Debating Patriarchy: Discursive Disputes over Spousal Authority among Evangelical Family Commentators

JOHN P. BARTKOWSKI†

Theoretical paradigms that have called attention to the contemporary "war" over the family suggest that religious conservatives in general, and evangelical Protestants in particular, are among the most vociferous defenders of a "traditional" patriarchal family structure. However, a handful of recent inquiries on contemporary evangelical spousal roles has suggested that conservative Protestants are not unanimous in their support for a patriarchal family structure. Drawing on insights from poststructuralist theories of discourse and gender theory, this study augments such investigations by analyzing the rhetoric contained within a large sample of popular evangelical family manuals. I demonstrate that leading conservative Protestants are engaged in a rancorous debate about spousal authority relations, with evangelical purveyors of patriarchy attracting significant criticism from prominent biblical feminists and a growing coterie of egalitarian evangelical commentators. After delineating the most salient points of this internecine debate, I trace these antagonists' divergent recommendations for the allocation of spousal authority to their distinctive assumptions about (1) the nature of masculinity and femininity, and (2) Bible's instructions for familial decision making. I conclude by specifying several directions for future empirical research, and by explicating this study's challenge to prevailing assumptions concerning the religious contours of the war over the family.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, social scientists of various stripes have attempted to illuminate the contours and antecedents of the contemporary "battle over the family." Within this voluminous body of research, a growing coterie of scholars has suggested that broader disputes over the American family are rooted in the markedly divergent value systems which antagonists import into this heated topic of social debate. In general, scholars have suggested that this dispute pits feminists and proponents of democratic family relations against anti-feminist religious conservatives who are committed to the preservation of patriarchal authority or spousal role distinctions in the household (e.g., Berger and Berger 1983; Hardacre 1993; Hunter 1991; Conover and Gray 1983). Many of these analyses suggest that the most outspoken and formidable purveyors of the "traditional" patriarchal family are evangelical Protestants.[1] Indeed, survey research on family attitudes has demonstrated (1) that rank-and-file evangelicals disproportionately support a patriarchal family structure (Grasmick, Wilcox, and Bird 1990); and (2) that this group of religious conservatives tends to favor circumscribing a woman's family role to "traditional" domestic pursuits and household responsibilities (see Grasmick et al. 1990; Peek, Lowe, and Williams 1991 for recent analyses and reviews of prior studies).[2] One reason that evangelicals have attracted such sustained attention from family and religion scholars is the sheer size of this religious group. Recent survey data suggest that evangelicals comprise approximately one quarter of the American population.[3] Moreover, evangelical organizations such as Focus on the Family and

† *John P. Bartkowski is Assistant Professor of Sociology in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work at Mississippi State University, P.O. Drawer C, Mississippi State, MS 39762. E-mail: bartkowski@soc.msstate.edu.*

Concerned Women for America are among the most highly organized, well-financed, and vocal "pro-family" groups in the United States (Guth, Green, Kellstedt, and Smidt 1996). Consequently, these organizations and their evangelical constituents have attracted considerable criticism from feminists and social scientists who embrace a more egalitarian vision of the family (e.g., Brown 1994; Faludi 1991; Scanzoni 1983; McNamara 1985b for review).

Yet, in the face of these empirical findings and prevailing critiques, various types of qualitative inquiries (textual analyses, ethnographic observations, and in-depth interviews) have revealed that gender relations in conservative Protestant families are more nuanced and considerably more complex than this research literature or critics of evangelicalism would suggest (Ammerman 1987; Bartkowski 1996; Lienesch 1993; Ingersoll 1995; McNamara 1985a, 1985b; Pevey, Williams, and Ellison 1996; Rose 1987; Stacey 1990; Stacey and Gerard 1990). A handful of recent studies has hinted that conceptualizations of household authority and spousal decision making are in fact the subject of debate within conservative Protestant circles, with conservative Christian proponents of patriarchy facing increasingly formidable challenges from biblical feminists and egalitarian evangelical family commentators (Bartkowski in press; Bendroth 1993; Ingersoll 1995; Stacey and Gerard 1990).

Such inquiries raise important questions about the contours of contemporary evangelical gender ideology and the broader "culture war" over the family. First, to what extent do evangelicals support a patriarchal family structure? Given that the only direct survey evidence for such support has been drawn from a local sample of Oklahoma City residents located squarely in the Bible Belt (Grasmick et al. 1990), is a patriarchal family model actually the subject of genuine debate within conservative Protestant circles? Second, if spousal authority relations are contested within contemporary evangelicalism, what are the values or presuppositions undergirding this debate? Put succinctly, on what grounds is this internecine debate being waged? In this study, I analyze a sample of over 30 popular evangelical family manuals to reveal the remarkable degree of heterogeneity in evangelical gender and family rhetoric. In addition to highlighting the contested nature of gender within contemporary evangelical family rhetoric, this study seeks to illuminate the competing values and assumptions which undergird these divergent viewpoints.

THEORY AND METHODS

Before proceeding to analyze the primary source texts that comprise the data for this study, the theoretical framework and methodological considerations guiding this inquiry deserve some elaboration. This study is informed by poststructuralist theories of discourse, and by constructionist insights from the sociology of gender. Following Foucault (1972, 1978), poststructuralists call attention to the constructed, polyvalent, and contested character of discourse (see Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983; Frank 1992; Lemert and Gillan 1982: ch. 3; Macdonell 1986: ch. 5 and 6; McNay 1994 for overviews of Foucault's theory of discourse). In poststructuralist parlance, discourses are not viewed as collections of objective facts about the world; rather, they are culturally constructed forms of knowledge that are aimed at imposing order on the social realm and affixing particular identities to the groups and individuals who inhabit it. As cultural constructs, discursive formations may be challenged — and in some cases subverted altogether — by oppositional discourses that posit a different understanding of the world. Even within a given cultural milieu, competing discourses often surface despite a common worldview and a shared language. Indeed, the potential for discursive contradiction seems endemic to culture and language itself: "We need to let go, then, of the notion that words have a meaning of their own, one pinned down for everyone alike in the system of a language . . . [To the contrary,] words change their meaning from one dis-

course to another, and conflicting discourses develop even where there is a supposedly common language" (Macdonell 1986: 45).

Poststructuralist theories of discourse consequently attune social researchers to the plurality of voices that are often articulated within a specific cultural milieu. Given this emphasis on discursive "plurivocality," the Foucauldian conceptualization of discourse challenges the "categories of cultural totalities" and universalizing assumptions that frequently govern classic structural analyses of ideology (Foucault 1972: 15–16; see Macdonell 1986). In the face of such structuralist presuppositions, Foucault (1978: 100) argues that "we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable . . .[It is composed of] a multiplicity of discursive elements that come into play in various strategies."

Following closely from these tenets, recent treatises in the sociology of gender call attention to the plurality and contested nature of gender constructions. Though he does not draw explicitly on Foucauldian theories of discourse, the work of Robert Connell (1987, 1995) has sensitized gender researchers to the multiplicity of masculinities and femininities that are often manifested within a particular social context. Connell's scholarship suggests that, in any given cultural setting, dominant or "hegemonic" gender constructions are likely to face challenges from purveyors of subordinated or "counter-hegemonic" conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity. Therefore, Connell explains that while the term "hegemonic" implies the primacy of a particular brand of gender ideology, hegemony itself

> does not mean total culture dominance, the obliteration of alternatives. It means ascendancy achieved within a balance of forces, that is, a state of play. Other patterns and groups are subordinated rather than eliminated. If we do not recognize this it would be impossible to account for the everyday contestation that actually occurs in social life, let alone for historical changes in definitions of gender patterns on the grand scale (Connell 1987: 184).

In the analysis that follows, I adopt the terms hegemonic and counter-hegemonic to distinguish between the prevailing and oppositional discourses of gender in contemporary evangelicalism, respectively.

It is my contention that many previous analyses of conservative Protestant family rhetoric have not construed gender as a contested cultural construct, but instead have been unduly preoccupied with the most distinctive (i.e., overtly patriarchal) strands of evangelical gender discourse. As a result, these studies have given short shrift to oppositional gender constructions within contemporary evangelicalism. The focus of this study, and the presuppositions that undergird it, are markedly different than those just articulated. Most importantly, this analysis is purposefully hermeneutic (i.e., interpretive) in nature: As a nonevangelical scholar with egalitarian sensibilities, I am interested in understanding the nuances of a religious subculture from the standpoint of committed believers *(verstehen)* whose theological commitments — and, in many instances, ideological viewpoints — are indeed "foreign" to me. Weber (1964: 1) has argued (most convincingly, I think) that a subjective understanding of another individual or group's viewpoint is a worthy sociological goal. As such, this study has the dual potential of enriching scholarly understandings of evangelical family relations and promoting dialogue between two parties (namely, social scientists and religious conservatives) who have long been positioned as political adversaries in cultural debates concerning gender and the family.

Apart from these theoretical concerns, two criteria guided the selection of conservative Protestant gender and family texts utilized in this analysis: (1) the popularity of the manual in question (several of which claim over one million copies sold), and (2) the prominence of the manual's author (many of whom preside over or hold prominent positions in popular evangelical organizations such as Focus on the Family, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, and the PromiseKeepers).[4] The actual analyses of these texts proceeded as follows. My pre-

liminary reading of each text was conducted using an emergent themes analytical technique. At this stage of the analysis, any rhetoric in the text pertaining to the allocation or implementation of spousal authority was flagged. Following this preliminary reading, the texts were then reanalyzed in full with the following questions in mind. First, what is the author's specific recommendation regarding the allocation of spousal authority in the home? By whom should family decisions be made and how should household authority be delegated? Second, what rationale does the author offer to support his/her prescriptions for the allocation of domestic decision-making authority? How does the author attempt to lend legitimacy to his/her recommendations for implementing household authority? Having described the theoretical and methodological considerations that guide this study, I next attempt to contextualize my analysis of conservative Protestant gender and family rhetoric with a brief description of the rules which govern evangelical discourse.

SCRIPTURE, SIN, AND SALVATION: THE RULES OF EVANGELICAL DISCOURSE

Despite his appreciation for discursive multiplicity and disjuncture, as well as his suspicion of teleologies and totalizations, Foucault does not argue that discourses devolve into complete fragmentation. Instead, a discourse congeals around a set of "rules" that govern the articulation of and interrelationship between its constituent parts: "[Discourses] do not come about of themselves, but are always the result of a construction of rules of which must be known, and the justifications of which must be scrutinized . . . [A]ccording to what rules has a particular statement been made, and consequently according to what rules could other statements be made?" (Foucault 1972: 25–27). What, then, are the rules that undergird the discourse of gender and family relations within contemporary evangelicalism?

Contemporary conservative Protestantism, an outgrowth of early twentieth-century fundamentalism, is characterized most notably by an unswerving commitment to the inerrancy of the Bible, i.e., the belief that the Bible is the actual word of God. Specifically, evangelicals believe that scripture provides reliable, empirically verifiable instructions on an array of personal, spiritual, and social concerns (e.g., Bilezikian 1985: 11, 13, 19; Christenson 1970: 17, 19; Cooper 1974: 9–10; Crabb 1991: 122–29; Dobson 1982: 476–77, 496–97; 1991: 109, 134, 209–10, 226; Elliot 1976: 20, 70; 1981: 171–76; Follis 1981: 14–15, 16; Getz 1974: 11; Groothuis 1994: xi–xii; Gundry 1977: 13, 38; 1980: 13, 38–39; LaHaye 1968: 9, 42, 46, 88; Wagner 1994: 10, 29, 31). This view is shared by virtually all evangelicals, and many of these authors evince a deep concern for the "literal" meaning of individual biblical words and phrases (Dobson 1991: 226; Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 9–10). Commentator Mary Pride (1985: 138), for example, maintains that "*every* word in the Bible is true" (emphasis in original), while Fred Littauer (1994: 148) contends that "nothing is in Scripture by chance. Every word, every 'jot and title' is by design and is placed, in the original manuscripts, exactly as God intended."

Despite this widespread conservative Protestant commitment to biblical inerrancy, closer scrutiny reveals that "inerrant" scriptural readings which hold sway among contemporary religious conservatives are indeed informed by particular hermeneutic assumptions that leading evangelicals import into the process of scriptural interpretation (Bartkowski 1996; Boone 1989). Contemporary constructions of inerrancy are largely contingent upon two pivotal interpretive presuppositions which religious conservatives use to arrive at "inerrant" scriptural readings. First, contemporary religious conservatives are preoccupied with what they perceive as *the pervasiveness of sin in the world and the innate depravity of human nature* (e.g., Cooper 1974: 21–22, 25–26, 102; Dobson 1975: 39, 1991: 94–95; Follis 1981: 32; Gabriel 1993: 15–16, 50, 69–70; Groothuis 1994: 109; LaHaye 1968: 103–4, 157; Pride 1985: 26, 29, 49, 89; Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 9, 16). This emphasis on human sin and depravity evinces an elective affinity with evangelical understandings of the Bible's

book of Genesis. Leading religious conservatives interpret the Genesis creation account to mean that, while human beings (i.e., Adam and Eve) were originally made perfect and in God's image, the primordial husband and wife defied God's instructions and thereby banished all of humanity to live in a sinful world occupied by selfish individuals (e.g., Bilezikian 1985: ch. 1 and 2; Dobson 1975: 39; 1991: 94–95, 224–25; Gabriel 1993: 40–41; Pride 1985: 3).

Second, evangelicals generally believe that the remedy for human sin and depravity lies in *obedient submission to God's plan for human salvation* as exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ and as outlined in the Bible (e.g., Bilezikian 1985: 15–19, ch. 4 and 5; Cooper 1974: 14–16, 23–24, 103–4, 109; Dobson 1975: 71; 1991: 227–29; Follis 1981: 32; Gabriel 1993: 8, 16, 78; Groothuis 1994: 109; LaHaye 1968: 41, 45, 82–83, 103–4, 126–27, 129–41, 158–60; Florence Littauer 1994: 187, 196; Pride 1985: xiii, 112, 175, 202; Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: x–xi; Smalley 1988a: 19). Following closely from the foregoing assumption about the "fallen" state of human nature, conservative Protestants generally agree that the only certain path to spiritual salvation lies in a personal striving to submerge or "submit" one's self-will to some external form of authority (e.g., God, the Bible, scripturally legitimated human authorities). As I attempt to demonstrate below, these theological convictions directly impact conservative Protestant gender discourse, including both hegemonic evangelical arguments for household patriarchy and counter-hegemonic critiques of it.

PATRIARCHY EXTOLLED: THE HEGEMONIC DISCOURSE OF "HUSBAND-HEADSHIP" AND "WIFELY SUBMISSION" IN EVANGELICAL ADVICE LITERATURE

A preponderance of popular conservative Protestant gender and family commentators advocate a patriarchal family structure (e.g., Cole 1982: 61, 75, 102, 125; Cooper 1974: 16–17, 43, 61–69; Crabb 1991: 198–208; Dillow 1986: 122–45; Dobson 1975: 67–70; 1982: 409–11; 1991: 49–51, 92–94, 97, 128, 151–52, 184–85; Elliot 1976: 66, 141,; 1981: 70–71; Farrar 1990: 157–83; Getz 1977: 124–29; LaHaye 1968: 27–28, 105–8; Lewis and Hendricks 1991: 133–40; Pride 1985: 196–203; Swindoll 1991: 25, 35; Weber 1993: 83–98; see also various selections in Piper and Grudem 1991). In practical terms, these authors argue that husbands — not wives — are ultimately responsible for making decisions that will affect the welfare of the family and its members. James Dobson states flatly: "The primary responsibility for the provision of authority in the home has been assigned to men. It will not be popular to restate the age-old Biblical concept that God holds *men* accountable for leadership in their families . . . God apparently expects a *man* to be the ultimate decision-maker in his family" (Dobson 1991: 92–93, emphasis in the original; see also Cole 1982: 70–71; Farrar 1990: 179–80).

It bears mentioning that none of these authors discourages husbands from seeking the input of their wives prior to making decisions, and many commentators even inject egalitarian rhetoric — e.g., equal in value, different in function — into their prescriptions for patriarchal spousal relations (e.g., Cooper 1974: 62, 65; Getz 1977: 129–31; LaHaye 1976: 72; Pride 1985: xiii). Dobson, founder/president of Focus on the Family and arguably the most popular evangelical family commentator, does not altogether rule out discussion, compromise, and negotiation as a means of familial decision making (e.g., Dobson 1975: 93–94; see also Crabb 1991: 173–74; Getz 1974: 162–64; 1977: 120–23), and cautions husbands against the "heavy-handed" use of authority (e.g., Dobson 1982: 411; 1991: 97, 184; see also Crabb 1991: 197): "It is important to understand what I mean by masculine leadership. I don't attempt to justify men who oppress their children or show disregard for the needs and wishes of their wives. That kind of nineteenth-century authoritarianism is dead, and may it rest in peace" (Dobson 1982: 409).

Despite such strong warnings against "dictatorial" domestic leadership, however, many of these commentators would seem to agree that husbands are not *obligated* to solicit (much less to heed) wifely advice or admonitions. Ultimately, these authors contend, God holds husbands accountable for exercising familial leadership that is in keeping with biblical principles. Therefore, even while Dobson (1975: 69–70; 1991: 130) maintains that men are to exercise familial authority in a benevolent and selfless fashion, he concludes: "For those who accept God's design for the family, it is clear that husbands bear the *initial* responsibility for correcting the problem. This obligation is implicit in the role of leadership assigned to males" (Dobson 1975: 70, emphasis in original; see also Dobson 1982: 409–10).

Evangelical wives, on the other hand, are often construed as "executive vice-presidents" of the family (e.g., Cooper 1974: 65–66; Dillow 1986: 122–45; see also LaHaye 1976: 71). Indeed, many of these authors liken the family to other social institutions — e.g., business, military, or government organizations — which operate according to the principles of hierarchy and submission to duly appointed authorities (Cooper 1974: 61, 85; Pride 1985: 198–99; see also Farrar 1990: 179–80). As executive vice-presidents in the family, wives are told that they are far from powerless. Indeed, they are instructed to offer input as requested or deemed necessary with regard to family decision making (e.g., Cooper 1974: 67; Dillow 1986: 128). At the same time, however, evangelical wives are enjoined to submit to and obediently implement their husbands' ultimate "presidential" decision, even if that choice is in direct contradiction to their "vice-presidential" wishes (Cooper 1974: 68–69, 73, 78–80, 87–88; Dillow 1986: 128; LaHaye 1968: 109–10; LaHaye 1976: 78):

> the president's success depends on the vice president's help in carrying out the policies. When new decisions have to be made, the president may consult the vice president for advice, but he assumes responsibility for the final decision. Once a policy is decided, they work together as a team to carry it out . . . In this relationship, they share a oneness, good communication, emotional peace, and security, provided the vice president is not struggling to gain control of the organization! (Cooper 1974: 66).

Given their crucial role in administering their husbands' directives pertaining to family life, wives are strongly discouraged from manifesting a grudging obedience to their husbands in cases where spouses do not share similar views (Cooper 1974: 90–91; Dillow 1986: 126–27, 128, 139). But how are wives to avoid harboring such resentment?

Alongside such reminders about the importance of their distinctive familial role, evangelical wives are provided with various reasons why they should enjoy their diminished decision-making power in the family. Darien Cooper's best-selling *You Can Be the Wife of a Happy Husband* (1974: 61–99), which boasts 33 printings and more than 700,000 copies in print, treats this issue at length. First, Cooper contends that familial leadership is accompanied by a burdensome responsibility for making the "right" decision. Thus, she somewhat paradoxically maintains that in wifely submission lie the true seeds for women's "liberation": "Let go! Relax. You can enjoy the freedom of knowing that, along with the right to make the final decisions, your husband carries the responsibility for the consequences of his decisions" (Cooper 1974: 78; see also Dillow 1986: 139–40; Elliot 1976: 65–67; LaHaye 1976: 71).

Second, she argues that a spirit of submission will ultimately yield personal satisfaction for wives. Stories abound in wives' advice manuals of women whose submission to their husbands' leadership, in the final analysis, contributed to bringing these wives' wishes to fruition (putatively, via the handiwork of God). Cooper (1974: 78–79, 87–89) herself provides four such examples of the practical benefits of wifely submission, including one story about how a wife's submission led to the conversion of her non–Christian husband despite his initial displeasure with his wife's churchgoing habits (Cooper 1974: 86–87; see also Dillow 1986: 140–42; LaHaye 1976: 79–80). Pointing to these and other practical merits of wifely submission, Cooper (1974: 78) urges wives: "Resist temptations to interfere with his leader-

ship because you feel his decisions or actions are too forceful, harsh, or wrong. Don't argue your point or try to manipulate him. Respond to his leadership in a relaxed manner, and you will find that your husband usually wants to please you."

And, finally, women are told that husbands who seem reluctant to lead their families will be encouraged to do so by their wives' submissive posture (Dillow 1986: 125, 140–42; LaHaye 1976: 73–74, 141–42):

> You will encourage your husband to take the lead by being a good follower and telling him how much you enjoy his taking charge. As you display trust in his ability, he will be more eager to continue as head of the house. Interestingly, as you follow, your husband will lead; but if you become aggressive, he may regress. You nag, and he will rebel. If you desire to please him, he will want to please you (Cooper 1974: 79).

Such recommendations, of course, raise a vexing question not directly confronted in many of these manuals: If a wife's submission is *required* for husbands to assume marital leadership, precisely who is exercising authority under such circumstances — a husband who is attempting to cut his teeth as the family's decision maker or his wife who is provided by these authors with explicit instructions falling under the paradoxical rubric of "How to Help Your Husband Become the Leader" (Cooper 1974: 77–80)?

PATRIARCHY CONTESTED: THE COUNTER-HEGEMONIC DISCOURSE OF "MUTUAL SUBMISSION" AMONG EVANGELICAL FAMILY COMMENTATORS

In stark contrast to the notion of wifely submission that prevails in hegemonic evangelical gender discourse, a burgeoning group of dissident commentators argues not for wifely submission but rather for *mutual submission* in the home (e.g., Bilezikian 1985: 153–71, 189–93; Follis 1981: 90, 93–94; Gabriel 1993: ch. 11; Groothuis 1994: 126, 164–65; Gundry 1977: 35; 1980: 22–26, 93–98; Fred Littauer 1994: 150–52; Mason 1985: 152–54; Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 148–49; Siddons 1980: 72–74; Smalley 1988b: 79–80, 156; Wagner 1994: 28). In general, proponents of this counter-hegemonic perspective maintain that the couple — not just the wife — have a mutual obligation to submit themselves directly to God, thereby submerging their individual interests for the collective good of the marital relationship (Bilezikian 1985: 162–71; Follis 1981: 94–95; Fred Littauer 1994: 145–46; Groothuis 1994: 163–65; Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 151–52; Wagner 1994: 38). This perspective, which seems to have originated with evangelical feminists, has now become common currency among equality-minded religious conservatives more broadly defined.[5] Evangelical feminist Rebecca Merrill Groothuis elaborates upon the meaning and perceived merits of mutual submission:

> Rather than eliminating submission altogether, biblical feminism calls for more submission . . . Unlike the established power of hierarchy or the grab-for-power of anarchy, mutual submission sets aside the power struggle and yields to the rule of love . . . No marriage fails for lack of authority and control; rather, marriages fail for lack of mutual love and submission . . . [W]ould not two-way submission then be twice as good [as one-way wifely submission]? (Groothuis 1994: 164–65).

How, according to these commentators, is "mutual submission" to be implemented in the home? Instead of the recommendations for ultimate patriarchal leadership found in prevailing evangelical commentary, counter-hegemonic voices outline several different strategies for familial decision making: (1) In-depth discussion and compromise including the input of both spouses or all family members who will be affected by the decision (Gundry 1980: 136, 139; Fred Littauer 1994: 155–56, 163; Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 160; Smalley 1988a: 82, 131, 135–39, 147–48; 1988b: 164–65; 1994); (2) A general agreement not to take action on a particular decision until both spouses or all involved parties are of similar mind (Gundry 1980: 139–40; Florence Littauer 1994: 124; Fred Littauer 1994: 156, 163; 166–67;

Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 160; Smalley 1988a: 129–31; 1988b: 165) (3) Deferring to the spouse who exhibits the most competence in that area or who has the most at stake in the decision (Follis 1981: 92–93; Gundry 1980: 139–40, 144; Fred Littauer 1994: 155; Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 160–61); (4) An "alternation of duty periods" in which one spouse serves as the decision maker for a given time period followed by a similar "duty period" for the other (Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 160); and (5) The sparing use of quid pro quo, a "this-for-that" trade of favors exchanged by spouses in the face of minor disagreements (Gundry 1980: 145).

These commentators are quick to extol what they perceive to be the practical benefits of mutual submission and joint decision making: learning to respect each partner's personal interests and boundaries; averting abusive patriarchal oppression; fostering marital intimacy and sexual responsiveness for both spouses; modeling "proper" conflict-resolution tactics for children; and, relieving husbands from the "burden" of sole responsibility associated with patriarchal decision making (Gabriel 1993: 107–9; Groothuis 1994: 164–65; Gundry 1980: 137, 140–41, 151–63; Fred Littauer 1994: 156; Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 160–74; Smalley 1988a: 133–34; 1988b: 165). Best-selling author of the revised and expanded *Being a Woman of God* (more than 250,000 copies in print), Ginger Gabriel, supports this perspective via a critical counter-example: "Many a woman has memorized the submission Scriptures, gone to women's study groups on submission, gone forward in church to recommit her life to submitting to the role of wife, only to blow up hours later at an insensitive husband . . . The solution is not to try to show more respect to your husband. *The solution is to experience God's healing* . . ." (Gabriel 1993: 104, emphasis in original). In short, then, recent years have witnessed the rise of a counter-hegemonic evangelical discourse on gender and family relations. These specialists argue that the notion of mutual submission is ethically and practically far superior to more "traditional" conceptualizations of patriarchal headship that have otherwise dominated conservative Protestant family discourse.

The Dispute Behind the Debate: Competing Conceptualizations of Gender and Divergent Interpretations of the Bible

The foregoing analysis of evangelical gender discourse reveals a remarkable degree of heterogeneity in leading conservative Protestants' recommendations for the household distribution of decision making authority. This internecine dispute over evangelical gender ideology raises the question of legitimation: How does each group of commentators justify their distinctive recommendations for spousal authority? In what follows, I link this evangelical debate over the patriarchal family with two interrelated sets of presuppositions to which these commentators appeal in order to justify their views: (1) divergent assumptions about the nature of gender, and (2) distinctive interpretations of the Bible's teachings on household authority.

Competing Understanding of Masculinity and Femininity: Gender Difference versus Gender Sameness

One important source of dispute between evangelical purveyors and critics of the patriarchal family concerns the nature of gender, and the extent to which masculinity and femininity are envisioned as radically distinctive or largely homologous. In general, evangelical proponents of a patriarchal family structure view masculinity and femininity as radically different from one another, and argue that distinctively "masculine" traits — including logic, strength, assertiveness, and instrumentalism — uniquely qualify men for familial leadership and for the burden of responsibility that accompanies this superordinate position

(e.g., Cooper 1974: 50, 66–67; Dobson 1982: 401; 1991: 93–94). Elizabeth Elliot (1976: 178) maintains that a husband's "virile drive for domination [is] God-given and necessary in fulfilling his particular masculine responsibility to rule," while Dobson (1991: 94) argues: "Boys and girls typically look to their fathers, whose size and power and deeper voices bespeak leadership."

At the same time, these authors maintain that women's apparent psychological "responsiveness," desire for relational stability, and innate vulnerability predispose them to submit willingly to their husband's household leadership (e.g., Cooper 1974: 17, 66–67, 74–75; Dobson 1991: 184; Elliot 1976: 58–62). Tim LaHaye, co-founder of the Moral Majority, elaborates upon what he perceives to be the connection between feminine "responsiveness" and the distribution of household authority:

> Man is the key to a happy family life because a woman by nature is a responding creature. Some temperaments, of course, respond more quickly than others, but all normal women are responders. That is one of the secondary meanings of the word *submission* in the Bible. God would not have commanded a woman to submit unless he had instilled in her a psychic mechanism which would find it comfortable to do so. The key to feminine response has only two parts — love and leadership. I have never met a wife who did not react positively to a husband who gave her love and leadership. Deep within a woman lies a responding capability that makes her vulnerable to that combination (LaHaye 1977: 178, emphasis in original).

Larry Christenson echoes this view, adding that inborn feminine vulnerability is highly consistent with patriarchal authority and wifely submission (see also Cooper 1974: 70–71, 74–75, 77). He contends that "God did not give this law of wives being submissive to their husbands because He had a grudge against women; on the contrary, He established this order *for the protection of women and the harmony of the home.* He means for a women to be sheltered from many of the rough encounters of life" (Christenson 1970: 33, emphasis in original). Christenson continues:

> In the world a woman is subject to physical attack, and therefore needs her husband's protection. This is a basic universal fact of existence and is written into the folkways of every age and culture. A woman's vulnerability, however, does not stop at the physical level. It includes also vulnerability at the emotional, psychological, and spiritual level. Here, too, she needs a husband's authority and protection (Christenson 1970: 34–35).

Given these "innate" gender differences, Dobson (1991: 151–52) suggests that women actually desire decisive masculine leadership in the home: "my observation is that most women are merely waiting for their husbands to assume [family] leadership . . ." (see also Dobson 1975: 102).

In contrast to this radical conceptualization of gender difference, evangelical feminists and others appeal to gender sameness to legitimate their prescriptions for shared spousal authority. These critical commentators argue that masculinity and femininity are not composed of dichotomous sets of traits categorically distributed between men and women. Instead, they emphasize the androgynous overlap between men and women, and point to that they perceive to be the largely ungendered distribution of emotional sensitivity, rationality, responsiveness, and assertiveness (Follis 1981: 108–9; Gabriel 1993: 39, 45–47; Groothuis 1994: 69, 110, 126, 162; Gundry 1977: 22–25; Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 22, 125–26, 167–74). Gabriel maintains:

> In some "Christian" literature the "feeling" characteristics are referred to as "feminine" and women are urged to be more emotional. The "thinking" characteristics are considered to be "masculine." Men are told to be more cerebral. The reality is that these characteristics are spread across the genders. Those whose personality patterns don't fit the female/feeling or the male/thinking models feel uncomfortable in some churches. God created man *and* woman to reflect His own image. God intended both men and women to be both thinking and feeling. A whole person is in touch with both sides (Gabriel 1993: 45).

In light of these views, Gabriel (1993: 46) reminds her female readership: "God created you to be both initiating and nurturing." Consequently, many advocates of mutual submission contend that husbands and wives alike possess the requisite capacities for exercising family leadership.

Some advocates of mutual submission envision the relationship between gender and household authority somewhat differently, however. Rather than arguing that male-female differences are inconsequential, these commentators believe that leadership in the home should be a team effort precisely because patriarchal authority is impaired by an array of uniquely masculine "biases." Specifically, these "modified essentialists" argue that men's inherent lack of sensitivity, compassion, and intuition, combined with the apparent abundance of these qualities in women, necessitates joint decision making among couples (see esp. Fred Littauer 1994: 155–56; Smalley 1988a: ch. 7, 9). Fred Littauer (1994: 155) remarks: "God created our wives to be our helpers, to be an important part of our team. He gave them understanding and perception that we husbands often don't have. They can see things we don't see. Therefore they need to be a part of the decision-making process about everything that affects the family." To convey this point more readily, these authors frequently cite incidents in which a wife's insight and intuition about a problem actually spared — or, had she been consulted, would have spared — the family from the dire consequences of a hasty, uninformed husband's unilateral decision (e.g., Florence Littauer 1994: 8–9; Fred Littauer 1994: 162–63; Smalley 1988a: 107–9, 132–33). Fred Littauer concludes:

> We penalize ourselves when we don't avail ourselves of our wives' wisdom. "Where no counsel is, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety. . . . The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that harkeneth unto counsel is wise" (Prov. 11:14 and 12:15). How much grief I could have spared myself in the past if I had listened to my wife's counsel or heeded her concerns! Now, at last, I have learned (Fred Littauer 1994: 154–55).

Similarly, Florence Littauer (1994: 10) urges her female readership not to subordinate their "feminine intuition" to their husbands' apparent penchant for logical argumentation: "God gave us women intuition. Let's not throw away the gift." Thus, even while these evangelical critics of patriarchy may disagree about the nature of masculinity and femininity, they concur that husbands and wives should share decision-making responsibilities.

Divergent Scriptural Interpretations: Gender and the Battle over the Bible

A second and perhaps more fundamental source of divergence separating evangelical advocates and critics of the patriarchal family relates more directly to the most distinctive facet of conservative Protestantism outlined above: the Bible. Commentators who embrace a patriarchal family structure construe several key biblical passages as advocating "husband headship" and "wifely submission" in the home. Most popular among theses is a series of verses from the Bible's book of Ephesians (ch. 5: 22–24) (Cooper 1974: 16–17, 61–62, 77, 82, 84–85; Dobson 1975: 69; 1982: 409; 1991: 128, LaHaye 1968: 106–7; Pride 1985: 197): "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything." Focusing upon the first of these passages (i.e., Ephesians 5: 22), many of these commentators frequently remind wives that submission to their husbands serves as an indicator of their commitment to Jesus Christ, for whom their husbands are serving as a divinely appointed proxy (e.g., Elliot 1976: 140–41; LaHaye 1976: 72–73):

> It should be comforting to know that God will, literally, show you His will for your life through your husband. If you have prayed about a certain matter and feel you know God's will concerning it, use God's final check. Ask your husband what you should do . . . You can trust God to lead you and your family spiritually

> without your defying your husband. When you get out from under God's umbrella of protection and become the spiritual leader in your home at the expense of your husband's headship, everyone suffers . . . Your attitude toward your husband reveals your spiritual condition. You are rebellious to Christ's leadership to the same degree that you rebel against your husband's leadership (Cooper 1974: 75–76).

Cooper (1974: 83) summarizes: "you can be in the center of [God's] will only if you obey the one God has put in authority over you — your husband. You display your obedience to God through being subject to your husband."

Apart from this series of verses in Ephesians 5, these commentators interpret several other biblical passages as divine commands for patriarchal household authority (e.g., Colossians 3:18; I Peter 3:1–6; I Timothy 3:4–5; Titus 2: 3–5) (Cooper 1974: 18, 56–57, 81, 85, 90; Dobson 1982: 409–10; 1991: 92; LaHaye 1968: 106–7; Pride 1985: xi, 196–97, 203), including I Corinthians 11:3: "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (e.g., Cooper 1974: 20–21, 62; Pride 1985: 197). These authors contend that divine authority relations — i.e., God-Christ-Church, in descending order of authority — mirror the God-ordained familial hierarchy of husband-wife-child. According to these writers, this passage is clear in its implications for family life: the husband is biblically commanded to exercise "headship" (i.e., leadership) over his wife and children (e.g., Cooper 1974: 62–65; Weber 1993: 86–87).

In addition to these New Testament passages, many of these specialists maintain that the Old Testament Genesis 2 account of human origins and the Genesis 3 depiction of the entrance of sin into the world underscore both the primacy of patriarchal authority and the pitfalls of feminine leadership in the home. First, these commentators interpret the Genesis 2 "order of creation" in which the creation of Adam predates that of Eve as a divine endorsement of patriarchal authority among this primordial couple (Cooper 1974: 17; Elliot 1976: 134, 145ff). Pointing to this account of human origins, these commentators stress that Eve was not only created after Adam, but from his body (namely, his rib), to relieve Adam of the sense of incompleteness that plagued him. These authors therefore conclude that God created women (the daughters of Eve) "from and for" men (the sons of Adam) (e.g., Elliot 1976: 67, 145–46). In practical terms, these authors construe the order of creation as unambiguous evidence that wives are to serve as "helpmeets" to husbands who, in turn, are to exercise authority over them (e.g., Dobson 1991: 129; Weber 1993: 89–90).

Second, many of these commentators interpret the Genesis 3 account of humankind's "fall" from grace as a confirmation of the pitfalls of feminine leadership in marriage (e.g., Christenson 1970: 39; Cooper 1974: 21; Pride 1985: 3). According to these commentators, sin entered the world because Adam's God-ordained position of authority was usurped by his wife Eve, who these authors stress had decided on her own accord to eat the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Some of these commentators also indict Eve for using her feminine wiles to undermine further her husband's authority (i.e., by giving the fruit to Adam and convincing her husband to follow her in sin)(e.g., Cooper 1974: 21; Farrar 1990: 167):

> It was, in fact, the woman, Eve, who saw the opportunity to be something other than she was meant to be — the Serpent convinced her that she could easily be "like God" — and she took the initiative. We have no way of knowing whether a consultation with her husband might first have led to an entirely different conclusion . . . What sort of world might it have been if Eve had refused the Serpent's offer and had said to him instead, "Let me not be like God. Let me be what I was made to be — let me be a woman"? (Elliot 1976: 24–25).

Based on this interpretation of Genesis 3, these gender commentators place a great emphasis on what they perceive to be the gender-specific "curse" that God articulated to Eve for inviting sin into the world: "your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you" (Genesis 3:16; see also I Timothy 2:13). These authors understand this passage to mean that

God's punishment of Eve included the reinforcement of patriarchal authority in marital relations. They conclude that if Eve was at all uncertain about her subordinate place in the created order, God made his marital chain of command quite clear indeed after "the fall."

In stark contrast to the biblical interpretations that hold sway among hegemonic purveyors of patriarchy, more egalitarian commentators select key scriptural passages to support their commitment to mutual submission. Most notably, they emphasize that the series of biblical passages often used to legitimate *wifely* submission (Ephesians 5: 22–24) are preceded (and, in their view, superseded) by a verse that commands *mutual* submission: "Honor Christ by submitting to each other" (Ephesians 5:21)(see Bilezikian 1985: 162–64; Follis 1981: 90–91; Gabriel 1993: 102; Gundry 1977: 71–72, 83; Florence Littauer 1994: 116; Fred Littauer 1994: 150; Mason 1985: 153; Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 148ff; Siddons 1980: 72–73; Wagner 1994: 73). Similarly, these commentators interpret I Peter 3:7 as evidence of divine support for mutual submission. Not unlike Ephesians 5, I Peter 3 allows for divergent interpretive emphases, which yield contradictory scriptural readings. While some of the opening verses from I Peter 3 are interpreted (and strongly emphasized) by hegemonic commentators as directives for wifely submission, I Peter 3:7 somewhat ironically describes husbands and wives as "joint heirs" or "fellow heirs" of God's grace. It is this latter passage (verse 7) that advocates of mutual submission give interpretive primacy (Gundry 1977: 83; Fred Littauer 1994: 147; Smalley 1988a: 41; Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 140–43, 159, 318; Wagner 1994: 105). In addition to these passages, other verses such as Romans 12:10 ("Be devoted to one another in brotherly love") and Romans 15:7 ("Accept one another just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God") are cited by these authors as evidence of God's imperative for marital equality (e.g., Fred Littauer 1994: 56, 125, 147; Smalley 1988a: 139; 1988b: 91).

Given these views, many of these authors directly challenge the veracity of biblical interpretations that conclude that "husband-headship" and "wifely-submission" are a divine imperative for the family. On the one hand, some of these authors construe "headship" — translated from the Greek word *kephale* — as a literal reference to the chronological order of creation. They consequently argue that the literal meaning of the term *kephale* is not "authority," but rather "origin" or "source" (e.g., Bilezikian 1985: 241–43; Gundry 1977: 64, 71; 1980: 102, 104, 116; Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 150; Siddons 1980: 62–63; see Ingersoll 1995). Therefore, I Corinthians 11:3 — in which the (allegedly Pauline) author writes, "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" — is interpreted as a chronological rather than a hierarchical reference. Unlike hegemonic commentators who seem to conflate chronology and hierarchy, these authors argue that neither the term *kephale* nor the Genesis 2 creative order to which it refers (i.e., God, Adam/man, Eve/woman) implies hierarchy for the family (Groothuis 1994: 68; Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 29–32). Rather, they contend that the hegemonic equation of the creation order with patriarchal authority is inconsistent with other seemingly egalitarian biblical passages, such I Corinthians 11:11–12: "In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman" (see, e.g., Fred Littauer 1994: 147; Groothuis 1994: 67–68; Gundry 1980: 107; Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 30, 316). Scanzoni and Hardesty (1992: 29) acerbically add that if authority is based on the order of creation, then men and women alike would be subject to the rule of animals, because the Genesis 1 account claims that humans were created after other creatures of the earth.

On the other hand, many of these critics of the patriarchal family contend that the Pauline use of the word *kephale* can be translated "literally" to mean "head," but must be understood as an actual head on a human body (Bilezikian 1985: 247–49; Gundry 1977: 64; Littauer 1994: 153–54; Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 33–37). These authors contend that the

biblical writer Paul uses this "literal metaphor" to liken the Christ-church relationship and the husband-wife relationship to the human body (see esp. Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 35). These equality-minded commentators are quick to point out that body parts operate interdependently, and are prone to stress other Pauline scriptural references which seem to indicate that the head is not to be privileged over other body parts such as hands, feet, ears, or eyes (I Corinthians 12: 14–25; Colossians 2: 19):

> [Paul's] point is a simple one: united head and body, we live; severed head from body, we die. It is a variation of an image Christ used, that of the vine and the branches (John 15: 1–17). As Christians united to Christ we who were once dead now live (Ephesians 2: 1–6; Colossians 2: 9–14). As a husband and wife become "one flesh" (Genesis 2: 24) and live in unity, the marital relationship lives and flourishes (Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 35; see also Bilezikian 1985: 248; Fred Littauer 1994: 146, 153–54).

Many of these authors seek to buttress this criticism of "husband-headship" in the home by pointing to women in the Bible who exercised authority and leadership in the family (e.g., Sarah, the spouse of Abraham), in the early church (Phoebe, a deaconess and minister), and in society at large (e.g., Deborah, a prophet and judge; as well as Queen Esther)(see e.g., Follis 1981: 97–103; Gundry 1977: 77, 89–104; Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: ch. 5, 141–43).

In addition to challenging prevailing interpretations that translate the scriptural term "head" as "authority," these more equality-minded commentators contend that portrayals of women (i.e., daughters of Eve) as more prone to sin and therefore in need of male authority do not withstand scriptural scrutiny. These authors contend that because Adam and Eve *both* partook of the forbidden fruit in Genesis 3, they shared *joint* responsibility for humankind's "original sin" (e.g., Bilezikian 1985: 39–50; Gabriel 1993: 95, 104; Gundry 1977: 20–21; Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 37–44), a view which some commentators support by reference to Romans 3:23: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 9). Hegemonic interpretations of the Bible that lay culpability upon Eve for humanity's "fall" from grace are characterized as being distorted by the importation of patriarchal assumptions into scriptural study (Bilezikian 1985: 49–50, 263–64; Groothuis 1994: 67–68, 111; Gundry 1977: 20–21; Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 33, 134–35; see also Follis 1981: 89). Indeed, some of these authors seem a bit more willing to indict Adam's behavior in this incident, for he alone is said to have received an admonition directly from God not to eat the forbidden fruit (Bilezikian 1985: 39–50). Even more importantly, according to these authors, Eve was tempted by Satan disguised as a serpent (an adversary superior in cunning to any human being), whereas Adam was gullible enough to eat the forbidden fruit without question simply upon the suggestion of Eve (his equal) (Bilezikian 1985: 48–50; see also Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 45).

Finally, several of these equality-minded commentators maintain that what is frequently interpreted as God's normative statement that Adam would "rule over" Eve after their collective fall was not a *prescriptive endorsement* of a patriarchal family structure. Rather, these authors interpret this verse as a *predictive lamentation* offered by an omniscient God who foresaw the hardship that patriarchal oppression and "submission abuse" (Gabriel 1993: 109) would cause for women in a male-dominated family and sinful world (Bilezikian 1985: 54–56; Gabriel 1993: 95, 109; Gundry 1977: 61; Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 1–2, 43–44; Siddons 1980: 43). Scanzoni and Hardesty (1992: 43) explain: 'Perhaps the most famous of God's pronouncements to women is . . . [that from Genesis] 3:16: "He shall rule over you." A better translation is found in The Jerusalem Bible: "He will lord it over you." ' These commentators, then, are convinced of the accuracy of this divine prediction and argue that for too long unilateral wifely submission has invited insensitivity, indifference, and even abuse from evangelical husbands (Gabriel 1993: 104, 109; Fred Littauer 1994: 144; Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 151–53). In short, evangelical disputes over the patriarchal family stem not only from competing conceptualizations of masculinity

and femininity, but also from divergent scriptural interpretations concerning the nature and implementation of spousal authority relations in the home.

Discussion

In this study, I have analyzed a large sample of conservative Protestant gender and family manuals to reveal a discursive multiplicity in evangelical constructions of spousal authority. On the one hand, some evangelical luminaries unabashedly extoll what they perceived to be the benefits (for *both* spouses) of a patriarchal family structure. These commentators agree that decision-making power in the family is ultimately the husband's responsibility, and enjoin wives to submit to their spouses' exercise of household leadership. On the other hand, a coterie of biblical feminists and more equality-minded evangelicals has challenged this hegemonic endorsement of the patriarchal family. In striking contrast to prevailing recommendations for *wifely* submission, these egalitarian authors call for *mutual* submission in which patriarchal leadership is supplanted by shared decision-making responsibility. After sketching the contours of this debate, I attempted to reveal how these competing visions of the family rest upon these antagonists' (1) divergent assumptions about the nature of gender, and (2) distinctive interpretations of the Bible's teachings on spousal authority relations. Commentators who embrace a patriarchal family structure tend to stress what they perceive to be "essential" and irrevocable gender differences between men and women, and place interpretive emphasis upon biblical passages that seem to enjoin wives to "submit" or be "subject" to their husbands. By contrast, more egalitarian evangelical authors tend to embrace an androgynous conceptualization of gender or a "modified essentialism" that dovetails with their vision of gender-complementary marital teamwork. These commentators rely upon scriptural passages that seem to indicate the *reciprocal obligation* that *all Christians* have to submit to one another (interpreted as "mutual submission" for husbands and wives).

A study of this nature should be complemented by future inquiries that probe conceptualizations of and legitimations for "headship" and "submission" among rank-and-file evangelicals in light of these broader conservative Protestant debates about the legitimacy of the patriarchal family. Implicit in this call for future research are two distinct but related questions. The first is *ideological* in nature.[6] What do rank-and-file evangelical spouses *believe* about submission in the home? Do they define submission as the wife's responsibility to her husband, or as both spouses' mutual obligation to their joint marital relationship? Previous ethnographic research suggests that the answer to this question may not be reducible to a dichotomous "either/or" alternative (or, for that matter, a Likert-scale range of response categories). Judith Stacey (1990: 118ff) has revealed in rich ethnographic detail that individual evangelicals can simultaneously embrace both a patriarchal and an egalitarian family structure. Such observations underscore the need for researchers to consider not only the contested character of evangelical gender discourse, but to investigate the subjective contradictions that mark the identities of conservative Protestant spouses. To this end, other ethnographic studies might focus upon the array of "gender strategies" (Hochschild 1989) that religious conservatives employ to craft a meaningful gender identity in light of the internal contradictions that mark contemporary evangelical gender discourse. Given the salience of gender-role issues among religious conservatives, studies should be designed to determine if evangelical men and evangelical women employ different strategies to navigate between contradictory conservative Protestant gender ideals.

Apart from gaining an appreciation for the complexity of evangelical gender ideals, future research would do well to consider a second important question: What is the relationship between the prevailing gender *attitudes* and the actual *practice* of gender in conservative Protestant households? Recent theoretical insights have begun to redefine the concept of

"gender" to include not only gender-specific beliefs and attitudes, but ongoing social behaviors as well — in a word, "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987). What, then, are the practical or behavioral dynamics of gender in conservative Protestant families? Again, some studies have already begun to address this question, revealing somewhat of an inconsistency between evangelical spouses' beliefs about gender on the one hand (e.g., patriarchal convictions) and their reported or observed gender practices on the other (e.g., egalitarian behaviors) (Ingersoll 1995; Pevey et al. 1996; Rose 1987; Stacey 1990; Stacey and Gerard 1990). Could these findings mean that the hegemonic patriarchal ideology outlined above is dominant only among leading evangelicals (who continue to support in disproportionate numbers some form a patriarchal family model)? And, if so, to what extent do biblical feminists and equality-minded evangelicals lend legitimacy to egalitarian spousal practices in actual conservative Protestant families? It would be premature to answer such vexing questions with any sense of certainty. But, to be sure, a sensitivity to the polyvalent and contested character of contemporary evangelical gender discourse is an important first step toward addressing such salient issues.

This paper began by referring to the heated and purportedly polarized debate that characterizes what some scholars have termed the "war" over the family. However, this study casts doubt upon popular and scholarly assumptions that evangelical Protestants are monolithic in their support for a "traditional" patriarchal family structure, and adds to the handful of studies that have called attention to the nuances, contradictions, and contested nature of conservative religious family ideals and spousal practices. In light of the marked disjuncture between this war-over-the-family theoretical paradigm on the one hand and the research findings of this study on the other, it seems fitting to end this inquiry by briefly considering why these countervailing conceptualizations of evangelical family life and spousal relations have not received more attention in previous studies. One potential reason for the relative inattention to these empirical nuances may lie in the fact that social researchers — particularly those who study religion and family life — are beholden to a set of ideological presuppositions which they often inadvertently import into their research designs and the interpretation of their findings (see Bartkowski 1995; Harris 1994; McNamara 1985b; Thomas and Roghaar 1990 for further discussion of this process). Paradigms portraying evangelicals as nearly unanimous in their defense of a patriarchal family act to instruct — and often constrict — scholarly understandings about the antagonists who are engaged in family debates (conservatives/orthodox vs. liberals/progressives, according to the received wisdom). Moreover, such theoretical models ultimately obscure the complex sets of values that undergird these cultural conflicts by conflating theologically conservative religious convictions (e.g., biblical inerrancy) with a vociferous, de facto defense of the patriarchal family. This study calls into question the viability and accuracy of such theoretical conceptualizations, and instead reveals how and why a patriarchal family structure is so hotly contested within American evangelicalism. If social scientists wish to stimulate meaningful dialogue concerning contemporary debates over the family, it would seem that a deeper appreciation of the complex contours of these debates might help them to realize this worthy goal.

NOTES

I am indebted to the insights provided by Christopher G. Ellison, Robert Fernea, Louis E. Fischer, Norval D. Glenn, Ralph W. Hood, Jr., Carolyn Pevey, Debra Umberson, Christine L. Williams, and the anonymous reviewers, all of whom offered valuable suggestions or comments during the course of this research. I, of course, am solely responsible for the interpretations and observations contained herein. This research has been generously supported by dissertation fellowships from the University of Texas at Austin and the Louisville Institute for the Study of Protestantism and American Culture, as well as a research grant from the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion.

[1] By "evangelical" or "conservative Protestant," I am referring to individuals whose religious convictions are defined largely by their belief in the inerrancy or absolute authority of the Bible (as elaborated elsewhere in the body of this text). The term "fundamentalist Protestant" may be more familiar to some readers but is avoided here due to both the pejorative connotation it has attracted in recent years and the divisiveness of this label within contemporary conservative Protestant circles. It also bears mentioning that while evangelical "pro-family" advocates figure prominently in the aforementioned studies, some of these scholars also examine the role of secular (i.e., economic and political) conservatives in the debate over the family (see e.g., Conover and Gray 1983: ch. 4).

[2] To avoid conceptual confusion, a clarification of terms is in order. Because gender is best understood as a multifaceted construct (e.g., Connell 1987), it is important to distinguish conceptually between *spousal authority* on the one hand and various facets of domestic gender relations on the other (e.g., the allocation of domestic chores or childcare responsibilities). In light of this distinction, patriarchy — which literally means "rule of the father" — may be defined rather narrowly as the concentration of power (e.g., decision-making authority) in the hands of a family's husband/father. According to this definition, then, patriarchy should not be conflated with "traditional" dichotomized household responsibilities (e.g., husband-providership and wifely domesticity), although these two gender role orientations may be closely aligned in practice.

[3] By way of example, 25.70% of primary respondents in the first wave of the National Survey of Families and Households (Sweet, Bumpass, and Call 1988) reported that they "strongly agree" with the following statement: "The Bible is God's Word and everything happened or will happen exactly as it says."

[4] Many of the manuals used in this analysis are best-sellers. Several of these publications have sold or list as in print from one-half million to over one million copies (e.g., Christenson 1970; Cooper 1974; Dobson 1975, 1991; LaHaye 1968; Smalley 1988a, 1988b), while others boast fewer but nonetheless impressive sales figures (often approaching one-half million copies sold or in print) (e.g., Elliot 1976; Getz 1974, 1977; Gabriel 1993, LaHaye 1976). The popularity of several manuals used in this study has merited several reprintings, stimulated the release of revised and expanded editions, and attracted awards recognizing the importance or influence of these volumes on evangelical gender and family discourse (e.g., Bilezikian 1985; Gabriel 1993; Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992; Swindoll 1991). More detailed information on the manuals and these evangelical commentators can be provided by the author upon request.

[5] In a strategic response to enduring criticism of the patriarchal family, a growing number of evangelical proponents of patriarchy have co-opted the term "mutual submission" even while they continue to defend some version of husband-headship (e.g., Crabb 1991; Dillow 1986; Farrar 1990; see Getz 1977: 121 for an earlier example of this rhetorical maneuver). With an unacknowledged reappropriation of business management and church leadership prescriptions from organizational consultant Robert K. Greenleaf (Fraker and Spears 1996; Frick and Spears 1996), many of these new-guard advocates of a patriarchal family structure encourage the husband to act as the family's "servant-leader" or "servant-head" (e.g., Crabb 1991: 191; Farrar 1990: 181; Lewis and Hendricks 1991: chs. 9 and 10). As might be expected, strategic rehashings of patriarchal rhetoric in which the husband still is construed as the family's leader (if only a "servant-leader") and is perceived as the embodiment of domestic authority (if only "authority to serve") continue to meet with disapproval from evangelical feminists (e.g., Groothuis 1994: 132–33).

[6] In addition to this ethnographic evidence, some survey research has begun to suggest that the gender role attitudes of rank-and-file religious conservatives are marked by a considerable degree of internal heterogeneity and ideological fragmentation (Davis and Robinson 1996; Gay, Ellison, and Powers 1996). In a comparative analysis of denominational homo/heterogeneity, Gay et al. (1996) found that conservative Protestants exhibit gender role orientations that are internally quite diverse when compared with the more homogeneous attitudes of their liberal counterparts (Jews, Episcopalians, and unaffiliated respondents).

REFERENCES

Ammerman, Nancy T. 1987. *Bible believers: Fundamentalists in the modern world.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Bartkowski, John P. In press. Changing of the gods: The gender and family discourse of American evangelicalism in historical perspective. *The History of the Family: An International Quarterly.*

———. 1996. Beyond biblical literalism and inerrancy: Conservative Protestants and the hermeneutic interpretation of Scripture. *Sociology of Religion* 57: 259–72.

———. 1995. Spare the rod . . ., or spare the child? Divergent perspectives on conservative Protestant child discipline. *Review of Religious Research* 37: 97–116.

Berger, Brigitte and Peter L. Berger. 1983. *The war over the family: Capturing the middle ground.* New York: Anchor Books.

Bendroth, Margaret Lamberts. 1993. *Fundamentalism and gender: 1875 to the present.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Bilezikian, Gilbert. 1985. *Beyond sex roles: What the Bible says about a woman's place in church and family* (2d ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

Boone, Kathleen C. 1989. *The Bible tells them so: The discourse of Protestant fundamentalism.* Albany: SUNY Press.

Brown, Karen McCarthy. 1994. Fundamentalism and the control of women. In *Fundamentalism and gender*, edited by John Stratton Hawley, 175–201. New York: Oxford University Press.
Christenson, Larry. 1970. *The Christian family*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House.
Cole, Edwin Louis. 1982. *Maximized manhood*. Springdale, PA: Whitaker House.
Connell, R. W. 1987. *Gender and power*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
———. 1995. *Masculinities: Knowledge, power, and social change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Conover, Pamela Johnston and Virginia Gray. 1983. *Feminism and the New Right: Conflict over the American family*. New York: Praeger.
Cooper, Darien. 1974. *You can be the wife of a happy husband*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
Crabb, Larry. 1991. *Men and women: Enjoying the difference*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
Davis, Nancy J. and Robert V. Robinson. 1996. Religious orthodoxy in American society: The myth of a monolithic camp. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 35: 229–45.
Dillow, Linda. 1986. *Creative counterpart*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
Dobson, James. 1975. *What wives wish their husbands knew about women*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House.
———. 1982. *Doctor Dobson answers your questions*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House.
———. 1991. *Straight talk: What men need to know, what women should understand* (revised and expanded). Dallas: Word.
Dreyfus, Hubert L. and Paul Rabinow. 1993. *Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and hermeneutics* (2d ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Elliot, Elizabeth. 1976. *Let me be a woman*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House.
———. 1981. *The mark of a man*. Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell.
Faludi, Susan. 1991. *Backlash: The undeclared war against American women*. New York: Anchor.
Farrar, Steve. 1990. *Point man: How a man can lead his family*. Portland, OR: Multnomah.
Follis, Anne Bowen. 1981. *"I'm not a women's libber, but . . ." and other confessions of a Christian feminist*. Nashville: Abingdon.
Foucault, Michel. 1972. *The archaeology of knowledge*. New York: Pantheon.
———. 1978. *The history of sexuality, volume 1: An introduction*. Vintage Books: New York.
Fraker, Anne T. and Larry C. Spears, eds. 1996. *Seeker and servant: Reflections on religious leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
Frank, Manfred. 1992. On Foucault's theory of discourse. In *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*, translated by Timothy J. Armstrong, 99–116. New York: Routledge.
Frick, Don M. and Larry C. Spears, eds. 1996. *On becoming a servant-leader: The private writings of Robert K. Greenleaf*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
Gabriel, Ginger. 1993. *Being a woman of God* (revised and expanded). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
Gay, David A., Christopher G. Ellison, and Daniel A. Powers. 1996. In search of denominational subcultures: Religious affiliation and 'pro-family' issues revisited. *Review of Religious Research* 38: 3–17.
Getz, Gene A. 1974. *The measure of a man*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books.
———. 1977. *The measure of a woman*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books.
Grasmick, Harold G., Linda P. Wilcox, and Sharon K. Bird. 1990. The effects of religious fundamentalism and religiosity on preference for traditional family norms. *Sociological Inquiry* 60: 352–69.
Groothuis, Rebecca Merrill. 1994. *Women caught in the conflict: The culture was between traditionalism and feminism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
Gundry, Patricia. 1977. *Women be free! Free to be God's woman*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
———. 1980. *Heirs together: Mutual submission in marriage*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
Guth, James L., John C. Green, Lyman A. Kellstedt, and Corwin E. Smidt. 1996. Onward Christian soldiers: Religious activist groups in American politics. In *Religion and the culture wars*, edited by John C. Green, James L. Guth, Lyman A. Kellstedt, and Corwin E. Smidt, 62–85. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.
Hardacre, Helen. 1993. The impact of fundamentalisms on women, the family, and interpersonal relations. In *Fundamentalisms and society: Reclaiming the sciences, the family, and education*, edited by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, 129–50. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Harris, Jay M. 1994. "Fundamentalism": Objections from a modern Jewish historian. In *Fundamentalism and gender*, edited by John Stratton Hawley, 137–73. New York: Oxford University Press.
Hochschild, Arlie (with Anne Machung). 1989. *The second shift: Working parents and the revolution at home*. New York: Viking.
Hunter, James Davison. 1991. *Culture wars: The struggle to define America*. New York: Basic Books.
Ingersoll, Julie J. 1995. Which tradition, which values? "Traditional family values" in American Protestant fundamentalism. *Contention* 4: 91–103.
LaHaye, Beverly. 1976. *The spirit-controlled woman*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House.
LaHaye, Tim. 1968. *How to be happy though married*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House.
———. 1977. *Understanding the male temperament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell.
Lemert, Charles C. and Garth Gillian. 1982. *Michel Foucault: Social theory as transgression*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Lewis, Robert and William Hendricks. 1991. *Rocking the roles: Building a win-win marriage*. Colorado Springs: NavPress.
Lienesch, Michael. 1993. *Redeeming America: Piety and politics in the New Christian Right*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
Littauer, Florence. 1994. *Wake up women! Submission doesn't mean stupidity*. Dallas: Word.
Littauer, Fred. 1994. *Wake up men! Headship doesn't mean lordship*. Dallas: Word.

Macdonell, Diane. 1986. *Theories of discourse: An introduction.* New York: Basil Blackwell.

Mason, Mike. 1985. *The mystery of marriage: As iron sharpens iron.* Portland, OR: Multnomah.

McNamara, Patrick H. 1985a. Conservative Christian families and their moral world: Some reflections for sociologists. *Sociological Analysis* 46: 93–99.

———. 1985b. The New Christian Right's view of the family and its social science critics: A study in differing presuppositions. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 47: 449–58.

McNay, Lois. 1994. *Foucault: A critical introduction.* New York: Continuum.

Peek, Charles W., George D. Lowe, and L. Susan Williams. 1991. Gender and God's word: Another look at religious fundamentalism and sexism. *Social Forces* 69: 1205–21.

Pevey, Carolyn, Christine L. Williams, and Christopher G. Ellison. 1996. Male God imagery and female submission: Lessons from a Southern Baptist ladies' Bible class. *Qualitative Sociology* 19: 173–93.

Piper, John and Wayne Grudem, eds. 1991. *Recovering biblical manhood and womanhood: A response to evangelical feminism.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

Pride, Mary. 1985. *The way home: Beyond feminism, back to reality.* Westchester, IL: Crossway Books.

Rose, Susan. D. 1987. Women warriors: The negotiation of gender in a charismatic community. *Sociological Analysis* 48: 245–58.

Scanzoni, John. 1983. *Shaping tomorrow's family: Theory and policy for the 21st century.* Beverly Hills: Sage.

Scanzoni, Letha Dawson and Nancy A. Hardesty. 1992. *All we're meant to be: Biblical feminism for today* (3d rev. ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Siddons, Philip. 1980. *Speaking out for women — A biblical view.* Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press.

Smalley, Gary. 1988a. *If only he knew: Understanding your wife.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

———. 1988b. *For better or for best: Understanding your husband.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

———. 1994. Five secrets of a happy marriage. In *Seven promises of a PromiseKeeper,* 105–13. Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family.

Stacey, Judith. 1990. *Brave new families.* New York: Basic Books.

Stacey, Judith and Susan E. Gerard. 1990. "We are not doormats": The influence of feminism on contemporary evangelicals in the United States. In *Uncertain terms: Negotiating gender in American culture,* edited by Faye Ginsberg and Anna L. Tsing, 98–117. Boston: Beacon Press.

Sweet, James A., Larry Bumpass, and Vaughn Call. 1988. The design and content of the National Survey of Families and Households. Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Swindoll, Chuck. 1991. *The strong family.* Portland, OR: Multnomah.

Thomas, Darwin and H. Bruce Roghaar. 1990. Postpositivist theorizing: The case of religion and the family. In *Fashioning Family Theory,* edited by Jetse Sprey, 136–70. Newbury Park: Sage.

Wagner, E. Glenn (with Dietrich Gruen). 1994. *Strategies for a successful marriage: A study guide for men.* Colorado Springs: NavPress.

Weber, Max. 1964. *The sociology of religion.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Weber, Stu. 1993. *Tender warrior: God's intention for a man.* Sister, OR: Multnomah.

West, Candace and Don H. Zimmerman. 1987. Doing gender. *Gender & Society* 1: 125–51.

ATLAS Serials

Copyright and Use:

As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.

No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.