


2013

Quiverfull: Conservative Christian Women and Empowerment in the Home

Juliana Denson

Claremont Graduate University, juliana.denson@cgu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/lux>

 Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), [Family, Life Course, and Society Commons](#), [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), and the [Social Psychology and Interaction Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Denson, Juliana (2013) "Quiverfull: Conservative Christian Women and Empowerment in the Home," *LUX: A Journal of Transdisciplinary Writing and Research from Claremont Graduate University*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 11.

Available at: <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/lux/vol2/iss1/11>

Quiverfull: Conservative Christian Women and Empowerment in the Home

Juliana Denson
 Claremont Graduate University
 School of Religion

Abstract

What is commonly referred to as “The Quiverfull Movement” is defined by its particular brand of “neo-fundamentalist” Christianity that advocates leaving family planning entirely up to God by refusing to use contraception, medical treatments, or, oftentimes, even natural family planning to prevent or control pregnancy and also tends to promote female submission to male headship. Although it has attracted increasing attention from the media and the ire of feminists, it has yet to receive scholarly attention. In this essay, I attempt to present a fair, non-judgmental treatment of Quiverfull by seriously considering the experiences and words of Quiverfull-minded Christians, particularly Quiverfull women, who, of course, form the locus of feminist concern regarding this lifestyle.

Imagine you are in a grocery store parking lot walking back to your car. You see a van pull into the lot. A pregnant woman in an ankle-length skirt and modest blouse steps out of the driver’s seat and begins unloading her passengers. A couple of teenagers emerge, followed by increasingly younger children — one, two, three, four...they just keep coming! Finally, the woman reaches in and pulls the last one, a squirming infant, out of its car seat. You count the kids again, sure you must have miscounted — a dozen children! Astonished, you ask the woman, “Are they all yours?” She replies, smiling, “Yes, these are my children,” before corralling her brood into the store.

This hypothetical woman and her family represent the typical image most people have of Quiverfull families: women dressed modestly in long skirts or dresses and *a lot* of children—probably at least a dozen. This view comes from the way in which the media portrays Quiverfull, which has been gaining public attention due to a number of television episodes, series, specials in recent years,¹ most notably *19 Kids and Counting!*, a TLC (formerly, The Learning Channel) series that focuses on the daily lives of the Duggars, a family with nineteen

¹ These television episodes, series, and specials include: the 2004 Discovery Health/TLC special *14 Children and Pregnant Again!*; the 2006 Discovery Health/TLC special *16 Children and Moving In*; the 2007 TLC miniseries *Kids by the Dozen*; the 2009 WeTV *Secret Lives of Women* episode “Born to Breed”; and, of course, the TLC series *19 Kids and Counting!*, which began in September 2008 as *17 Kids and Counting!* (and was entitled *18 Kids and Counting!* in its second and third seasons). *19 Kids and Counting!* is currently in its ninth season.

children.² These shows have sparked both admiration and derision because of the decision of the families featured on them to eschew any form of birth control, including natural family planning (NFP). For example, fans applaud Jim Bob and Michelle Duggars' courage to leave family planning entirely up to God. Critics, on the other hand, express concern for the health of Michelle and her babies as a result of so many pregnancies — especially after the dangerously premature birth of their last baby in 2009, which threatened the lives of both mother and child, and, most recently, their miscarriage in late 2011.³

Feminists, in particular, tend to express alarm at the Quiverfull lifestyle, which not only advocates leaving family planning entirely up to God by refusing to use contraception, medical treatments, or, oftentimes, even natural family planning to prevent or control pregnancy but also tends to promote female submission to male headship. At the fore of this feminist charge is Kathryn Joyce, journalist and author of the only book-length treatment of Quiverfull by an outsider, *Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement*. Sadly, this book presents a largely inaccurate, clearly biased portrayal of Quiverfull, and there still remain no scholarly works on Quiverfull, which deserves, as all religious groups do, fair, non-judgmental treatment that considers the point of view of its participants, who tend to find their lifestyle and the religious beliefs that give it impetus empowering, liberating, joyous, and satisfying. Thus, this paper presents a first step toward filling this gap in scholarship by: one, presenting an introduction to Quiverfull that attempts a non-judgmental stance; and, two, arguing that neither the common Quiverfull identification as “antifeminist” nor their practices of unencumbered procreation, male headship, homeschooling, and stay-at-home mothering necessarily mean that they oppress women, as many feminists claim, for many women find great happiness and satisfaction through their Quiverfull beliefs and lifestyle.

Is Quiverfull a Movement?

Quiverfull is commonly referred to as a “movement” but whether one should refer to it as such remains debatable. The results of the online survey I conducted in late 2011 indicate that many women who identify as Quiverfull do not identify with “the Quiverfull Movement.”⁴ 30 of the 56 women surveyed responded affirmatively to the question, “Do you identify as

² Although the Duggars claim in their latest book, *A Love That Multiplies*, that they do not belong to the Quiverfull Movement (Jim Bob and Michelle Duggar, *A Love That Multiplies: An Up-Close View of How They Make It Work* (New York: Howard Books, 2011), 92), the public (including Quiverfull-minded Christians), by and large, still considers them a part of this movement — even Quiverfull.com advertises for the Duggars' show and books —, so their actions still affect the public's perception of the movement.

³ In addition to health concerns raised by the miscarriage, the Duggars' decision to take and distribute professional photographs of the hands and feet of the deceased fetus at her memorial and in an online tribute has caused controversy.

⁴ Throughout this essay, I will utilize my survey results, but I have decided to limit my discussion of these results to those participants who self-identified as Quiverfull. Although many more of my participants could be classified as Quiverfull, many choose not to identify with it because of the common perception that it is oppressive and abusive to women and children. While some women and children do suffer under the guise of Quiverfull, this is not an inherently abusive lifestyle, and this essay endeavors to show how many women who live this way experience it as joyful, liberating, and empowering.

Quiverfull?” but some of these women expressed reservations when asked if they identified with “the Quiverfull Movement.” As one woman, Amie,⁵ explained, “In the truest sense of the term, we [my husband and I] are quiverfull [*sic*]. But we are not part of or in anyway [*sic*] connected with the quiverfull movement [*sic*].”⁶ Similarly, another woman, Maddy, responded, “I’m not sure if I identify with the movement, not sure what it is. But I consider myself ‘quiverfull.’”⁷ In light of such issues surrounding calling Quiverfull a movement, I prefer to refer to “the Quiverfull way of life” or “the Quiverfull mindset.” Similarly, I refer to those who identify as Quiverfull as “Quiverfull-minded Christians.” I borrow the term “Quiverfull-minded”⁸ from Chris and Wendy Jeub, Quiverfull parents whose family appeared on the TLC special *Kids by the Dozen* and the WeTV’s *Secret Lives of Women* episode “Born to Breed,” among other radio and television appearances, and who own Monument Publishing, administer Training Minds Camps, and have authored several books to advocate the Quiverfull way of life, especially the homeschooling aspect.⁹

Why do people often refer to Quiverfull as movement? How is Quiverfull a movement? One can identify a shared set of beliefs and practices as well as *de facto* leaders — those who supply the books, DVDs, and other materials and organize the conferences, camps, and retreats that unite Quiverfull-minded Christians by promoting the beliefs and practices that characterize the Quiverfull way of life. Joyce claims that “Quiverfull began with the publication of Rick and Jan Hess’ 1989 book, *A Full Quiver: Family Planning and the Lordship of Christ*.”¹⁰ While this book gives Quiverfull its name based on Psalms 127:3-5, I argue that Quiverfull actually began to take shape after the publication of Mary Pride’s 1985 book *The Way Home: Beyond Feminism, Back to Reality*, for this book laid the foundational ideas for the movement. Moreover, Mary Pride served as the Hesses’ book agent and wrote the foreword to *A Full Quiver*. In the acknowledgments, the Hesses note that Pride’s “pen graces more than a few pages in this book,”¹¹ suggesting that her influence goes beyond the foreword. For example, they cite pages 170 to 172 of Pride’s *All the Way*, borrowing her analogy of fathers as CEOs of their families, with their wives as Plant Managers under them.

Children are Blessings from God

⁵ This is a pseudonym. I have chosen to keep all survey participants anonymous to protect the privacy and safety of my participants.

⁶ Juliana Denson, “Quiverfull: Conservative Christian Women and Empowerment in the Home,” Survey Monkey, 2011, <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/quiverfull>.

⁷ Denson, “Quiverfull Survey.”

⁸ Chris and Wendy Jeub, *Love Another Child: Children. They’re Blessings, Always.*, (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2011), 22.

⁹ “The Jeub Family,” *Monument Publishing*, <http://www.monumentpublishing.com/jeub-family/>.

¹⁰ Kathryn Joyce, “Arrows for the War,” *The Nation*, November 9, 2006, <http://www.thenation.com/article/arrows-war>.

¹¹ Rick and Jan Hess, *A Full Quiver: Family Planning and the Lordship of Christ* (Brentwood, TN: Woglemuth & Hyatt, Publishers, Inc., 1989), xii.

Pride explains that *The Way Home* “is an exposition of [...] Titus 2:3-5”¹² because it “is the most important text in the Bible on married women’s roles, capsulizing a young wife’s marital, sexual, biological, economic, authority, and ministering roles.”¹³ Thus, each section of the book focuses on “one of the womanly roles listed in Titus 2:3-5: loving your husband, loving your children, ‘homeworking,’ being kind and subject to your husband, and what happens if you do (or don’t do) all this.”¹⁴ In the part on “loving your children,” Pride’s Quiverfull mindset comes through. She explains, “Loving your children [...] means first of all *wanting to have babies*.”¹⁵ Wanting to have children, according to Pride, means not using birth control, so that God may bless you with the maximum number He wants you to have.

One reason — perhaps the primary reason — cited by Pride and subsequent Quiverfull-minded Christians is that “[t]he Bible says that *children are a blessing*.”¹⁶ To back up this claim, Pride quotes Psalms 127:3-5, which lends the Quiverfull way of life its name and states:

Children are a heritage from the LORD,
 offspring a reward from him.
 Like arrows in the hands of a warrior
 are children born in one’s youth.
 Blessed is the man
 whose quiver is full of them.
 They will not be put to shame
 when they contend with their opponents in court.¹⁷

Another passage that Quiverfull-minded Christians often cite to show that the Bible clearly speaks of children as blessings is Psalms 128:3-4.¹⁸ In addition to other Old Testament passages, such as the story of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel in Genesis (see, for example, Genesis 30:22¹⁹ and Genesis 49:25²⁰), Deuteronomy 7:13,²¹ and Psalms 113:9,²² Quiverfull proponents also tend to refer to New Testament passages in which Jesus expresses His love of children, such as Matthew

¹² “Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God” (Titus 2:3-5, NIV).

¹³ Mary Pride, *The Way Home: Beyond Feminism, Back to Reality* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1985), xi.

¹⁴ Pride, xiii.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁷ Psalms 127:3-5, NIV.

¹⁸ “Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Yes, this will be the blessing for the man who fears the LORD” (Ps. 128:3-4, NIV).

¹⁹ “Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and enabled her to conceive” (Gen. 30:22, NIV).

²⁰ “...your father’s God, who helps you, because of the Almighty, who blesses you with blessings of the skies above, blessings of the deep springs below, *blessings of the breast and womb*” (Gen. 49:25, NIV, emphasis added).

²¹ “He will love you and bless you and increase your numbers. He will bless the fruit of your womb, the crops of your land — your grain, new wine and olive oil — the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks in the land he swore to your ancestors to give you” (Deut. 7:13, NIV).

²² “He settles the childless woman in her home as a happy mother of children. Praise the LORD” (Ps. 113:9, NIV).

18:1-5,²³ Mark 9:42,²⁴ and Mark 10:13-16,²⁵ to support the belief that God views children as blessings.

Be Fruitful and Multiply

Not only does the Bible indicate that God views children as blessings, it contains His command to “be fruitful and multiply.”²⁶ This is God’s first command to Adam and Eve: “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’”²⁷ Quiverfull-minded Christians like Craig Houghton, author of *Family UNplanning: A Guide for Christian Couples Seeking God’s Truth on Having Children*, assert that this verse “is a clear instruction that man and woman were to have lots of children”²⁸ because God commanded Adam and Eve to “fill the earth” with their offspring, the “fruit” of their “fruitfulness.” Houghton goes on to note that God repeated this command when Noah and his family left the ark²⁹ and again to Israel in Genesis 35:11.³⁰ He argues that the repetition of this command emphasizes its importance.

Furthermore, Quiverfull-minded Christians believe that procreation is the purpose of marriage. An oft-cited biblical verse supporting this view is Malachi 2:15: “Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth.”³¹ However, that does not mean that Christians should actively seek to have many children. Kathryn Joyce incorrectly claims that “Quiverfull parents try to have upwards of six children.”³² Not only do Quiverfull-minded Christians shun medical fertility treatments to increase their families, they assert that quivers come in all sizes, for “God opens and closes the womb,” as they often say. In

²³ “At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: ‘Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me’” (Matt. 18:1-5, NIV).

²⁴ “If anyone causes one of these little ones — those who believe in me — to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea” (Mk. 9:42, NIV).

²⁵ “People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’ And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them” (Mk. 10:13-16, NIV).

²⁶ Genesis 1:28, KJV.

²⁷ Genesis 1:28, NIV.

²⁸ Craig Houghton, *Family UNplanning: A Guide to Christian Couples Seeking God’s Truth on Having Children* (Xulon Press: 2007), 28.

²⁹ “As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it” (Gen. 9:7, NIV).

³⁰ “And God said to him, ‘I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will be among your descendants’” (Gen. 35:11, NIV).

³¹ Malachi 2:15, NIV.

³² Joyce, “Arrows for the War.”

their exegesis of Psalms 127:3-5, Rick and Jan Hess claim that “the Hebrew quiver of Old Testament times” held between twelve and fifteen arrows, but they hasten to add:

[W]e are *not* stating that every couple must have twelve to fifteen children! Couples need only trust God to provide them with the perfect number of children for their situation. God can choose the ideal number for any couple. [...] The fact here is inarguable — a man with a full quiver, *i.e.*, *the number he is supposed to have* is described by God as “blessed”!³³

In other words, the Quiverfull mindset is that God determines the number of children a couple should have, which is not always a large number (or any at all). Christians should simply allow God to determine the size of their families by not trying to prevent or cause pregnancy through artificial means. As Craig Houghton explains, “by allowing God to be sovereign with our reproduction by no means guarantees that it will result in numerous children.”³⁴ Similarly, Chris and Wendy Jeub elaborate on this idea in their latest book *Love Another Child*:

People often err in thinking of Quiverfull as some contest to have as many children as possible. [...] You see, having a “full” quiver is a relative term. That could be 16 children for Chris and Wendy Jeub. It could be *one* for you. We’re not out to manipulate the number, just accept it. This area of our life — that of so-called family planning — is in God’s hands.³⁵

Quiverfull families come in all sizes because leaving family planning up to God means not using birth control or fertility treatments. In fact, my survey results suggest that Quiverfull families typically have between 4 and 6 children (see Appendix, Figure 1).³⁶

Quiverfull-minded Christians point to biblical texts that show how God opens the womb (*i.e.*, God allows impregnation, full-term gestation, and successful birth to occur) as a blessing and closes the womb (*i.e.*, God causes infertility) as a curse. For example, in Deuteronomy 28:4³⁷ and 11³⁸ God explains that if Israel is obedient to Him, they will be blessed with children, but in verse 18, He warns that disobedience will result in infertility.³⁹ They also use biblical texts that point to God as the creator of life to show that God controls fertility, such as Psalms 139:13-16,⁴⁰ Job 10:10-11,⁴¹ and Jeremiah 1:5.⁴² Therefore, Quiverfull-minded Christians like Craig

³³ Hess, 32.

³⁴ Houghton, 83.

³⁵ Jeub, 22.

³⁶ Denson, “Quiverfull Survey.”

³⁷ “The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock — the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks” (Deut. 28:4, NIV).

³⁸ “The LORD will grant you abundant prosperity — in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your ground — in the land he swore to your ancestors to give you” (Deut. 28:11, NIV).

³⁹ “The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks” (Deut. 28:18, NIV).

⁴⁰ “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my

Houghton reason, “It is the LORD who has created us, and created all humans throughout history. It never was the husband and wife who created life, for God alone is the Creator.”⁴³ In short, God can make a woman pregnant despite her best efforts to prevent it, and He can prevent a woman from conceiving despite her best efforts to conceive, as He sees fit. This means that contraception, whether artificial (like birth control pills or condoms) or natural (like the rhythm method), is actually somewhat pointless. However, they are also sinful. God not only commands people to “be fruitful and multiply,”⁴⁴ but, Quiverfull-minded Christians argue, birth control pills and intrauterine devices (IUDs) are abortifacient (meaning they cause abortions) and barrier methods, such as condoms and diaphragms, *coitus interruptus* (“the pull-out method”), and spermicides not only spill the man’s semen but hinder the pleasure of sexual intercourse.⁴⁵

When asked if they “strongly agree,” “agree,” “disagree,” or “strongly disagree” with the statement, “Birth control pills are abortifacient, meaning they cause the premature termination of pregnancy,” 26 out of the 30 women who identified as Quiverfull in my survey selected “strongly agree.” Similarly, 25 “strongly agreed” with the statement, “Intrauterine devices (IUDs) are abortifacient, meaning they cause the premature termination of pregnancy.” Furthermore, 2 “agreed” that the Pill is abortifacient, and 2 “agreed” that IUDs are abortifacient. Only 1 “disagreed” that the Pill is abortifacient (she did not respond to the question about IUDs). No one “strongly disagreed” that either the Pill or IUDs are abortifacient.⁴⁶

The chapter of Nancy Campbell’s foundational Quiverfull text *Be Fruitful and Multiply* entitled “Protect Your Unborn Babies from Death” elaborates the view that birth control pills and IUDs cause abortions. In it, she argues that “many God-fearing Christian couples unknowingly abort their own babies. [...] Both the Pill and the IUD can and do act as abortifacients.”⁴⁷ In short, the argument used by Quiverfull-minded Christians like Campbell is that these forms of birth control utilize three mechanisms to prevent conception: suppressing ovulation, blocking sperm from reaching the egg should ovulation occur by thickening the cervical mucus, and making implantation difficult for a fertilized egg should the sperm reach the egg by thinning the uterine lining. When the first two mechanisms fail and the third succeeds, abortion occurs.⁴⁸

unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” (Ps. 139: 13-16, NIV).

⁴¹ “Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese, clothe me with skin and flesh and knit me together with bones and sinews?” (Job 10:10-11, NIV).

⁴² “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations” (Jer. 1:5, NIV).

⁴³ Houghton, 26.

⁴⁴ Genesis 1:28, KJV.

⁴⁵ We should note the Quiverfull-minded Christians, like many other conservative Christians, consider heterosexual vaginal intercourse between two married people the only acceptable form of intercourse, in part because this is the only form of sex that produces children.

⁴⁶ 1 woman chose not to respond when asked if she “strongly agrees,” “agrees,” “disagrees,” or “strongly disagrees” with the statement “Birth control pills are abortifacient, meaning they cause the premature termination of pregnancy.” 3 chose not to respond when asked if they “strongly agree,” “agree,” “disagree,” or “strongly disagree” with the statement “Intrauterine devices (IUDs) are abortifacient, meaning they cause the premature termination of pregnancy” (Denson, “Quiverfull”).

⁴⁷ Nancy Campbell, *Be Fruitful and Multiply: What the Bible Says About Having Children* (San Antonio: Vision Forum Ministries, 2000), 171.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 172-173.

Since Quiverfull-minded people, like many conservative Christians, believe that life begins at conception, they consider this tantamount to murder. Citing Psalms 139:13-16,⁴⁹ Job 10:11,⁵⁰ and Jeremiah 1:5⁵¹ as proof, Houghton explains, “The LORD is with us from the beginning of life,”⁵² by which he means that God values human life from the point of conception. Thus, Campbell contends, “In all probability, more newly-conceived humans [*sic*] beings are destroyed each year by the intrauterine device (IUD) and the Pill than by surgical abortions.”⁵³ She goes on to assert that the birth control pill and IUDs “cause perhaps almost three million micro-abortions each year,”⁵⁴ and so “the death toll from the IUD and the Pill exceeds that of the Nazi Holocaust — each year — in the United States alone.”⁵⁵ With such staggering statistics on the “deaths” caused by the abortifacient properties of the birth control pills and IUDs, Campbell appeals to the pro-life Christian Right that simply stopping chemical and surgical abortions is not enough; medical forms of birth control must also cease. Even when birth control is not abortifacient, Quiverfull-minded Christians argue that they are a hindrance to sexual pleasure and sinful for wasting the man’s semen. For example, Nancy Campbell argues:

[T]he life which begins at conception, finds its origin and source in the seed of the man (semen), a seed which God declares to be sacred. Contrary to the modern view, which reduces semen to mere bodily fluid, the Bible clearly identifies this as a life-source of tremendous value.[...] In fact, the Bible makes it clear that the entire process of life, from God’s design in eternity past, through the act of conception in which an egg is fertilized by sperm, to the preparation of that new life in the womb, to the birth and ultimate ministry of the “seed,” is holy, because it is ordained and orchestrated by God, down to the smallest detail.⁵⁶

In short, the entire life process, from conception until death, is holy because God consecrates and governs it. Since semen is necessary for conception to occur, Campbell and other Quiverfull-minded Christians consider it a part of this holy life process. Therefore, semen, like a newly conceived embryo or fetus, should not be intentionally destroyed, for to do so would be to destroy something holy — something ordained and organized by God. Campbell and Houghton both cite the story of Onan in Genesis 38 to illustrate this point.⁵⁷ Following the custom of the

⁴⁹ “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” (Ps. 139: 13-16, NIV).

⁵⁰ “Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese, clothe me with skin and flesh and knit me together with bones and sinews?” (Job 10:10-11, NIV).

⁵¹ “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations” (Jer. 1:5, NIV).

⁵² Houghton, 25.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁵⁶ Campbell, 142-144.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 142, and Houghton, 36-39.

time, after his older brother's death, Onan was obliged to marry his brother's widow, Tamar, and give her children to carry on his brother's name. However, "Onan knew that the child would not be his; so whenever he slept with his brother's wife, he spilled his semen on the ground to keep from providing offspring for his brother. What he did was wicked in the LORD's sight; so the LORD put him to death also."⁵⁸ Houghton concludes that in light of other scriptures about the sacredness of sperm and the sin of wasting it, "The LORD may have judged Onan because, although he was willing to derive the sexual pleasures of being with Tamar, he prevented conception from taking place."⁵⁹ Campbell and Houghton point to Onan's decision to prevent conception through *coitus interruptus* as the cause of his divine punishment, rather than his violation of his cultural custom to provide his brother's widow with children, because it breached a moral rather than cultural imperative, since semen is an integral part of the life process, which is holy. In sum, Quiverfull-minded Christians reason that since God commands Christians to "be fruitful and multiply" as well as to not waste semen, all forms of contraception must be sinful because they do not allow conception to occur.

As for medical sterilization, such as vasectomies and tubal ligations, Quiverfull literature is rife with stories from people who underwent such procedures only to regret their decision later, once they realized that children are blessings from God. In the minds of Quiverfull-minded Christians, while vasectomies do not result in wasted sperm like other forms of birth control, they, like other forms of sterilization and contraception, do circumvent the purpose of marriage — procreation — and demonstrate a rejection of God's blessings. Many Quiverfull-minded Christians encourage vasectomy reversals.⁶⁰

What about natural family planning (NFP), though? Although most people believe that all Quiverfull-minded Christians flatly reject NFP, I have discovered through my survey that some women who identify as Quiverfull also practice NFP. Quiverfull-minded Christians all seem to agree that married Christian couples should eschew artificial forms of contraception, but they remain somewhat divided over NFP, such as the rhythm method. While 80% of those surveyed who identified as Quiverfull said that they reject all forms of birth control *including* natural family planning, 20% said that they reject all forms of birth control *except* natural family planning.⁶¹

Quiverfull-minded Christians who do not consider NFP acceptable tend to give four main arguments against it: First, and most obviously, they do not want to try to prevent pregnancy, which is the goal of NFP. Second, the rhythm method requires couples to avoid sex during the time when it is most pleasurable for women, *i.e.* when they are most fertile. For example, one of my survey participants, Jillian, explained that she rejects all forms of birth control, including natural family planning, because "they come between spouses in the marital act, and/or they can kill the newly conceived child. I reject NFP for myself because I believe that sex during the fertile period is most pleasurable, and because I desire children. I believe that children are gifts, not something to be avoided, and that pregnancy is a natural and healthy state."⁶². Not only do some Quiverfull women like Jillian actively desire to become pregnant, they consider sex most

⁵⁸ Genesis 38:8-10, NIV.

⁵⁹ Houghton, 38.

⁶⁰ Hess, 121-134.

⁶¹ Denson, "Quiverfull Survey."

⁶² *Ibid.*

pleasurable during the most fertile time of their monthly cycles. Third, since God opens and closes the womb, NFP consists of, as the Hesses put it, “needless tinkering with a system He already controls lock, stock, and baby.”⁶³ In other words, Quiverfull-minded Christians who reject NFP contend that it is a rather futile attempt to control a process which God, not humans, controls; God decides whom will become pregnant (or not) and when. Fourth, as Nancy Campbell explains, NFP “is a deliberate attempt to thwart God’s natural design for intimacy in which the potential for life and the act of love are mutually inextricable throughout the fertile season of a woman’s life.”⁶⁴ Like Campbell, some Quiverfull-minded Christians consider NFP disrupts God’s design by divorcing the sex act from the potential for conception. Referring again to the story of Onan, Craig Houghton argues that Onan’s decision to withdraw and spill his semen on the ground served as a form of natural family planning. He contends, “The story of Onan from Genesis 38 is the Bible’s *only* allusion to what we refer to as NFP. This act brought the LORD’s judgement [*sic*], not His blessing.”⁶⁵ According to Houghton, God punished Onan for preventing conception through his use of *coitus interruptus*, a common form of NFP.

However, other participants who also identified as Quiverfull said that they use natural family planning. Those who use NFP said they believe they are still leaving their family planning up to God because, as one woman, Jessica, put it, “though God opens and closes the womb, the regularity and design of the woman’s cycle indicates that it was meant to be used to either increase the chance of conception or decrease the chance.”⁶⁶ Since NFP works by determining the times during a woman’s cycle when she is least fertile to decrease chances of conception and most fertile to increase chances of conception, women like Jessica reason that they are still allowing God to plan their families when they use NFP because they utilize the system He designed to increase or decrease their chances of pregnancy.

Soldiers for God’s Army

Quiverfull not only emphasizes the creation of children but also the proper training of children. As Houghton explains, “Once our LORD blesses us with children, He not only commands us, but also gives us the privilege of training our children to know and to love Him. God’s plan involves the parents raising up the next generation of believers for his Glory.”⁶⁷ He cites Deuteronomy 6:6-9,⁶⁸ which instructs parents to teach God’s commandments to their children. Quiverfull-minded Christians like Houghton believe that God not only commands Christians to have children but to raise them according to His laws. The “Quiverfull Psalm” (Psalms 127:3-5), refers to children as arrows in the hands of a warrior. This military metaphor reflects an important aspect of the Quiverfull worldview, which envisions the world as the

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Campbell, 112.

⁶⁵ Houghton, 49.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 33.

⁶⁸ “These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates” (Deut. 6:6-9, NIV).

battlefield in the war between good and evil, God and Satan. As Nancy Campbell explains, “We are in a war today and God needs arrows for His army. God wants children born to fulfill His strategies and plans.”⁶⁹ Furthermore, “God gives us children to bless us, honor us, and give us greater glory and power in the earth. The more godly children we have, the more power we have for God in the earth. The more ‘arrows’ we raise for God, the more power we have over the enemy [Satan], and the more honor we receive and the more glory God receives.”⁷⁰ In short, God wants Christians to have children and raise them to be faithful soldiers for His army to fight in the war against Satan. The more faithful soldiers He has, the stronger His army is, and the sooner He will defeat Satan, ushering in His Kingdom on earth.

In order to understand this perspective, one must understand that Quiverfull is, broadly speaking, “neo-fundamentalist,” to borrow George Marsden’s terminology. What does this mean? In fact, what constitutes fundamentalist Christianity? Originating in the 1920, the term “fundamentalism” refers to a subset of evangelicalism⁷¹ that is distinguished by its militant opposition to “‘modernist’ theology and certain secularizing cultural trends,”⁷² particularly “those associated with ‘secular humanism.’”⁷³ The militancy that characterizes fundamentalism arises from their perception that the universe is divided between the forces of good and evil,⁷⁴ with humanity serving as soldiers in either God’s or Satan’s army. Martin E. Marty explains that fundamentalists militantly defend “the five fundamentals” of Christianity, which consist of the belief in biblical inerrancy⁷⁵ and literal understandings of Jesus’ virgin birth, sacrificial death, physical resurrection, and second coming.⁷⁶

In the late 1950s, fundamentalism split into two camps: stricter fundamentalism and “neo-evangelicalism,” as Marsden calls it. Marsden defines neo-evangelicals as “softened fundamentalists who wanted to preserve the essentials of tradition but not its extremes. They retained the basic fundamentalist biblicism and opposition to liberal theologies, but they did not demand separatism; and they deemphasized some of the stricter prohibitions of the

⁶⁹ Campbell, 79.

⁷⁰ Campbell, 68.

⁷¹ Historian George M. Marsden defines evangelicalism as a term that “usually refers to a largely Protestant movement that emphasizes: (1) the Bible as authoritative and reliable; (2) eternal salvation as possible only by regeneration (being “born again”), involving personal trust in Christ and in his atoning work; (3) a spiritually transformed life marked by moral conduct and personal devotion, such as Bible reading and prayer; and (4) zeal for evangelism and missions” (George M. Marsden, “Evangelical and Fundamental Christianity,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 5, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Macmillan Reference Library USA, 2005), 2887).

⁷² Marsden, *Encyclopedia*, 2887.

⁷³ George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 1.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁷⁵ Biblical inerrancy is the belief that “the Bible not only is an infallible authority in matters of faith and practice, but also is accurate in all its historical and scientific assertions. Of course, fundamentalists do not hold that everything in the Bible is to be interpreted literally (the mountains do not literally clap their hands). Rather, “literal where possible” is their interpretive rule. Whatever in the Bible can reasonably be given a literal reference should be interpreted as literal and accurate” (Marsden, “Fundamentalism and American Evangelicalism,” *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, 25).

⁷⁶ Martin E. Marty, “Fundamentalist Christianity,” in *Contemporary American Religion*, vol. 1, Wade Clark Roof, ed. (New York: Macmillan Reference Library USA, 1999), 270.

fundamentalist moral code.”⁷⁷ However, neo-evangelicalism soon split over the question of biblical inerrancy. While progressives considered inerrancy “too narrow a way to define biblical authority,” most “fundamentalistic neo-evangelicals” retained the fundamentalist insistence on belief in biblical inerrancy as a test of true Christian faith.⁷⁸

Again, in the late 1970s, “the emergence of large-scale political activism among moderate fundamentalists,” under the leadership of Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority, led to the formation of what Marsden calls “neo-fundamentalism.” The 1962 and 1963 U.S. Supreme Court rulings against the use of “officially inspired prayer and devotional Bible reading in public schools,”⁷⁹ combined with the 1973 Supreme Court ruling in *Roe v. Wade* that abortion was a constitutional right, served as the impetuses behind the politicization of fundamentalism. As a result, issues surrounding education, gender, sexuality, and the family became the locus of neo-fundamentalist political activism.⁸⁰ Neo-fundamentalists consider those who oppose their viewpoint as fighting on the wrong side in the universal war between God and Satan. They identify “‘secular humanists,’ religious liberals, corrupting elites in big and encroaching government, mass media, and education”⁸¹ as part of Satan’s army. For example, Rick and Jan Hess reflect this viewpoint when they contend:

Today, Christians are fighting battles on several fronts. We face the issues of abortion, obscenity, the denial of parental rights in education, state gambling lotteries, infanticide, and enough other things to make a long and depressing list. Increasingly the government is acting in definitely anti-Christian ways.⁸²

The Hesses reflect the militancy of fundamentalism, viewing political issues as part of the war between God and Satan. They see the government as serving Satan’s agenda in the legalization of abortion and state lotteries, as well as in the public school system, which promotes the government’s secular agenda. As a result, they encourage political involvement in order to Christianize the government, significantly decreasing Satan’s power in the United States and, ultimately, the world. While traditional fundamentalism “proudly eschewed political involvements”⁸³ in order to retain Christian separatism as a means of protecting themselves from the evil of the secular world, neo-fundamentalism embraces and encourages political activism in order to fight against the forces of Satan in the secular world. Even more so than neo-evangelicals, neo-fundamentalist groups, like Falwell’s Moral Majority, are open to allying themselves with other politically like-minded religious groups, such as conservative Catholics and Mormons, long-time targets of fundamentalist ire, in order to achieve their political goals.⁸⁴

Neo-fundamentalists consider Christians a minority fighting on the side of good against the majority fighting on the side of evil. Quiverfull-minded Christians differ from other neo-

⁷⁷ Ibid., 30.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Marty, 272.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Hess, 163-164.

⁸³ Ibid., 32.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

fundamentalists in their belief that, as the Hesses assert, Christians find themselves “a besieged *minority* [...] because we have let the world’s humanistic thinking dictate our family sizes instead of allowing God to bless us with His provision.”⁸⁵ They believe that Christians find themselves in a minority position against Satan’s forces because they have intentionally limited the size of the families. Quiverfull-minded Christians lament the number of Christians who use birth control, fearing that, as Campbell explains, “[a]t the present rate, Satan will win the war against Christians through attrition — and we are cooperating with him, rather than trying to defeat his lies.”⁸⁶ By listening to the secular, humanist world, which promotes the use of birth control and controlled family planning, Christians unwittingly buy into Satan’s plan to minimize the size and influence of God’s army by limiting their family size, preventing all the children with whom God would bless them, if they had left their family planning up to Him. Quiverfull-minded Christians believe that having more children contributes to world evangelism, an important part of combatting the forces of evil in the world by recruiting more soldiers for God’s army,⁸⁷ by supplying more future Christians, who will grow up to evangelize and convert more Christians. Therefore, not only does having children (potentially) produce Christians, who will grow up, have children, and raise more Christians, some of those children may also become evangelizers and convert others to Christianity.

In short, Quiverfull-minded Christians believe that God commands Christians to “be fruitful and multiply”⁸⁸ in order to provide soldiers for His army. This perhaps explains why they have taken the name of their way of life from Psalms 127:3-5. In reference to this Psalm, the Hesses conclude, “God had spiritual warfare in mind when He told the Psalmist that children were ‘arrows.’ And He has spiritual warfare in mind when He gives us children today.”⁸⁹ According to the Quiverfull mindset, God gives people children so that they may either grow up as Christians or convert to Christianity. Therefore, Christians must not only procreate, they must raise their children to embrace Christianity, thereby serving as soldiers in God’s army in the war against evil. Thus Nancy Campbell describes Christian parents as “arrow sharpeners,” who prepare the “arrows for God’s army.”⁹⁰ She also claims, “One of the biggest threats to the devil is husbands and wives who understand God’s revelation for marriage and who will bring forth godly offspring for His glory [...] for it is they who will destroy his works in this world.”⁹¹ Christians who use birth control, then, contribute to the problem, succumbing to Satan’s plan to eliminate all the true Christians, who are God’s spiritual warriors. Therefore, having as many children as God naturally allows (neither by attempting to prevent conception nor by trying to “artificially” cause conception through medical fertility treatments) is imperative for winning the war against the forces of evil. However, parents must also remain vigilant in raising their children to be true Christians for God to use them as His arrows.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 164-165.

⁸⁶ Campbell, 81.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 169.

⁸⁸ Genesis 1:28, KJV.

⁸⁹ Hess, 170.

⁹⁰ Campbell, 81.

⁹¹ Ibid., 37.

Homeschooling

Usually, for Quiverfull parents, homeschooling plays a major role in raising “godly seed.” As Mary Pride explains, “For parents and children, the benefits of home school are obvious: the academic possibilities of the best private school education at minimal cost. [...] But more than all this, home schooling allows parents to control their children’s spiritual development.”⁹² To help them mold their children’s spiritual lives, Quiverfull parents utilize Christian homeschool materials, such as those published by the Advanced Training Institute (ATI), which is run by Bill Gothard’s Institute in Basic Life Principles (IBLP). According to the IBLP website, its goals are to introduce others to Jesus Christ and to instruct and train “individuals, families, churches, schools, communities, governments, and businesses on how to find success by following God’s principles found in Scripture.”⁹³ IBLP primarily accomplishes these twin goals through seminars, educational programs, books and pamphlets, and training centers.⁹⁴ Joyce explains that Gothard is known for bringing his “pronatalist message that God is the authority of family size to many thousands of Southern Baptists and other conservative Christians.”⁹⁵ As such, Gothard plays an important role in promoting the Quiverfull way of life among conservative Christians.

Vision Forum is another well-known Christian homeschool organization that promotes Quiverfull. On its website, President Doug Phillips explains that the mission of his organization “is to communicate a vision of victory to Christian families through edifying books, films, toys, curriculum, and other resources.”⁹⁶ He goes on to assert that the world is currently experiencing “the systematic annihilation of the Biblical family,” reflecting the neo-fundamentalist belief that Christianity is under attack by the forces of Satan under the guise of secular humanism. However, Phillips claims that hope remains:

While the family is under attack from every side today, God’s sufficient Word provides clear direction and hope to rebuild the family, and it is our goal at Vision Forum to promote courageous fatherhood, noble motherhood, virtuous boyhood and girlhood through vision-casting discipleship tools that teach, equip, and inspire.⁹⁷

In other words, Vision Forum’s goal is to provide families with biblically-guided “discipleship tools,” such as books, CDs, films, and toys, to mold families into Phillips’ vision of what the Christian family should look like. Among these “vision-casting discipleship tools” is Nancy Campbell’s *Be Fruitful and Multiply*, which Vision Forum Ministries published and for which Doug Phillips provided the foreword.

⁹² Pride, 97.

⁹³ “What We Do: A Brief Overview of Our Ministry,” Institute in Basic Life Principles, <http://iblp.org/iblp/about/whatwedo/>.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Kathryn Joyce, *Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), 123.

⁹⁶ Doug Phillips, “About,” Vision Forum, <http://www.visionforum.com/about/>.

⁹⁷ Phillips, “About.”

Stay-at-home mothering makes homeschooling possible. Although many people refer to stay-at-home mothers by the acronym SAHM, Mary Pride refers to the practice as “homeworking,” and she contends that it constitutes “the biblical lifestyle for Christian wives.”⁹⁸ She points to Titus 2:4-5 to show that “homeworking” is the biblical mandate for wives, and structures her book according to the five mandates for wives in these verses. Jan Hess⁹⁹ also cites Titus 2:3-5¹⁰⁰ in her chapter “A Word to Wives” in *A Full Quiver*, contending that it “states very plainly God’s plan for women whom He chooses to be wives.”¹⁰¹ In it, God commands wives to “love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands [...]”¹⁰² Pride and Hess interpret “to be busy at home” as “to work in the home.” Pride claims that “homeworking” “is a way to take back control of education, health care, agriculture, social welfare, business, housing, morality, and evangelism from the faceless institutions to which we have surrendered them. More importantly, homeworking is the path of obedience to God.”¹⁰³ Remember, fundamentalists and neo-fundamentalists consider anyone or any institution that does not meet their definition of Christian morality a part of the opposing side in an ancient and ongoing war between the forces of good and evil. According to this view, by working at home, women can take back control over many of the things that secular humanism has taken over. For example, by homeschooling, Christians may educate their children according to their own principles, not those taught at public schools (or even Christian schools, which many still see as too influenced by secular humanism). Women may also take back control over agriculture by growing their own produce and/or raising farm animals for meat. They may also run their own businesses from home, so as not to have to answer to anyone other than God and their husbands.

While none of the women I surveyed who self-identified as Quiverfull said that they work outside the home,¹⁰⁴ only 24 said that they homeschool their children; 5 said that they send their children to public school; and 1, a Roman Catholic, said that she sends her children to Catholic school. Clearly, Quiverfull also reflects the neo-fundamentalist embrace of non-evangelical, non-Protestant, conservative Christians that remains anathema to traditional fundamentalism. In fact, many of the women in my survey who self-identified as Quiverfull also identified as Roman Catholic and/or charismatic, spirit-filled, or Pentecostal — groups with which traditional fundamentalists prefer not to associate (see Appendix, Figure 2).¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ Pride, xiii.

⁹⁹ “A Word to Wives” is the only chapter in *A Full Quiver* attributed solely to Jan Hess.

¹⁰⁰ “Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, *to be busy at home*, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God” (Titus 2:3-5, NIV, emphasis added).

¹⁰¹ Hess, 154.

¹⁰² Titus 2:5, NIV.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Some do run home businesses or work from home, for example, as writers, farmers, homeschool co-op teachers or administrators, or activists (Denson, “Quiverfull Survey”).

¹⁰⁵ While my survey results suggest that Catholics make up a majority of Quiverfull-minded Christians, we must keep in mind how small my sample size is. Out of 56 participants, this graph only considers the 30 who self-identified as Quiverfull. 30 is a pretty small sample size when attempting to extrapolate statistics on a group that

Demographics

Although Quiverfull encompasses a number of Christian denominational affiliations, it seems to be less diverse in terms of racial/ethnic makeup. While some Quiverfull families may not be Caucasian, this way of life seems far more prevalent among Caucasians than other races. For example, 26 out of 30 survey participants who self-identified as Quiverfull selected “Caucasian/White” as their race/ethnicity; 4 chose not to respond.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, many, if not all, the Quiverfull-minded Christians that have appeared on television, produced films, or written blogs, websites, or books about their way of life seem to be Caucasian.

Not surprisingly, most Quiverfull-minded Christians seem to come from the United States, followed by Great Britain, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Indeed, all of my survey participants who self-identified as Quiverfull identified the United States, Canada, Great Britain, or New Zealand as their countries of origin and countries of current residence.¹⁰⁷ This may be a result of the origins of Quiverfull in the United States with the publication of Mary Pride’s *The Way Home* and, later, Rick and Jan Hess’ *A Full Quiver*. Additionally, many, if not all, Quiverfull resources, such as *Above Rubies*, Vision Forum, and IBLP, are centered in these countries. For example, Nancy Campbell and her husband Colin hail from New Zealand, moved to Australia in 1982, and settled in Tennessee in 1991. Colin pastored in all three countries,¹⁰⁸ and Nancy’s *Above Rubies* magazine finds its primary following in the U.S., New Zealand, and Australia.¹⁰⁹

Since Quiverfull originated in and continues to be centered in the U.S., considering what areas of the nation it finds the most support may prove helpful for understanding who Quiverfull-minded Christians are. More Quiverfull-minded Christians seem to reside in the South and in rural and suburban areas than in other regions of the U.S. or urban areas. For example, 9 out of 22 women who identified as Quiverfull and live in the United States said that they live in a Southern state; 3 live in the Midwest; 3 on the West Coast; 2 on the Pacific Northwest; 2 on the East Coast; none in the Southwest; and 3 chose not to specify their state. Furthermore, 11 out of 30 women who identified as Quiverfull said that they live in a rural area; 11 live in a suburban area; 5 live in an urban area; and 3 chose not to say whether they live in a rural, suburban, or urban area.¹¹⁰

Although some people may assume that a woman would only choose this lifestyle as a result of ignorance, most of the Quiverfull women whom I surveyed have attained a high level of education. 11 graduated from a four-year college, 5 have graduate degrees, and only 2 did not

likely includes thousands of people. Furthermore, my Catholic background likely made my invitation to participate in my survey more enticing to Catholics than other Christians (Denson, “Quiverfull Survey”).

¹⁰⁶ Titus 2:5, NIV.

¹⁰⁷ Twenty-three selected the U.S. as their country of origin; 2 selected Canada; 1 selected Great Britain; 2 selected New Zealand; and 2 chose not to respond. Twenty-two selected the U.S. as their country of residence; 3 selected Canada; 2 selected Great Britain; and 3 chose not to respond (Denson, “Quiverfull Survey”).

¹⁰⁸ Mary Pride, “Who Are the Campbells?,” *Above Rubies*, last modified December 21, 2011, <http://aboverubies.org/home/about-us>.

¹⁰⁹ Back cover to *Be Fruitful and Multiply: What the Bible Says About Children*, by Nancy Campbell (San Antonio: Vision Forum Ministries, 2000).

¹¹⁰ Denson, “Quiverfull Survey.”

attend or graduate from high school.¹¹¹ Some people may wonder why, since many, if not most, Quiverfull women are well-educated, they condemn themselves to the life of poverty that a single household income and numerous children seems to guarantee. However, Quiverfull families may not be as impoverished as some might think. While the vast majority claimed household incomes of between \$25,000 and \$80,000, 4 of the Quiverfull women surveyed claimed household incomes of \$100,000 or more before taxes and 3 claimed household incomes of less than \$25,000 (see Appendix, Figure 3).¹¹² Therefore, if one were to base a characterization of Quiverfull on my survey sample, one could conclude that the typical Quiverfull woman is most likely to live in a rural or suburban area of the U.S. South, to have attended or graduated from college, and have a household income of \$25,000 to \$80,000. While readers must keep in mind the small size of my survey sample and the fact that it was conducted online (which means that the people surveyed have access to the internet), at the same time these same trends are reflected in the numerous Quiverfull family blogs that populate the internet and in the families featured on the television specials, miniseries, episodes, and series about Quiverfull families.

Since Quiverfull began in the late-1980s after the publication of Pride's *The Way Home* and the Hesses' *A Full Quiver*, Quiverfull-minded Christians tend to be under 70 years of age. The Quiverfull women whom I surveyed range in age from 23 to 68 years old. Most are between 30 and 54 years old (see Appendix, Figure 4),¹¹³ which makes sense, since Quiverfull has only existed as a way of life for about 25 years or so.

Unfortunately, no studies exist on how many Quiverfull-minded Christians exist. The only figures I could find come from Kathryn Joyce. She claims, "Though there are no exact figures for the size of the movement, the number of families that identify as Quiverfull is likely in the thousands to low tens of thousands."¹¹⁴ Considering that there are hundreds of blogs and dozens of books by Quiverfull families, Joyce's estimation may be fairly accurate.

Quiverfull and (Anti)Feminism

So, why do feminists like Joyce find the Quiverfull lifestyle alarming? Notice that the subtitle of Joyce's book *Quiverfull* is *Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement*. While I do not agree with her equation of Quiverfull with the Christian Patriarchy Movement, she does so to emphasize the patriarchal aspects of the Quiverfull lifestyle, in order to show how it oppresses women. However, although many Quiverfull-minded Christians identify as antifeminist and advocate female submission to male headship, not everyone who identifies as Quiverfull also identifies as antifeminist. Moreover, many of those who do identify as antifeminist and advocate female submission find this lifestyle liberating, joyous, and empowering. As religious studies professor R. Marie Griffith points out in her case study of the charismatic evangelical women of Women's Aglow Fellowship International, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the*

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Denson, "Quiverfull Survey."

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Joyce, "Arrows."

Power of Submission, those feminists who desire respectful treatment toward all women should be careful to give respectful treatment to non-feminist women.¹¹⁵

Perhaps the reason that people often associate Quiverfull with antifeminism lies in the fact that it began with an antifeminist manifesto. Mary Pride, a former feminist, wrote *The Way Home: Beyond Feminism Back to Reality* to encourage women to turn away from feminism and back toward Christian “homeworking,” as she has. She argues:

*Feminism is a totally self-consistent system aimed at rejecting God’s role for women. Those who adopt any part of its lifestyle can’t help picking up its philosophy. And those who pick up its philosophy are buying themselves a one-way ticket to social anarchy. [...] Homeworking, like feminism, is a total lifestyle. The difference is that homeworking produces stable homes, growing churches, and children who are Christian leaders.*¹¹⁶

Evidently, Pride sees “homeworking,” “the biblical lifestyle for Christian wives,”¹¹⁷ as completely incompatible with feminism, which is a part of the secular humanist forces trying to destroy the Christian family. In fact, she goes so far as to refer to feminism as a religion that has replaced biblical Christianity, explaining, “[F]eminism is a religion. *Feminism is only humanism on the half shell.* To humanists, man is the measure of all things. To feminists, the measure of all things is woman. *Woman, to feminists, is God.*”¹¹⁸ Viewing feminism as part and parcel of humanism, Pride reasons that if humanism is the worship of man (as she and other neo-fundamentalists consider it), then feminism is the worship of woman. She sees feminism as the mother of “careerism,” which encourages women to work outside the home, and she considers “the rejection of children” to be one of the worst outcomes of careerism.¹¹⁹ While feminism condemns “homeworking,” Pride points out that “homeworking” does not mean that women are less important than men, for “the Bible teaches a distinct role for women which is *different* from that of a man and *just as important.*”¹²⁰ In other words, women and men have separate but equally important biblically-ordained roles. Although she points to Ephesians 5:22-24,¹²¹ Colossians 3:18,¹²² and 1 Peter 3:1-6¹²³ as biblical passages commanding women to submit to

¹¹⁵ R. Marie Griffith, *God’s Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 201.

¹¹⁶ Pride, xii-xiii.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xiii.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, xiii.

¹²¹ “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do 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” (Eph. 5:22-24, NIV).

¹²² “Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (Col. 3:18, NIV).

¹²³ “Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear” (1 Pet. 3:1-6, NIV).

their husbands, like most other Quiverfull-minded Christians, she believes that Titus 2:3-5 perfectly describes this role, and so her book serves as an a lengthy exposition of this passage.¹²⁴ Verse 5 specifies that women are “to be subject to their husbands,” which she interprets as a command for women to submit their husbands as the head of the family.

Most feminists express serious concern over the Quiverfull practice of “wifely submission.” However, I argue that while some relationships in which the wife submits to her husband are abusive, they need not necessarily be so. Griffith cautions feminists not “to interpret with undue haste the discourse of female submission as flatly or irrevocably oppressive” because to do so would be to ignore the complexities of their faith and, worse still, present an unrecognizable portrayal of their own devotional lives to the women in my study.¹²⁵ Thus, feminists must take seriously Quiverfull women’s claims that they find their patriarchal, allegedly “antifeminist” lifestyle empowering for as feminist poet and essayist Adrienne Rich poignantly explains, “It is pointless to write off the antifeminist woman as brainwashed, or self-hating, or the like. I believe that feminism must imply an imaginative identification with all women [...] and that the feminist must, because she can, extend this act of the imagination as far as possible.”¹²⁶ In other words, feminists should not simply dismiss the claims of antifeminist women that they find their ways of life liberating or empowering because they identify as antifeminist. To do so is to fail at the feminist task of identifying with all women.

Unfortunately, many feminists still subscribe to what Griffith refers to as “the rigid victimization theory.” She laments that “the rigid victimization theory [...] continues to dominate many feminist analyses of non-feminist women: No matter how much they claim to find liberation and fulfillment in prayer and Jesus, according to this perspective, evangelical women defeat themselves at every turn and ultimately buttress men’s power at their own expense.”¹²⁷ Such a perspective dismisses claims from non-feminist women that they find liberation through submission, an idea anathema to many feminists, and thus fails to employ the respectful treatment they claim to desire for women of all walks of life. While I remain aware of the fact that a person’s claims about their lives do not necessarily reflect the reality of their lives, I nonetheless affirm that dismissing claims of liberation by antifeminist women denies these women the respectful treatment they deserve, for it assumes that they are unwilling or unable to see or at least admit that they are oppressed because they are lying, ignorant, and/or brainwashed.

Some of the comments made by Quiverfull survey participants may help illuminate how women experience their patriarchal, Quiverfull lifestyle as empowering. For example, Camille believes “submission usually causes your husband to freely love and serve you more [...]”¹²⁸ In contrast to the common feminist assumption that wifely submission means that women serve men, never the other way around, Camille suggests that submission actually involves the wife and husband serving each other. Sandy also describes the joy and empowerment she experiences as a result of her Quiverfull lifestyle:

¹²⁴ Ibid., xi.

¹²⁵ Griffith, 201.

¹²⁶ Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), 71.

¹²⁷ Griffith, 204.

¹²⁸ Denson, “Quiverfull Survey.”

We receive [*sic*] the greatest joy, as we give of ourselves, and as we grow in compassion, selflessness, and service to our families, our lives also are filled with true joy, and more of it. The joy of goodness and love, and the joy of participating in an amazingly important work, making a difference in the world. Mothers, particularly mothers who raise and teach their children, are the biggest influence on the future of our nation. We are the biggest influence in our children's lives, and therefore in the world that they grow up to live in. What other occupation is more powerful than that?¹²⁹

Women like Sandy consider the selfless joy and love of motherhood more rewarding than any career outside the home could possibly be. Likewise, contrasting the Quiverfull way of life with feminism, Joan asserts that Quiverfull “validates the unique role of women in bringing forth life and caring for the young, rather than degrading that role and expecting that women strive to be ‘mini-men’. [...] It brings the joy and satisfaction of watching ourselves and our children grow into faithful, productive adults — rather than the fleeting, elusive joys connected with a selfish and/or materialistic lifestyle.”¹³⁰ To Sandy, feminism does not allow women to be women; rather, it pushes them to act like men and prevents them from experiencing true joy by distracting them with the transient joys of materialism. Quiverfull, on the other hand, allows women to live as God created women to live, selflessly giving of themselves as wives and mothers, which produces true joy as they watch their children grow in good Christian adults.

Similarly, other women spoke of the freedom they experience as a result of their Quiverfull way of life. Martha, for example, wrote:

I would say that the top way the Quiverfull way of life empowers women is that it allows women to surrender control of their reproductive lives to God. Instead of stressing over whether or not to have another baby, and agonizing over whether we make the right decisions about family size, we can allow God to decide if we have 2 children or 12 (or more, or none!), and when each child should be born. The Quiverfull way of life also frees women to freely choose to keep at home and teach their children, if they so desire, without the guilt and feelings of inadequacy feminism associates with homemaking and child training. The greatest freedom comes from knowing that you have surrendered your life to God, and do not have to find answers (excuses) to justify your choices to the anti-life, anti-family society we live in.¹³¹

Martha sees feminism (and the rest of the secular humanist world) as oppressive, and Quiverfull as liberating. She reasons that the secular world tells women that they must decide whether they want children and, if so, how many and when. Then they must worry about unplanned pregnancies and/or the ability to have children, according to their family plan. Quiverfull, on the other hand, releases women from this burden by allowing them to leave their family planning to

¹²⁹ Denson, “Quiverfull Survey.”

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

God. They do not have to worry about having too many children, having children at the wrong time, or not being able to have children because they know that God will give the number of children that He knows is the right number for them. Martha also considers feminism oppressive because she sees it as denigrating stay-at-home mothering, which she resents. However, she thinks that “the top way the Quiverfull way of life empowers women” comes from the freedom of not having to do one’s own family planning. Cathy summarizes this sentiment succinctly, stating, “It takes away the pressure. I’m not “worried” about becoming pregnant or trying to get pregnant.”¹³² Mona elaborates on this point:

The feminist movement made birth control seem so normal and just a part of life. But the quiverfull movement has taken it the other way. Instead of being tied down to calendars and pills and chemicals we are free to experience life more fully. We aren’t worried about an unplanned pregnancy or what someone will think. We aren’t spending time, money and energy on not getting pregnant. It’s freeing. It’s liberating. It’s what women’s lib should have been!¹³³

Quiverfull women like Mona see birth control as oppressive, costing women much time, money, energy, and anxiety. She believes that Quiverfull liberates women because it frees them from the tyranny of birth control, which, as a result of feminism, most women consider a normal, unavoidable part of life.

Similarly, other women said that they enjoyed the freedom from worrying about a career. As Tracy explains, “Because of making this choice they [Quiverfull women] don’t have to worry about whether or not they should be pursuing a career outside the home and they can be free to see this job as important and something that one can be *proud* of doing.”¹³⁴ Not only Quiverfull women consider themselves free from the burdens of family planning, Tracy sees them as free from the burden of working outside the home, another facet of modern life normalized by feminism. Much like second wave feminists decried women’s perceived inability to choose to work outside the home as a result of patriarchy, Quiverfull women now criticize women’s perceived inability to choose to work inside the home as a result of feminism, which they believe shames women who work at home.

Over and over again, the Quiverfull women I surveyed use the words “liberating,” “joyous,” “freeing,” and “empowering” to describe their way of life.¹³⁵ And they are not the only ones. Authors of books promoting the Quiverfull lifestyle often use these words to describe it. For example, in their discussion of the freedom experienced by eschewing birth control, Chris and Wendy Jeub explain, “Controlling conception doesn’t fill our thoughts and discovering a pregnancy is, without any hesitation, joyous news. We make love without worrying something will ‘go wrong.’ This freedom is wonderful. This family life is liberating.”¹³⁶ Certainly, not having to worry about accidentally becoming or not being to intentionally become pregnant sounds freeing, doing what one perceives to be the will of God would be empowering and

¹³² Denson, “Quiverfull Survey.”

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Jeub, 3.

satisfying, and many women do seem to genuinely enjoy child-rearing. Therefore, not only do Quiverfull-minded Christians consider their lifestyle ordained — even commanded — by God, they find it to be an enjoyable, beneficial way to live, despite what some feminists, like Joyce, would have people believe.

Furthermore, not all Quiverfull-minded Christians identify as antifeminist. When asked “Do you identify as ‘antifeminist,’ however you may define the term? Please explain why or why not,” only 11 out of the 30 Quiverfull women whom I surveyed identified as antifeminist. In fact, 2 identified as feminist. These women do not see feminism and Quiverfull as at odds. As Beth explains, “Back in the early 70’s, I was one of the founding mothers of Second Wave Feminism. [...] I still think of myself as a feminist, but a feminist who doesn’t demonize stay-at-home moms or moms who choose to have large families.”¹³⁷ Here, Beth echoes Adrienne Rich’s sentiment that feminists must identify with all women, rather than demonizing them for their lifestyle choices. In my survey, 3 participants who identified as Quiverfull did not identify as either feminist or antifeminist; 5 gave statements that were unclear about whether they identified as antifeminist or feminist; and 9 chose not to respond to the question.¹³⁸ Clearly, antifeminism and Quiverfull are not synonymous, as some critics claim. However, misunderstandings proliferate on both sides of the argument. Antifeminists claim that feminists hate men, want women to be like men, take mothers away from their children by pushing “careerism,” and kill unborn children (abortion). Some feminists claim that antifeminists oppress women, allowing — even encouraging — men to abuse women by forcing them to stay at home “barefoot and pregnant.” On the feminist side, this is due to the application of what Griffith calls “the rigid victimization theory” to non-feminist women, which argues that all non-feminist — especially antifeminist — women must be oppressed, despite their claims to the contrary, because they do not embrace feminist ideals, which in this case are primarily equated with those of second wave feminism. However, feminism has moved beyond the second wave paradigm of fighting for the right to work outside the home to embrace any walk of life that empowers women, and this, in many cases, includes Quiverfull.

Conclusion

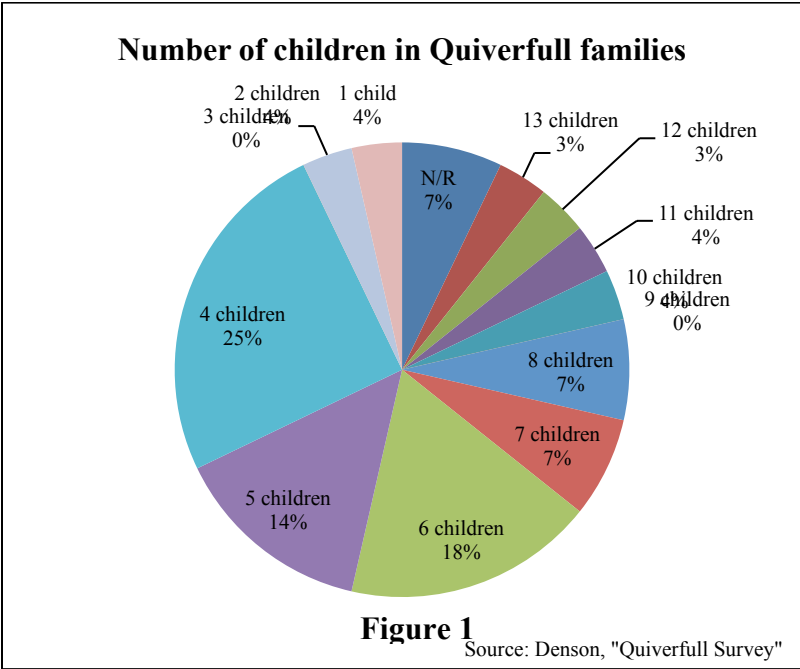
Throughout this essay, I have attempted to seriously consider the experiences and words of Quiverfull-minded Christians, particularly Quiverfull women, who, of course, form the locus of feminist concern regarding this lifestyle. Although we can identify unifying beliefs and *de facto* leaders, I have opted not to refer to Quiverfull as a movement because many people who identify as “Quiverfull” do not identify with “the Quiverfull Movement.” Quiverfull, which may have adherents in the thousands, is characterized by a neo-fundamentalist worldview that emphasizes the belief that God commands married couples to allow Him to plan their families by having vaginal sexual intercourse without using contraception. Reflecting their neo-fundamentalist worldview, Quiverfull-minded Christians believe that God wants Christians to have as many children as He decides so that they may raise soldiers for His army to fight in the universal war between good and evil. Since Quiverfull emerged in the mid- to late-1980s,

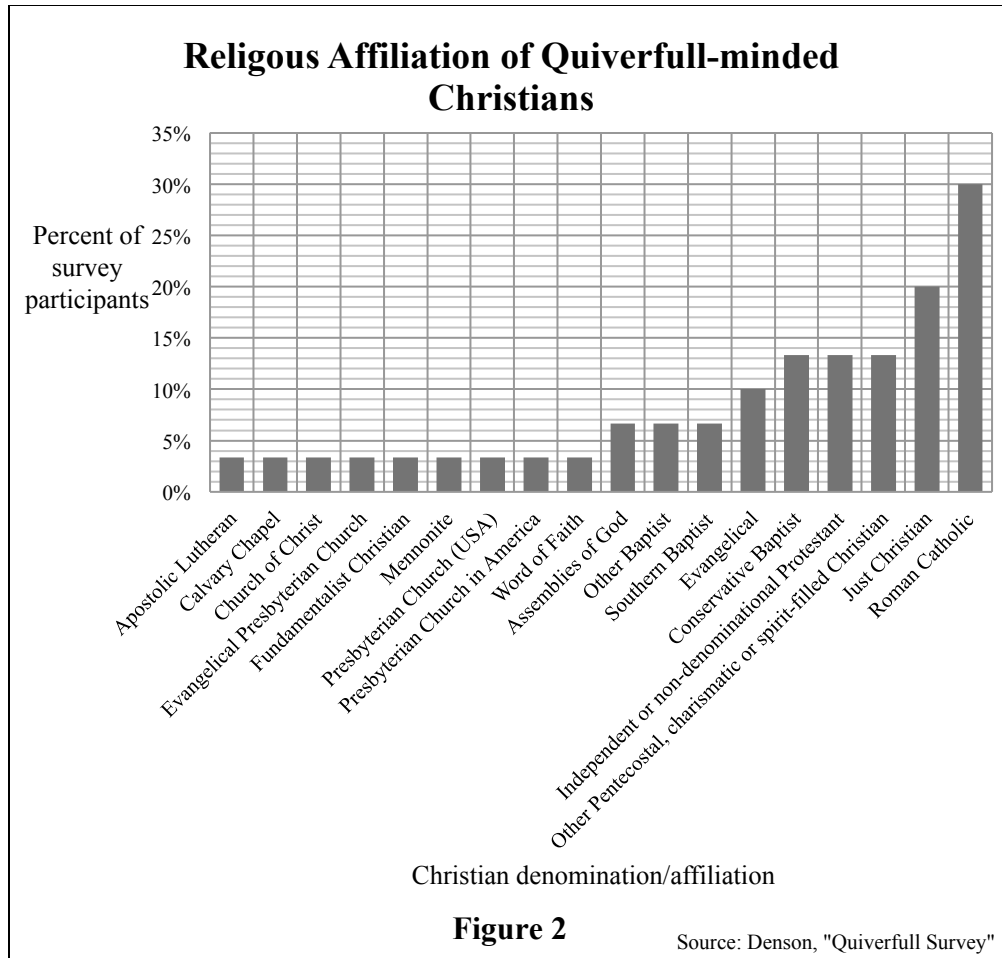
¹³⁷ Denson, “Quiverfull Survey.”

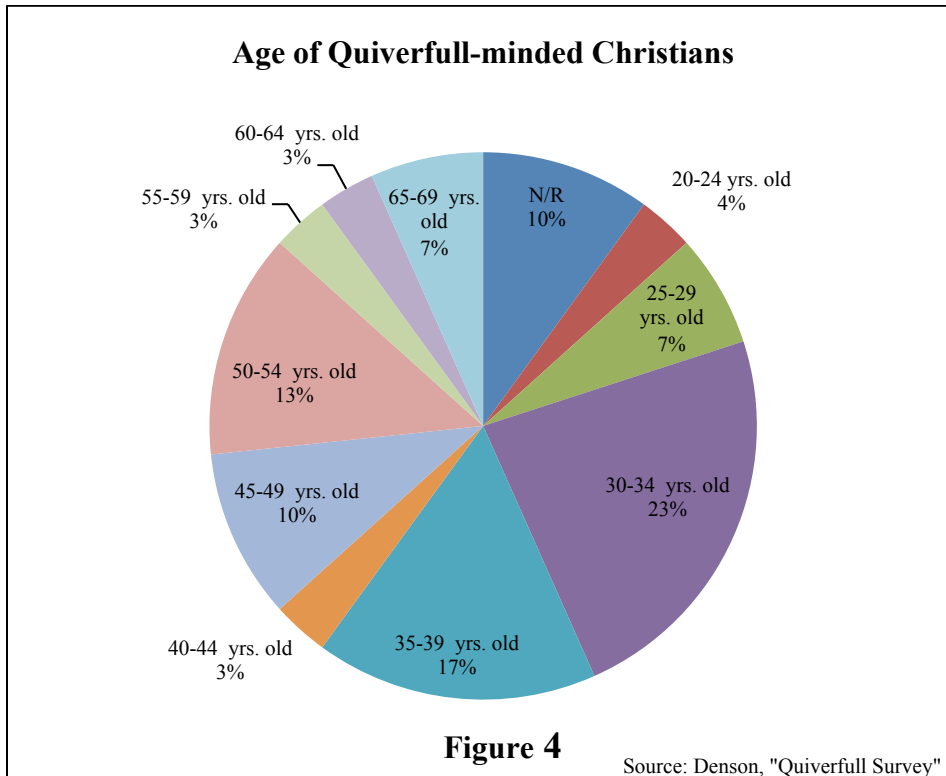
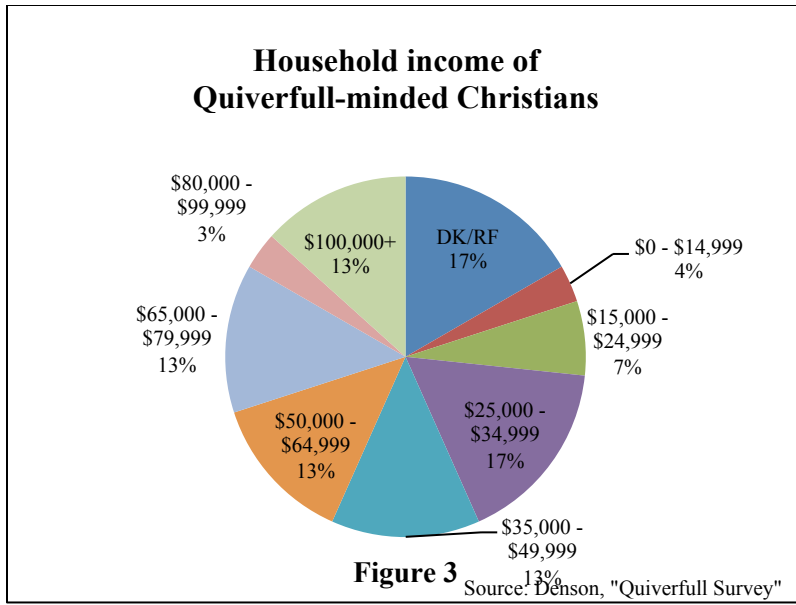
¹³⁸ Ibid.

Quiverfull-minded Christians tend to be under the age of 70, most likely between 30 and 54 years old. They are likely to live in a rural or suburban area in the South, have attended or graduated from college, and have a middle class level of household income. Although the only book-length treatment of Quiverfull and almost every article on it written by an outsider treat the women who follow the Quiverfull way as victims of an oppressive, patriarchal system that they are too brain-washed, stupid, or intimidated to escape. However, my research suggests that while some Quiverfull women live in abusive relationships, many experience great joy, liberation, and empowerment from this way of life.

Appendix







Bibliography

- “The Jeub Family.” *Monument Publishing*. <http://www.monumentpublishing.com/jeub-family/>.
- “What We Do: A Brief Overview of Our Ministry.” Institute in Basic Life Principles. <http://iblp.org/iblp/about/whatwedo/>.
- Campbell, Nancy. “Who Are the Campbells?” *Above Rubies*, 2011. <http://aboverubies.org/home/about-us>.
- Campbell, Nancy. *Be Fruitful and Multiply: What the Bible Says About Having Children*. San Antonio: Vision Forum Ministries, 2000.
- Denson, Juliana. “Quiverfull: Conservative Christian Women and Empowerment in the Home.” Survey Monkey, 2011. <http://www.surveymonkey.com/quiverfull.com>.
- Duggar, Jim Bob and Michelle. *A Love That Multiplies: An Up-Close View of How They Make It Work*. New York: Howard Books, 2011.
- Griffith, R. Marie. *God’s Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997.
- Hess, Rick and Jan. *A Full Quiver: Family Planning and the Lordship of Christ*. Brentwood, TN: Woglemuth & Hyatt, Publishers, Inc., 1989.
- Houghton, Craig. *Family UNplanning: A Guide for Christian Couples Seeking God’s Truth on Having Children*. Xulon Press, 2007.
- Jeub, Chris and Wendy. *Love Another Child: Children. They’re Blessings. Always*. Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2011.
- Joyce, Kathryn. “Arrows for the War.” *The Nation*, November 9, 2006. <http://www.thenation.com/article/arrows-war>.
- Joyce, Kathryn. *Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2009.
- Marsden, George M. “Evangelical and Fundamental Christianity.” In *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 5, edited by Lindsay Jones, 2887-2894. Detroit: Macmillan Reference Library USA, 2005.
- Marsden, George M. “Fundamentalism and American Evangelicalism.” In *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, edited by Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston, 22-35. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991.

Marsden, George M. *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991.

Marty, Martin E. "Fundamentalist Christianity." In *Contemporary American Religion*, vol. 1, edited by Wade Clark Roof, 270-273. New York: Macmillan Reference Library USA, 1999.

Philips, Doug. "About." Vision Forum. <http://www.visionforum.com/about/>.

Pride, Mary. *The Way Home: Beyond Feminism, Back to Reality*. Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1985.

Rich, Adrienne. *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979.