for structure among ECHS members, including the implementation of rigid gender roles.⁴

The ECHS subscribe to a patriarchal model of family with male headship and female subservience. According to John Bartkowski and Jen'nan Ghazal Read, the concept of headship is reinforced through scripture, where Christ is positioned as the head of man and man is positioned over woman. Their success can be, in part, attributed to parents' interest in providing the "best" possible opportunities for their children, which the BPM and ECHS advertise.⁵ But while these organizations tend to define their teachings with rigidity, two women from the same church may have different ideas about how to practice their models. Among the people who participated in this research, there was no

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Bartkowski, J., & Read, J.G. (2003). Veiled submission: Gender, power, and identity among Evangelical and Muslim women in the United States. *Qualitative Sociology* 26(1), 73-77

singular format for how the BPM model was implemented on the ground.⁶ There was a plurality of beliefs among my informants—some women reported feeling empowered in their submission to their husbands, while others sought a more egalitarian based relationship. In fact, from family to family members of ECHS appeared to perform their gender roles quite diversely.

Many of the ECHS who embraced fundamentalism grew anxious over changing gender roles and the growing influence of feminism in the church. As a result, Gothard added what he referred to as the “chain of command.” Gothard argued that God only speaks through male authority. By using what he believed to be the Biblical model of authority—where God is the ultimate head, followed by the husband, then the wife, and finally the children—Gothard supplemented faith with obedience.

According to Steven Mitchell the door to the BPM was opened by ECHS families’ desires to see their children grow in character.⁷ BPM gained relevance among mothers attempting to balance their various responsibilities, including homeschooling and combating what they perceived as the “cultural wars” negatively impacting youth. Sociologist Mitchell L. Stevens argued that the “fragile child” became the focus of BPM and that order within the home was the route to success.⁸ This intersection between ECHS and the BPM was created through a shared fear of feminism and desire for greater order in the home.

Within the BPM there are sub-communities, such as the Quiverfull movement or community, a name that represents the group’s emphasis on their perceived calling to raise as many children as they can for God—the arrows in the quiver being a metaphor for children.⁹ One of my respondents subscribed to these beliefs. The Quiverfull movement believes that women should be willing to sacrifice their bodies for the purpose of procreation, and forego the use birth control.¹⁰ Daughters

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Stevens, M. (2001). *Kingdom of children: Culture and controversy in the homeschooling movement*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

⁸ Stevens, M. (2001). *Kingdom of children: Culture and controversy in the homeschooling movement*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

⁹ Mesaros-Winckles, C. (2010). TLC and the fundamentalist family: A televised Quiverfull of babies. *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, 22(3), 1–20. Retrieved from <https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-246536555/tlc-and-the-fundamentalist-family-a-televised-quiverfull>. B The quiver is used in biblical texts as a metaphor for a large family with lots of children.

¹⁰ Ibid.

remain under their father's "headship" until they are married and are trained to be "keepers at home,"¹¹ which minimizes their options for advanced education. The Quiverfull community is just one expression of the BPM, but demonstrates the diversity of the broader movement.

Drawing on the literature surrounding the BPM, several recurring themes emerge that demonstrate the influence of the BPM within individual families, such as the prescription of male hierarchy, female submission, and distinct gender performance. I surmise that BPM capitalizes on members' nostalgia. Many perceive that the past embodies a safe and more moral era, which BPM accredits to patriarchy and traditional family values. The influence of the movement is quite vast.

However, little sociological work has focused on the tensions within ECHS families as a result of the BPM's strict gender based theology. My research explores the teachings endorsed by the leaders of the BPM, and, by drawing on the interviews that I have collected, the diverse ways they are practiced. My hope is that by using mixed methods I will be able to understand the pressures that affect parents who chose to be in ECHS and the influence of the BPM's doctrines on Evangelical homeschoolers.

METHODS

My methodological approach is a mixed methodology of in-depth interviews with ECHS parents and daughters who were homeschooled, and analysis of key texts written by leaders of the BPM as well as social artifacts, such as toys that are displayed and sold at homeschool conferences. I also examined Phillips's now defunct website, Vision Forum (www.visionforum.org), and Gothard's website, Advanced Training Institute International (www.iblp.org), to better understand the teachings of the BPM.

I conducted a series of in-depth interviews with four current and six past members of the BPM. I deployed the snowball method of sampling to find participants for in-depth interviews by using Facebook to recruit alumni and current ECHS. I interviewed the participants via Skype or FaceTime. One lacuna in the current literature is an ethnographic based study on former ECHS and how families approached modesty, purity, and courtship. This research hopes to fill that gap. I asked the participants why

¹¹ Ibid.

they chose to be ECHS, and how much they participate in teaching and determining curriculum. Additionally, I asked questions about many of the explicit ideas of the BPM, such as how families interpret modesty in clothing, submission in marriage, and how much outside social interaction they have with non-Evangelicals. I used Judith Lorber's "Components of Gender" as a tool to analyze the data in which she defines gender statuses, kinships, sexual scripts, personalized social control, ideology, and imagery that are used in social institutions.¹² Following Lorber, I looked at the gender identities, beliefs, displays, and processes that compose an individual.¹³ I transcribed the interviews, looking for common themes, and then coded them. I wanted to explore the full impact the teachings of the BPM on these ECHS families.

DATA ANALYSIS OF BIBLICAL PATRIARCHY WEBSITES

This paper focuses on two of the founders and the dissemination of their materials and teachings online. On both Phillips's and Gothard's websites, they define biblical patriarchy and other beliefs of the BPM. They commonly use symbols and metaphors to differentiate and promote distinct gender roles, such as the woman as the "heart of the home."¹⁴ The BPM is performance-based, meaning that members demonstrate their faith through works rather than the Protestant interpretation of faith that emphasizes grace.

One way Phillips reinforces gender roles in the home is by selling toys. For example, an advertised toy for a boy is a castle and for a girl, a dollhouse.¹⁵ While these choices are far from atypical, the toy descriptions, as advertised on the website, reveal an overt attempt to socialize boys and girls into their respective gender normative roles. Boys are to play with castles and girls with dollhouses; children are only allowed to play with their own gendered toys, which creates a very constrictive binary environment. The castle is described as the following:

¹² Lorber, J. (1994). *Paradoxes of Gender*. Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press, 30.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ VFM. (2008b). *Doctrine*. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20111021044709/http://www.visionforumministries.org/home/about/doctrine.aspx>

¹⁵ VFM. (2010). *Folding castle*. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20100128034607/http://www.visionforum.com/beautifulgirlhood/productdetail.aspx?productid=13882&categoryid=199>

Whether protecting the home front from the enemy, or used as a frontier outpost against the wild dragons in the land, this Fold & Go Castle opens for easy deployment. The soldiers can man the walls, lock up enemies in the dungeon, or make the castle a home for the king and queen. The king and queen have thrones and a royal bed, and are protected by two brave knights on horses to guard them. The castle includes a working drawbridge, a dungeon and a handle for storage or transportation.¹⁶

The little girl's pink dollhouse is described as the following:

This special wooden dollhouse in the Fold & Go product line is a charming little Victorian style cottage. Containing two flexible, wooden play figures (Daddy and Mommy), and furnished with eleven pieces of wooden furniture, this dollhouse is ready to be made a home by your little homemaker in training. The dollhouse opens for easy access and folds closed for convenient storage.¹⁷

I am fascinated by their mention of a shared bed for the king and queen. Specifically, because little boys do not normally think of the bedroom as a male-specific space, although I suspect it is the inventor's intent to correct this oversight. I also postulate that the use of royalty is intentional, emphasizing man's headship and responsibility to rule over his kingdom—his home and family. In contrast, the dollhouse symbolizes women's subservience, which, according to the description, was designed to train the "little homemaker."

Gothard's "Institute of Biblical Life Principles" website (IBLP) has a slightly different function, as they have ten different organizations that help ECHS as well as churches. The website is designed to guide them in how to perform social roles. Whereas other ECHS families may look outside their home for healthcare, economic provision, or to attend a local church, the IBLP asserts that the home should be the center of everything. The clearly defined roles provided online by Gothard (i.e. the child is a person, the husband is the financial provider, and the wife

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ VFM. (2015c). Folding Mini Doll House. Retrieved 8 December 2015, from https://web.archive.org/web/20100128034607/http://www.visionforum.com/beautifulgirlhood/productdetail.aspx?productid=13882&categoryid=199of_vision_forum_mi.aspx

provides for the vital needs of her partner) is meant to leave little room for individual variation or adaptation.

IBLP also teaches that there are five roles of the mother: she is (1) the heart of the home, (2) the light, (3) the learner-teacher, (4) the creative recorder, and (5) coordinator of responsibilities.¹⁸ The father is the head and the mother the heart. The head and heart are instructed to work together. The mother is the “light” which illuminates spiritual problems or conflicts that arise between parent and child. The “learner-teacher” role emphasizes the woman’s responsibility to continually educate herself, so that she is equipped to homeschool her children through the upper grades. The mother is also the coordinator; families in the BPM tend to be larger and the responsibility of cleaning, teaching, and food preparation can be overwhelming. Many of the older children are taught how to help the younger children, and it is the mother’s responsibility to train her children to do so. Despite the importance of her role, she has little autonomy and is expected to operate under the headship of her husband and male leaders.

In contrast, the father’s role specifically relates to spiritual leadership and he is responsible for teaching his wife and children. The father also is to engage in spiritual warfare and is in charge of protecting the home from sin. Additionally, he is instructed to recognize the needs of his wife, maintain communication with his children, rearrange his schedule for his family, and apply God-honoring principles to his business. Since women are not allowed to work outside of the home, the vast majority of the family income comes from the husband.

NARRATIVES OF HOMESCHOOL FAMILIES

My informants include ECHS men and women. The participants were all white, and defined as evangelical.¹⁹ Many reported negative aspects of their ECHS experience that they attributed to the influence of the BPM. However, most stated that they did not regret their choice to homeschool. Several informants did not perceive a correlation between their negative experiences and the BPM.

Four participants were mothers in their mid-thirties to early fifties. As an average, the women who participated in this study had

¹⁸ IBLP. (2011a). How can I meet my husband's basic needs. Retrieved 8 December 2015, from <http://iblp.org/questions/how-can-i-meet-my-husbands-basic-needs>

¹⁹ According to Nces.ed.gov the vast majority of homeschooling families are white, and thus it was difficult for me to find other families of different races and ethnicities.

homeschooled their children for fourteen years and had six children. Only two of the mothers were still homeschooling. Three out of four mothers worked full-time outside of the home, one mother did so while homeschooling. Two women had some college education; one was working on her bachelor's degree at the time of our interview. Instead of interviewing multiple members of the same family I focused on collecting a more diverse sampling.

As an average, the three men who participated in this research had also homeschooled their children for fourteen years, but had three children. All three male participants had an associate's or bachelor's degree. Two of them owned their own business, while the third worked for a company.

I also interviewed three young women in their early twenties. Each was the oldest female sibling in their family and had four to five siblings. All were homeschooled throughout high school. All were married. Two of the three women were pursuing bachelor's degrees, and the other had earned two college-level degrees. Only one of the young women had children. All the women enjoyed working outside of the home, including the mother who worked part-time and attended school full-time.

My questions addressed ECHS families' approaches to modesty, abstinence, dating, and courtship among their teen children. I also asked what type of responsibilities they delegated to their children and the respective roles and responsibilities of parents. Each participant was asked what they liked best and least about homeschooling, and to describe a typical day of homeschool. Participants were also asked how their religious beliefs influenced their approach to homeschooling, to describe how "spiritual authority" is manifest within their homes, and what spiritual influence, if any, played a role in determining the size of their respective families. In addition, the three younger women were asked if they planned on homeschooling their children, and if they knew why their parents chose to homeschool. Two questions pertained to character training, which would include any spiritual and emotional development that would need to be shaped in the child. I also asked informants to discuss their interest, if any, in the official BPM websites.

Prior to conducting the participant interviews I selected a small group of ECHS mothers that were willing to look over my questionnaire. I asked for feedback about how the questions made them feel. I ended up reframing three of the questions and including one additional question,

which I directed toward homeschooling women. The feedback was beneficial.

FINDINGS

Roles and Responsibilities

All participants accepted that the mother was the primary day-to-day teacher. I asked each of the women to describe a typical day; surprisingly, there was very little variation: they arose, ate breakfast, conducted chores, and homeschooled their children throughout the early hours of the day. One ECHS mother changed her children's sleeping habits so she could work and homeschool, but even with the time change the other patterns remained the same. Fathers who supported their wives had a significant and positive impact on the homeschooling women participating in this research.²⁰

House chores were divided between husband and wife and followed with traditional gender norms. While the husband is the breadwinner, he also has responsibilities within the home. According to my informants, the husbands worked full-time and participated in homeschooling as an ancillary teacher. Fathers occasionally shared the disciplinary role with their spouse. Peter, one of the ECHS fathers, called it "being the heavy."²¹ He described scenarios in which disciplining a child might be necessary. He explained that if he needed to intervene, he would invite the child into his office and would say, "Your teacher is having a problem with you in this area. What is going on?"²² He laughed as he described the scenario. He implied that it was not a regular occurrence. He believed that in taking on the disciplinary role he was able to support his wife. According to Peter, the husband played the role of a principal and the wife played the role of a teacher. While the family adhered to traditional gender roles, the parents tried to collaborate in their efforts. As Peter explained, his wife preferred that he take on the disciplinary role while she taught. Drawing

²⁰ Vigilant, L. G., Trefethren, L. W., & Anderson, T. C. (2013). "You can't rely on somebody else to teach them something they don't believe," impressions of legitimization crisis and socialization control in the narratives of Christian homeschooling fathers. *Humanity & Society*, 37(3), 201–224. Retrieved from

<http://doi.org/10.1177/0160597613495841>

²¹ Peter Personal Communication February, 5, 2015,

²² Ibid.

on my broader sampling of fathers, all informants seemed to emphasize the importance of supporting their spouse.

The gap between what was prescribed by the BPM and what was practiced on the ground was expansive. One informant, Joe, explained that there were times when he did the majority of the homeschooling while his wife worked full-time. However, this was atypical and his wife was generally the primary teacher. Many of the fathers that I interviewed cooked regularly and helped with household chores. Although overall, the division of labor tended to reflect traditional forms.

I also interviewed the women about their roles and responsibilities in the home. Beth and Ann disclosed that their husbands helped out when they could, but for the most part they took care of the home, children, and homeschooling. However, they had no problem asking for help when they needed it. In fact, Ann told me that her husband was much better at cleaning than she was, and she loved when he helped. Bridgette had an unusual experience: she not only worked out of the home, but as her ex-husband was diagnosed with mental illness and was unable to help with any of the household chores, income, or homeschooling, she had to balance a broad spectrum of responsibilities. One woman, Janine, felt that fulfilling her household responsibilities and homeschooling four girls was very difficult. Janine recalled that her ex-husband was often angered that she struggled to fulfill his expectations.

Two of the girls that I interviewed believed that they had a safe and pleasant upbringing because their parents did not avidly follow the teachings of the BPM. Another informant, Barbara, the oldest of five children, believed that her difficult upbringing was related to her parents' strict adherence to the doctrine of the BPM. She explained, "There was a lot of separation between what was expected from the boys and us girls. We did a lot of house cleaning; the boys did not do as much as the girls. We cleaned the bathrooms and were constantly in the kitchen and cleaning and cooking."²³ Barbara explained that she was not allowed to mow the lawn because it was a "man's job."

Women with children confessed that homeschooling was arduous, and that it required a great deal of time and energy. All respondents mentioned that they were continually refining their management of time. However, they all felt that a sacrifice was necessary to produce kind and productive adults, explaining that the benefit outweighed the cost. These

²³ Barbara Personal Communication February 12, 2016

findings were similar to sociologist Mitchell Stevens's study on childrearing and parental efforts to build adolescent character.

The Pursuit of "Character"

The families I interviewed shared varying reasons for choosing to homeschool. The reasons ranged from wanting to spend more time with children to a desire to offer advanced educational opportunities to their children. Most explained that they resided in economically disadvantaged school districts. While the BPM's focus was adherence to strict gender roles and children's spiritual development, the parents that I interviewed discussed the temporal advantages as well. Parents, at least in part, followed the instruction outline from the BPM because they believed it would help their children attain greater social mobility.

All of my informants, except one father, had used Gothard's or Phillips's materials or toys. The interviewees can be divided into two groups: those who embraced some or all of the BPM, and those who believed the movement was toxic. To provide an example of the former, Ann, a mother of thirteen children, does not embrace the BPM wholly, but does follow the Quiverfull movement. She and her husband believe that they should not prevent pregnancy, but rather, the size of their family should be determined by God. In her interview, Ann discussed her weariness of the BPM. She stated:

The father is the ultimate authority and that's downright unbiblical and scary. Because they feel like they have all this power and they can do anything they want, and the families are damaged as a result. So just the fact that they believe that women are to be subservient to their fathers and brothers and teaching that is not a biblical role for women in any way, shape, or form. So, I just saw those dangers early on, so we stayed away from any of their specific teachings.²⁴

On one hand, Ann finds merit in doctrines related to procreation, while on the other, she rejects the patriarchal structure that she described as demeaning women. Joe and Peter discussed their apprehension for "the legalistic forms" of ECHS, including members who adhere to very strict

²⁴ Ann Personal Communication February 5, 2016

codes of conduct related to dress, separation from others, and family size.²⁵ They found that these groups were harder to interact with and, as a result, they made a conscious effort to find ECHS groups that were more “open and accepting.” One informant, Beth, described her visceral reaction to a BPM publication:

The story was of Tamar who was raped and they [Gothard] blamed her. They said she should have called out louder for help. And after that, I just threw the book in the trash, because I figured that it is where it belonged. I figured that if they were going to skew that story what else are they skewing.²⁶

On the other end of the spectrum, Bridgette embraced the BPM and discussed the advantages of character training and gender differentiation. She explained, “It is more about how can you become, and who you are supposed to be. Or the character traits, you know that is important for a female or a male.”²⁷ She wanted her daughters to be prepared for marriage because she had felt unprepared. In her interview, she discussed the positive aspects of BPM’s teachings and how she believed those teachings would prepare her girls for that transition into adulthood. She also believed character training would enhance their education. In terms of the gender imagery—or as the scholar, Judith Lober, defines it, the “cultural representation and embodiment of gender”—Bridgette saw it as a protective force.²⁸ However, even Bridgette swayed from some of the more restrictive gendered scripts. For instance, she allowed her girls to learn from their father how to change the oil of the car, they built a computer from scratch, and the girls knew how to balance a checkbook. These are activities that are typically defined by the BPM as male-specific.

Another informant, Barbara, whose family embraced the BPM, viewed the rules as “unfair” towards girls. She explained, “so for me, I didn't ever think, oh I just wish I went to school, or I can't wait till I go to college even from a young age of twelve or thirteen. Well, I just want to

²⁵ Legalist forms describes the rigidity of some Evangelical Christian beliefs that can include restrictive standards concerning dress, dating, and entertainment that would influence these Christians.

²⁶ Beth Personal Communication February 5, 2016

²⁷ Bridgette Personal Communication February 12, 2016

²⁸ Lorber, J. (1994). *Paradoxes of gender*. Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press.

be married, because I saw marriage as my escape route and a kind of escape. It is kind of a dramatic word, but the truth.”²⁹ Barbara’s desire to “escape” her home situation by entering an institution that might replicate her upbringing highlights the lack of opportunities extended to women within the BPM. Barbara’s responses concur with what Kathryn Joyce found in similar stories as she studied the Quiverfull movement.³⁰

Modesty, Purity, and Courtship

My informants’ responses to questions regarding modesty, purity, and courtship varied. Some were strict in their application of the BPM’s teachings, while others were more flexible or less restrictive. Purity normally was defined by being a virgin until marriage, but some defined purity as not even kissing before marriage. I noticed a palpable discomfort when my informants discussed such topics.³¹ Because sex is often a taboo subject in conservative BPM communities, I suspect that many feared being judged or misunderstood. All of the respondents identified as proponents of abstinence and modesty, but their interpretation of modesty varied depending on whether they were part of an encouraging, open, and supportive ECHS group or not—strong community ties often meant less judgment and therefore more liberal interpretations.

Most respondents stated that there were more restrictions for girls than boys. Joe, one of the ECHS fathers, did not believe in strict rules but felt that dialogue was more important. He admitted that he was open with his daughter and that he did not think about what his sons wore versus what his daughter wore. His own self-awareness and openness towards his daughter showed her that he was still learning and wanted to treat his kids with equality. The other two fathers, Chris and Peter, were more concerned with what their daughters wore than their sons. However, they allowed their daughters to make their own choices.

²⁹ Bridget Personal Communication February 12, 2016

³⁰ Joyce, K. (2009). *Quiverfull : Inside the Christian patriarchy movement*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

³¹ One of the most interesting aspects that came out about modesty was how the respondents’ homeschool groups or co-ops played an integral part in either allowing them to embrace their own standards or trying to enforce very rigid modesty and purity guidelines. Homeschool groups or co-ops are groups of families that have pooled their skill sets together, and some may teach particular classes. Every respondent had been a part of multiple homeschool groups at different times.

In discussing modesty, Ann also mentioned that she only allowed girls to change girls' diapers and boys to change boys' diapers. Since she mentioned how all thirteen children rotate between all of the chores in the house, I asked her the rationale behind this and she stated, "It was advice given to us a long time ago, and just to eliminate mischievousness."³² I asked her for further clarification, and if she was worried about inappropriate touching; she confirmed. She also required the girls to wear bras unless they were in the privacy of their own bedroom, and the boys to wear shirts. The children were also required to come to the breakfast table fully dressed for the day. Ann insisted that she wanted to teach her children to be respectful of others. She explained, "So I just teach the girls that [it] is a stumbling block [to not wear a bra] to your brother so, don't do that, and same with the boys."³³ She was trying to set similar standards for both sexes. Her interview was the only one to mention the concern of sexual misconduct within the family. There appears to be greater emphasis on women's purity than that of men's, not only out in public, but also in private. Ann perceived these rules as aiding her children through their transition into adulthood, because, as she believes, modesty reduces promiscuity.

The ECHS groups also socialize women toward a distinct expression of femininity. Elizabeth shared a story in which she wore army boots and a studded cross t-shirt to a sock-hop and was shunned as a result, even though it was a fifties-themed teen dance. Modesty was not simply about dress, but also about gender performance. Many of my informants discussed the insecurity they felt as a result of always being monitored—their body and actions always being on display.

Nicole, one of the homeschooled girls, related a story about how difficult it was for her while competing in ECHS Speech and Debate. She stated:

There was lots of shame around my body; I developed quicker than most of the girls my age. I have large breasts and large hips; I was told those were a distraction, that I need to not wear pants or a pant suit. I should only be wearing a skirt suit, that I shouldn't wear high heels because when you wear high heels your legs lift up muscles and accentuate things, so during that time there was such an intent

³² Ann Personal Communication February 05, 2016

³³ Ibid.

focus on a particular theological perspective that really impacted like every aspect of my speech and debate career.³⁴

Another one of the homeschooled girls, Elizabeth, talked about how she struggled with being bullied. She described the difficulty of living within a conservative ECHS community that did not approve of girls wearing pants, or friendships between girls and boys. She stated, “I was considered a slut and a whore because I wore pants and hung out with guys, and I didn't have my first kiss until I was seventeen years old. I wore make up, I wore pants, and I hung out with friends that were guys and I was called nasty things.”³⁵ She is now employed as a children’s church coordinator, and was quick to specify that she was a virgin until she was married. She felt they had tried to totally spoil her identity but failed.³⁶

During my interviews with the girls, I noticed their body language changed—they looked down and avoided eye contact, there were long pauses and sighs. They had a difficult time finding the right words to convey their stories. I surmise that they felt ashamed.³⁷ However, both interviewees expressed their determination to overcome the ridicule they endured. One of the girls even presented an argument supporting Christianly kindness during a school debate that addressed this. However, they both discussed their insecurity and admitted that they had, at least in the past, occasionally questioned their own modesty—worrying that perhaps they had become “stumbling blocks” to boys in the community. Nicole recalled the years she had participated in the debate group for school: “It really felt demeaning. I was participating in those activities because I was smart, because I was passionate about you know, different issues. And for so much of the focus to be on my body versus my actual skill set and what I was trying to say, it made me feel like what I had to say was not worth saying unless I looked a certain way.”³⁸

Each of my respondents described the isolation that resulted from the stigma of simply being a girl. Nicole also articulated how she did not feel like she could talk to her parents or coach because so much of the

³⁴ Nicole Personal Communication February 19, 2016

³⁵ Elizabeth Personal Communication February 19, 2016

³⁶ Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

³⁷ Pattison, S. (2000). *Shame*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

³⁸ Nicole Personal Communication February 05, 2016

criticism she endured was associated with “scriptural principles.”³⁹ She has only recently begun to open up and share her experiences. She recalled how disheartened her mother was when she heard what Nichole had endured. Elizabeth also discussed how she felt stigmatized and how this took a toll on her self-esteem. As discussed previously, in the BPM the onus of “character” is put on the girl—women are urged to conform.⁴⁰ From what I observed, the consequence of policing women and their bodies was vastly negative—there were few spaces where a woman could safely navigate her interests and identity.

Three of the four mothers reported that their ECHS group or community had, on various occasions, pressured them into “covering up” their breasts. That is, that grown women, as well as young girls, were regulated by ECHS communities; and modesty was often enforced by peers—even, and perhaps most specifically, by women. This gendered social control had enough power to influence the mothers and not just the daughters. While the mothers had not considered their clothes improper or immodest, other women in the group enforced these standards and had approached them and told them they should cover up more. These gender processes and scripts and how women tended to safeguard against the lack of modesty in dress or behavior were mentioned by all the female respondents. In fact, Janine, who was a leader in her ECHS group, recalled a conversation initiated by other leaders about her daughter:

Our oldest daughter, who was wearing your average clothing, nothing provocative, nothing offensive, just your average teenage clothing, no midriff, showing no cleavage, just average teenage clothes and that was not enough for them. They sat us down, had a conversation with us, and tried to get us to encourage her to wear more skirts, and they used their daughters to get our daughter to wear more skirts. So, it kind of went beyond policies and procedures and what was on paper.⁴¹

She described to me how she felt after such interactions with fellow ECHS members:

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Lorber, J. (1994). *Paradoxes of gender*. Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press.

⁴¹ Janine Personal communication February 12, 2016.

I would just have to say that I was pretty much in survival mode. I hadn't really processed that, and how I felt. I just basically listened to what they said, well, we will see. I am not an extremely deep thinker when it comes to this stuff. I just I know what I believe; well I will just continue to live our lives the way we should live them. But I was in so much survival mode in my own marriage; I don't know if I even knew how to process that, if that makes any sense.⁴²

Janine discussed how she felt the need to regularly evaluate herself and improve—a theme shared by many of my female informants.

The group's focus on courtship rather than dating meant that children were actively looking for a spouse rather than enjoying the company of the other gender. In addition, most of the parents were involved in the courting process in order to help their children find spouses. However, trying to implement the rules of courtship seemed more difficult than first expected with each family. Parents felt that it was their job to assist but not dictate their children's search for a spouse, with only one exception. Barbara recalled that her three oldest siblings did not follow the prescribed method of courtship. Both Nicole and Elizabeth chose to date rather than court.⁴³ However, both admitted that their dating was fairly limited. In fact, Nicole married her college boyfriend. All parents perceived the ECHS guidelines for courting or dating as serious, and, according to my informants, was a difficult aspect of culture to navigate. The organization often emphasized what they believed were the consequences of not living a chaste life, such as damaging one's personal relationship with God. I would argue that the BPM uses fear to influence ECHS families to abide by their guidelines.

Ann, whose oldest daughter is currently courting-age, reported that she and her husband were heavily involved in the process of courtship. While she stated that it was completely up to her daughter whether she wanted to court or date, she warned her daughter, "If your goal is abstinence until you are married, it would be a good idea if there was someone else to go with you because the option to go back to his place is very strong, and it would be in your best behavior."⁴⁴ They also suggested

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Stevens, M. (2001). *Kingdom of children: Culture and controversy in the homeschooling movement*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

⁴⁴ Ann Personal Communication February 05, 2016.

that whomever she chose to take with her needed to be in eyesight but not have to hear what was being said. Ann insisted that her daughter wanted their input and that she welcomed their suggestions.

Peter explained that he often disagreed with the partners his daughter chose to court. While he did not forbid the dating, he openly discussed problems he observed within the relationship. He stated:

I would explain to my daughter why I felt something of a concern, and my wife may or may not agree with me and she would explain if something was a concern [to her]. I may or may not agree with her, and our daughter was exposed to both of those thoughts. And she had to process things on her own, and we would still draw the line if it was needed and most of the time I would let my wife make that decision because I gave my input and she did what she thought was the best for it.⁴⁵

Though both Peter and Ann's families believed that abstinence was important, they implemented courtship rules differently. For instance, Ann promoted courtship, but was open to her children dating.

Spiritual Authority and Leadership in the Home

The other topic that seemed to cause unease was that of "spiritual authority" in the home. The respondents' views varied more on this topic than on any other. The three daughters that I interviewed had very interesting, and often differing, opinions about their parents' relationships. According to Nicole, her father thought favorably about women in authority and supported women pastors. Elizabeth spoke highly of her parents' relationship; she felt her parents did not reflect the norm within ECHS communities because they had more of an egalitarian relationship where her mother had a say in family-related decisions.

Barbara's response seemed the most surprising, because her parents fully embraced the BPM's teachings. She stated, "I would say that my mother had final authority, but it always came through my dad's words. So, the decisions were made by mom, but my dad was always the one who spoke them."⁴⁶ According to Barbara, her upbringing was

⁴⁵ Peter Personal Communication February 05, 2016.

⁴⁶ Barbara Personal Communication February 12, 2016.

wrought with hardship because of the patriarchal nature of her father. She once wrote her parents a letter mentioning the desire for their family to attend counseling, and as a result, she was kicked out. She ended up living with her grandparents who took her in. They taught her how to drive and find new employment, since, up to that point, she had only worked for her father. She eventually took a job as a nanny, a skill that she knew well since she had taken care of her siblings. Then things only became worse. She stated:

I lived with my grandparents, but things just got worse and then my parents told my grandpa that I couldn't live there anymore and that if I didn't move out then my grandparents couldn't see the rest of my siblings, and so I didn't want to put my grandparents in a situation where they had to choose between me living there and them seeing their grandkids and my thought process was if they are angry at me there is no reason for them to be angry at them as well. So, I moved out of my grandparents'.⁴⁷

She described how she had to scrape by to just survive because her parents considered her mindset—and particularly her request for family therapy—dangerous. She explained her desire to do things differently now that she is a mother:

My goal is to try to find [my] flaws and how I am acting and how I am treating other people or how I am thinking so I don't repeat my parents' mistakes. I can't fix how my parents treated me, but what I can do is be there for my siblings. I can't fix how I don't have a mother-daughter relationship, but I can hope to provide one. That is part of the reason that my degree is in psychology, because I am fascinated to learn about how hitting milestones as a child, and how it totally shapes your worldviews. I want to be a good mom.⁴⁸

Barbara had to establish new cultural boundaries for herself and her child. She, too, described working through shame and the need to reinterpret womanhood as disassociated with the teachings she had been inculcated with as a child. The author Stephen Pattison describes how

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

shame is caused by the misrepresentation of religion where the focus is on God's judgment, instead of focusing on how God offered redemption for sin and guilt, which Pattison says should be demonstrated by the fathers. This unconditional love is withheld, and the Christian is left no longer united with God.⁴⁹ Barbara is now not only looking for social and familial connectivity, but also a renewed spirituality.

Ann discussed her own marriage in terms of "egalitarian." She once told a friend to leave her husband because of the emotional and spiritual abuse she had endured. She described the conversation:

He [the friend's husband] just bangs his wife over the head with Ephesians, to submit, you have to submit! I keep telling her that submission in the Bible doesn't tell you to obey your husband, it says to submit, and I think that only comes in when two people cannot make a decision if they both want different things.⁵⁰

Congregants were encouraged to seek personal revelation from God, and yet, that revelation is to be revealed through the husband who is the final authority. Ann's comments seem to suggest that there is never complete clarity as to how women are to navigate their personal lives and marriages.

Bridgette acknowledged how she tried to follow the headship of her husband, but due to him being "institutionalized twenty-two times during [their] marriage due to mental illness," it was very difficult.⁵¹ She relayed a conversation she had with her pastor regarding her now ex-husband. She stated:

He doesn't want to make decisions. He can't make decisions. He won't make decisions. How can he lead if he won't make decisions? And so I was told, "Well give him two options, and ask him which one he wants. You present the option and have him tell you to do it, so it is really his decision. He is being the leader you are being submissive; you are not just doing it, and so I tried. It felt wrong. It felt very manipulative."⁵²

⁴⁹ Pattison, S. (2000). *Shame*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

⁵⁰ Ann Personal Communication February 05, 2016.

⁵¹ Bridgette Personal Communication February 19, 2016.

⁵² *Ibid.*

She went on to explain that her girls had seen him physically abuse her. She was told by her pastor that it was her responsibility to remove stress from the home, but due to his disability they had to move constantly, and as a result, the cycle of abuse continued. It was not until they relocated to a different county (where county officials threatened to take her children away) that she finally filed for a divorce. She divulged, "I struggled my entire marriage. It was very difficult for me to be loving towards him. I took on a mother role, rather than I can count on you and you can count on me."⁵³ All the responsibility was on Bridgette's shoulders and yet, according to the BPM, she was to remain subservient in her role as a wife. She explained that it was difficult to reconcile her life with the will of God. She wanted to be obedient, but was unsure of how to maintain the patriarchal model; the BPM had provided little direction as to how she should navigate her unique circumstances. Bridgette struggled with the shame and frustration of balancing God's will with her real-life circumstances.

Another informant, Beth, negotiated for greater personal authority by using the system. She explained that she often felt pressured to conform to gender expectations by friends who did not believe that she should wear pants in the home. According to Beth, they perceived it as a sign of disrespect. So in an effort to resolve the problem, she asked her husband to intervene. She explained, "So I finally had an epiphany [laughing], and I had my husband call her husband and tell her that my husband wanted me to wear pants and that she needs to back off because that was his decision as the head of the household. And that was the end of the problem, and we were fast friends after that."⁵⁴

Pressures to conform came from pastors, ECHS groups, and friends. Beth also described how she felt pressured to allow her husband to make a financial decision that she did not agree with. She explained:

My husband didn't pay the taxes on our business and we had a big to-do about it. And I finally decided to shut up about it, because we were about to get divorced over it. And the taxes didn't get paid and there still is a problem, so I am not sure if I should have gone out on it. I am pretty sure if I had, we would have split so I left it alone.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Beth Personal Communication February 5, 2016.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Looking back, she explained how they have grown and changed in their marriage, but she wished that she had more of a voice back then. Presently, their relationship is more egalitarian and she is the main breadwinner. Although most couples discussed in this research started out with headship, all my respondents described an evolving negotiation between spouses that eventually resulted in a more egalitarian marriage. These men revealed that with men and women in the church, both genders are looking for ways to better navigate, and perhaps expand, their roles.

My male informants recalled that they had attempted to take on the role of independently presiding, but they did not find it conducive to what they wanted in their marriages. They believed that their wives had so much more to offer their family and did not want to squelch that potential.⁵⁶ However, in the BPM, gender roles are intended to be nonnegotiable. One respondent, Chris, talked about how his church had pushed patriarchy. He stated:

The things that we were involved with had serious prejudice against women and so there was a lot of negativity. My wife and I were probably a lot more egalitarian than most of the people we hung out with, but most of that interaction was done between her and me and without the other people around. So it was almost like two different lives, or was it more of just like presenting a different front—or well it wasn't like that for me, but I think for my wife it was like two different lives, so having to present this front, and being around the religious people and trying to fit their mold was a concern for her. After that happened, and since then I have been very upset about it; it made me very unhappy. My eyes were opened and changed, we were very entangled—I was very entangled into their religion, and so I didn't really ever take time to examine it, to see what fruit it was actually producing."⁵⁷

When asked what brought about the change, he stated:

⁵⁶ Bible Gateway. (2017). Bible Gateway passage: 1 Corinthians 11:3 - New International Version. [online] Available at: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+11:3> [Accessed 30 Jun. 2017].

⁵⁷ Chris Personal Communication February 12, 2016.

Honestly, my wife gave me an ultimatum one day, she had finally had enough, and so we decided to leave the church. It became clear to me that things were very broken. The further I got from it, the easier it was for me to see the kind of thing that when you are there you cannot see, but the further away from it you can.⁵⁸

Chris's reflections demonstrate how patriarchy is not always visible neither are the effects always overt. The alienation nearly ruined their marriage.

Two of my informants described being sexually abused, which they ascribed, in part, to the BPM's patriarchal teachings. Even though both leaders of the BPM encouraged their followers to stay sexually "pure" before and within marriage, both Doug Phillips and Bill Gothard stepped down from their positions of leadership due to allegations of sexual misconduct. Doug Phillips admitted in his public statement that he had a relationship with his nanny:

There has been serious sin in my life for which God has graciously brought me to repentance. I have confessed my sin to my wife and family, my local church, and the board of Vision Forum Ministries. I engaged in a lengthy, inappropriate relationship with a woman. While we did not "know" each other in a Biblical sense, it was nevertheless inappropriately romantic and affectionate.⁵⁹

In Bill Gothard's case, 34 women came forward with sexual harassment allegations as part of a lawsuit. The accusations stemmed from the 1970s when the plaintiffs were mere teenagers. Gothard responded to the allegations through his attorney. His attorney stated, "Mr. Gothard communicated to the Board of Directors his desire to follow Matthew 5:23-24 and listen to those who have 'ought against' him."⁶⁰ There were allegations against local leaders of the BPM as well.

One of the informants, Bridgette, shared an example of sexual abuse perpetrated against her girls who had attended a youth group trip to the mountains to sign "courtship oaths." The attending pastor molested five of the girls attending the retreat, despite the purpose of the trip, which according to Bridgette was to "commit to purity of not dating." She stated,

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ The Aquila Report, (2017)

⁶⁰ World.wng.org. (2017)

“My two older girls took the courting oath that the pastor signed. He molested them on the second trip right after they signed up. So, I don't know, that one is very hard for us to cross that bridge. We haven't yet, for there is a lot of emotion tied to it.”⁶¹

When I asked more about what took place, and if the pastor's wife was aware of what was going on, she said,

Every single one of the five girls went to her [the pastor's wife] and told her what was going on. They went to her for help, because they were all confused by his actions and didn't know what to think. They all went to her saying we are not really comfortable what should we do? And every single one of them was told that was just normal, that was a father's love, and it was their fault for feeling uncomfortable because they didn't understand a father's love. And that was because your daddy doesn't love you right.⁶²

Bridgette explained that the pastor was convicted and in prison and that they no longer attend his church. They were in the church for over sixteen years and both the pastor and his wife had personally counseled Bridgette and her ex-husband. The pastor's betrayal created a tremendous amount of hurt among the entire family. The two older girls are now of dating age. Bridgette told her oldest daughter to have “fun” while dating, something not emphasized within the courtship culture of the ECHS.

Another example of sexual abuse was in Janine's home. She disclosed that her ex-husband was often angry and that abuse had taken place behind her back for some time. Eventually, her oldest daughter admitted that Janine's now ex-husband had sexually and physically abused her. This led Janine to take action. Initially she sought help from family:

I remember calling some family members who are marriage counselors, and begging them for help numerous times. They would sit down and have a meal with us and talk with us. I would tell them about his anger and how overwhelmed I was. He would turn it back on me and, I have hard time saying this—I love my family, we are all taught in the church with that whole submission thing is—so these family members they would hear my side and

⁶¹ Bridgette Personal Communication February 19, 2016.

⁶² Ibid.

his side. He would say he was angry because the house wasn't in order, and if only I did my job the way I should he wouldn't be so angry. And so, then she would turn to me and say, "If you get your house in order and do what he is asking you to do then he won't be so angry." And so it got turned back on me. Nobody ever dealt with his issues; nobody dealt with his anger.⁶³

He was angry not just about how well she kept house, but that she also disclosed that she had suffered sexual abuse and believed that she had been raped during the labor of her youngest daughter. She stated,

I ended up testifying against him on the sexual abuse, which was part of the investigation, but one of the things that I kept secret for a long time was the internal female injury from my youngest daughter's birth [that] he caused. And it was while I was in labor with her, so immediately after she was born my uterus came completely out of my body, fully inverted so this was what they call medically a full uterine prolapse.⁶⁴

When I asked her what caused the prolapse, she said:

It started out in a sense, what I thought was, you know, how they say sex will speed up labor. But it quickly went from a mutual thing, to a him thing, if that makes sense. It was more about him pleasing himself, it was no longer the way I testified to; it was that the look in his eyes changed and he became extremely rough, and I was softly crying. I tried to get him to stop and he wouldn't. So, it then became rape at that point.⁶⁵

I clarified, "You were in labor?" Janine responded, "Yeah, I was in labor."⁶⁶ Janine delivered her child at home and the midwives unexpectedly missed the birth. Her ex-husband, according to Janine, was supposed to gently massage her belly but didn't, which resulted in midwife-recommended bed rest for six weeks. Janine explained that the police and social services became involved in her divorce and her ex-

⁶³ Janine Personal communication February 12, 2016.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

husband went to jail for the sexual abuse. This took a major toll on their family and they lost their home due to financial hardship. Janine was forced to put her children in school and work full-time to support them. She cried as she explained the difficult transition she and her family had faced. However, she never regretted homeschooling her children. She explained:

I would say I don't regret homeschooling, I still advocate for homeschoolers; I regret submitting myself to a group that encouraged, whether it was directly or indirectly—I don't think they ever intended to through the teachings—it was encouraging the abuse in our home. I don't know, I think the situation we got in, because it was so patriarchal, it removed my identity.⁶⁷

While Janine's narrative included intimate, and undoubtedly graphic imagery, I include the better part of our interview with my contributor's permission. At the time of our interview, Janine was finding her voice after years of hardship and desired to bring visibility to her circumstances and the circumstances of others dealing with sexual abuse.

When reflecting on her beliefs regarding purity, she concluded:

People can't use courtship and abstinence as a foolproof approach for protecting their children. Part of it is in the Christian culture it is a shameful topic [talking about sex] and it is uncomfortable—it's not an easy one at all. So, I am not a big proponent of you need to get married quickly, although that is what I used to believe. I don't believe that anymore. I think people need to take the time to get to know one another and I've made that very clear to my girls. I am still a proponent of abstinence, but how the young man treats my daughters is just as important.⁶⁸

Janine's experiences had clearly shaped her perception of purity and courtship—influencing the way she raised her children and the expectations she had for their future marital relationships.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

The responses of my informants demonstrate the various ways that the BPM's teaching impact families. While my research is limited to a small sample, it does illuminate the way women and men navigate patriarchy and negotiate their identities within patriarchal institutions.

CONCLUSION

There is a gap between the doctrine of the BPM—what is taught—and the practices of individual homeschooling families. My informants' employment of the BPM's doctrines regarding dress, dating, and modesty varied. Ultimately, two families ended in divorced and three young women expressed the emotional repercussions of feeling judged by other members of the ECHS. However, while some informants left, others have remained a part of the ECHS.

While this study only scratches the surface, my hope is that it provides a basis for future inquiry on the BPM and the members of the ECHS. Currently the study has several limitations, including a limited sampling and the snowball method that more than likely impacted the course of this study. However, my research has merit in exploring the impact of the BPM on the ECHS and how individuals navigate for themselves the teachings and practices embedded within these institutions.