

The Power of Scripture:
A Study of the Use of Sacred Texts in Combating Violence Against Women
in Religiously Diverse Communities

Sascha Shroff

Research Intern, Spring 2022

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this research are those of the author and do not reflect the official opinions or positions of the Rumi Forum, its members, or its inspiration. Any content provided in this research was not sponsored by any religious or ethnic group, organization, nation- state government, company, or individual. The prescriptions made in this publication and the facts presented therein are not meant to detract from the political neutrality of the Rumi Forum and are incorporated only insofar as the integrity of that political neutrality is not compromised. The reader is encouraged to arrive at his or her own conclusions and interact firsthand with sources and information presented in this research. The reader is also encouraged to understand that the views presented hereafter are those of the author and fellow collaborators and that the condition of facts presented is complex, dynamic, and ever-changing. Thank you for your assistance in acknowledging and helping to preserve the political neutrality of the Rumi Forum while allowing it to support the research of its interns.

The Power of Scripture:
A Study of the Use of Sacred Texts in Combating Violence Against Women
in Religiously Diverse Communities

Table of Contents

Disclaimer	2
Table of Contents	3
Abstract	5
Introduction	7
Section 1: The Current State of Violence Against Women and Girls	9
Section 2: Literature Review	16
2.1 Islamic Scripture	17
2.1.1. The Practice of Islam	17
2.1.2. Female Figures in the Quran	18
2.1.3. Relationship Between Spouses in the Quran	19
2.1.4. The Way the Prophet Treated Women	19
2.1.5. <i>Nikah</i> - The Marriage Contract	20
2.1.6. Verse 4:34	21
2.1.7. Honor Killings	22
2.2. Christian Scripture	22
2.2.1. Scriptural Counts and Reasoning	23
2.2.2. God and Jesus' Teachings	23
2.2.3. Christian Figures Today	24
2.2.4. Interpreting Christian Scripture Today	26
2.3. Jewish Scripture	26
2.3.1. The Torah	26
2.3.2. Compensation for Violence in the Torah	28
2.3.3. <i>B'tzelem Elohim</i>	28
2.3.4. <i>Shalom Bayit</i>	29
2.3.5. <i>Tikkun Olam</i>	29
2.3.6. Marriage and Divorce - the Status of <i>Agunah</i>	30
2.4. Conclusion	31

Section 3: Interviewee Responses	32
3.1. Mary and Other Women in the Scriptures	32
3.2. The Controversial Verses	34
3.3. Marriage and Divorce	37
3.4. The Prophets as Role Models	39
3.5. God Loves Everyone, Even Abusers?	41
3.6. Patriarchal Structures in Religious Texts	42
3.7. Honor Killings	43
3.8. <i>B'tzelem Elohim, Shalom Bayit, and Tikkun Olam</i>	44
Section 4: Interviewee Analysis	45
4.1. Mary	45
4.2. Other Women in the Scriptures	46
4.3. The Controversial Verses	48
4.4. Marriage and Divorce	52
4.5. The Prophets as Role Models	55
4.6. God Loves Everyone, Even Abusers?	57
4.7. Patriarchal Structures in Religious Texts	58
4.8. Honor Killings	61
4.9. <i>B'tzelem Elohim, Shalom Bayit, and Tikkun Olam</i>	62
Section 5: Conclusion	63
Section 6: References	64
Section 7: Interviewees	67
Muslim Faith Leader: Imam Earl El-Amin (he/him)	67
Muslim Scholar: Dr. Semiha Topal (she/her)	67
Jewish Faith Leader: Rabbi Abbi Sharofsky (she/her)	68
Jewish Scholar: Dr. Amy Kalmanofsky (she/her)	68
Christian Faith Leader: Minister Camille Henderson-Edwards (she/her)	69
Christian Scholar: Dr. Kendra Weddle (she/her)	69
Acknowledgments	70
About the Author	70

Abstract

Religious spaces and institutions have the ability to help uplift women by addressing gender gaps and combating gender-based violence that prevails in varying religious spaces and traditions. With religion and culture being intertwined in many spaces, it is essential that religious leaders work to ensure that women are held to equal value to men in the religious setting. In many religious traditions, women are held to a high value, a value and practice that helps combat gender discrimination and violence against women. Along with this, different religious organizations have even used religious text and tradition to help combat gender-based violence discrimination in different contexts.

To further contribute to this progress in religious spaces, this research aims to explore how Abrahamic religious scripture can be used to combat violence against women in religiously diverse communities, pertaining to both private and public forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG). For this research with the Rumi Forum, I focused specifically on contemporary interpretations of Abrahamic religious scripture to explore how religious scripture can be used to combat violence against women and girls. I spoke with various religious leaders and scholars in each religion in this study to explore contemporary interpretations of religious text and how they could be used as a force of change against violence against women. The essay begins by introducing definitions of violence against women and girls and previously done work in the faith space to combat violence against women. The research continues to report on the three Abrahamic religions, exploring Islamic, Christian, and Jewish scripture. To further analyze these texts and their varying meanings, religious scholars and leaders were interviewed to have open conversations about different interpretations of religion and scripture in the context of it being used to combat VAWG. The answers of the interviewees are compared and analyzed, finding

overlap and difference. The research then takes the collected data to form a conclusion of how this scripture can be used to combat violence against women.

Keywords: *Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), Religious Scripture, Honor Killings, Nikah, Agunah*

Introduction

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) affects women and girls every day, being the largest, most widespread human rights violation. 1 in 3 women have been a victim of VAWG in their lifetime, yet the issue still remains underreported due to stigma and shame surrounding it coupled with patriarchal systems that hinder proper reporting.¹ With the recent pandemic coupled with a rise in humanitarian crises, conflicts, and climate disasters, the rate at which women are impacted by VAWG has increased significantly. The effects of this include psychological, sexual, and social consequences against victims of VAWG throughout their lifetime and have a serious impact on equality, development, and peace in the communities in which VAWG severely impacts women and girls' human rights. While all women and girls are at risk for falling victim to VAWG, certain groups are even more vulnerable, including those living through humanitarian or conflict crises. Because of how widespread the issue is, religious communities have the ability to prevent these acts against women and girls. With religion being a global phenomenon, religious communities and leaders have the power to impact religiously diverse communities in combating VAWG.

The Abrahamic faiths share the largest population of religious individuals globally, their scripture overlapping and intertwining from many different aspects. The power that these religious communities have in peace and violence is endless, making the use of scripture evermore important in peace talks and violence prevention. To add to the growing amount of literature on the use of scripture to combat violence and its added value to the peacebuilding space, I aim to create a guide based on textual analysis, religious understandings, and interviews to explore how Abrahamic scripture can be used to combat violence against women and girls,

¹ "International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women," United Nations (United Nations, November 2021), <https://www.un.org/en/observances/ending-violence-against-women-day>.

researching similarities and differences in scripture that result in overlap in scripture and religious understanding. This research proposes to answer the question: How can Abrahamic scripture be used to combat violence against women and girls in religious diverse communities? Based on this data, I aim to explain how scripture can be used as a forefront of anti-violence efforts, hypothesizing that interviewees will give similar answers across the religions explored as to how scripture can be used to combat VAWG. To ensure non-confirmatory research, this research is designed based on adding information to the field by using past scholarship and a diverse set of interviewees to create new developments in the peacebuilding space. The results of the study show covariation between Abrahamic scripture in its teachings of non-violence.

Section 1: The Current State of Violence Against Women and Girls

Gender-based violence is a global phenomenon that takes many different forms, hindering people of many identities from the basic human right of protection from abuse, specifically inhibiting women and girls to live freely without fear of abuse. Gender-based violence includes both physical and emotion forms of violence ranging from domestic violence and sexual assault to emotional manipulation. Being such a widespread issue, UN Women generally defines gender-based violence as “harmful acts directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on their gender,” which then encompasses violence against women and girls (VAWG), an overarching term used to define specific acts of gender discrimination against women and girls.²

VAWG is generally defined by the United Nations as “any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”³

VAWG can manifest itself in physical, sexual, and psychological forms in both public and private life spaces. This paper will be focusing on VAWG in both public and private life, referring to domestic/intimate partner violence, femicide, honor killings, and sexual violence.

VAWG is not a phenomenon specific to a region or a group. Rather, according to Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General, “violence against women is endemic in every country and culture, causing harm to millions of women and

² “Frequently Asked Questions: Types of Violence against Women and Girls,” UN Women – Headquarters, accessed May 31, 2022, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/faqs/types-of-violence>.

³ UN General Assembly, *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*, 20 December 1993, A/RES/48/104

their families.”⁴ While it affects 1 in 3 women globally, VAWG and gender-based violence were not always widely recognized in the secular, peacebuilding space. It was not until the 1995 United Nations’ Beijing World Conference on Women when the Platform for Action was formalized by 189 governments that VAWG was brought into the mainstream, secular space. This platform not only recognized VAWG but also the threat it shows to equality, development, and peace.⁵ Since that 1995 conference, at least 158 countries have passed laws working to prevent and punish domestic violence, with 141 of them also having laws preventing and punishing sexual harassment in employment.⁶ Although, these rarely present concrete solutions to the problem as VAWG remains a global issue, largely affecting women living in least developed countries, an estimate of 37% of women.⁷ Legislative systems and societal structures hinder the ability for laws as such to have an impact on social structures already in place. Coupled with corrupt legal systems and gender roles, many cases go unreported. According to UN Women, less than 40% of women who experience a form of violence report it, less than 10% going to law enforcement officials.⁸ Many scholars that have studied the causes and effects of VAWG argue that it is rooted in gender and power inequality, being a form of expression of patriarchal domination over women which causes it to continue and go underreported.⁹

VAWG can be perpetrated by family members, spouses, and relatives. When Goretti from western Kenya shared her story of abuse with the United Nations in a form of documentation of specific stories of VAWG, she emphasized that her story was largely impacted by the local

⁴“Devastatingly Pervasive: 1 in 3 Women Globally Experience Violence,” World Health Organization (World Health Organization, March 9, 2021), <https://www.who.int/news/item/09-03-2021-devastatingly-pervasive-1-in-3-women-globally-experience-violence>.

⁵ Sunita Kishor and Kiersten Johnson (Calverton, Maryland, 2004).

⁶ “Facts and Figures: Ending Violence against Women,” UN Women – Headquarters, accessed May 31, 2022, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>.

⁷World Health Organization 2021

⁸UN Women 2022

⁹Jennifer Lawson, “Sociological Theories of Intimate Partner Violence,” *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 22, no. 5 (2012): pp. 572-590, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2011.598748>.

culture in western Kenya. After her husbands' death, per tradition, she returned to western Kenya where she endured 20 years of abuse from her in-laws, leading to injuries so bad she was hospitalized and unable to work. At first, she was afraid to go to law enforcement and found help through a local human rights defender to later discover her in-laws had forged her approval to withdraw the case, even though she cannot write.¹⁰ Stories like Goretti's show the severity and mistrust embedded in societal structures that allow for the continuation of VAWG.

VAWG mainly occurs between spouses. Based on WHO's multi-country study on the prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV), it is found to be the most common form of VAWG, as 1 in 3 women experience this in their lifetime, affecting approximately 641 million women.¹¹¹² It has been reported that 35% of women globally have experienced some form of sexual IPV by a partner or non-partner.¹³

Being defined by the United Nations, domestic abuse, domestic violence, or intimate partner violence, is “a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner.”¹⁴

This includes forms of abuse that are physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats. That same WHO study also found that IPV causes female victims to have poorer health, emotional distress, and suicidal thoughts. It also impacts a woman's ability to make

¹⁰“Violence against Women Must Stop; Five Stories of Strength and Survival || UN News,” United Nations (United Nations, November 24, 2021), <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/11/1106322>.

¹¹Kishor and Johnson 2004

¹²World Health Organization 2021

¹³“Global and Regional Estimates - World Health Organization,” World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 2013), https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/85239/9789241564625_eng.pdf?sequence=1.

¹⁴“What Is Domestic Abuse?,” United Nations (United Nations), accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/what-is-domestic-abuse>.

her own decision about her reproductive health, which includes exposure to sexually transmitted infections and diseases and unwanted pregnancy.¹⁵

According to results from a regional analysis of five Caribbean Community states (Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago) Women's Health Surveys from 2016-2019, "ever-partnered women aged 15-64 who were in relationships with men who had attitudes and behaviours that reinforce men's dominant position over women and perpetuate gender inequality were more likely to have experienced lifetime and current IPV. Behaviors intended to control women's bodies, autonomy and contact with others are also strongly correlated with an increased experience of IPV."¹⁶ Although, this finding is not limited to this region in the world. Globally, gender power structures influence the autonomy and freedom women have from domestic violence and IPV.

Beyond family and intimate partner violence, there is femicide, which is the murder of women because they are women. Differing from male homicide, most cases are committed by partners or ex-partners, having a strong connection to IPV. Femicide is a prevalent issue while also being severely underreported. In 2017, it was reported that 50,000 women worldwide were killed by intimate partners or family members.¹⁷ Furthermore, according to the WHO, 38% of murders are committed by an intimate partner globally.¹⁸ Although, these statistics are skewed due to lack of reporting to investigate the cause of death in many cases of the death of a woman.

¹⁵Faith Owunari Benebo, Barbara Schumann, and Masoud Vaezghasemi, "Intimate Partner Violence against Women in Nigeria: A Multilevel Study Investigating the Effect of Women's Status and Community Norms," *BMC Women's Health* 18, no. 1 (September 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-018-0628-7>.

¹⁶"Violence against Women," World Health Organization (World Health Organization, March 9, 2021), <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>.

¹⁷Diane Cole, "U.N. Report: 50,000 Women a Year Are Killed by Intimate Partners, Family Members," NPR (NPR, November 30, 2018), <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/11/30/671872574/u-n-report-50-000-women-a-year-are-killed-by-intimate-partners-family-members>.

¹⁸World Health Organizations 2021

In 2008, Guatemala became the first country to formally establish femicide as a crime with high mandatory minimum sentencing with the Law Against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence Against Women (hereinafter 2008 Law). This law was a challenge to patriarchal violence from many aspects of the government and social system. Although, despite the 2008 Law being put into place, there have still been over 9,000 Guatemalan women and girl deaths from violent causes. According to a study done by Erin Beck and Amir Mohamed on the effects of the law, it can be seen that despite it being in place, there are still many factors between the state, media, and public that causes femicide to persist. From patriarchal social structures to a deeply flawed criminal justice system, the ability for the legislative process to provide women with a sense of security and justice is unreachable.¹⁹

Across the globe, the problem takes forms in many ways. For example, the story of 28-year-old Tshogofatso Pule, an 8 months pregnant woman who was brutally murdered in South Africa. Her body was found hanging from a tree in broad daylight after she was shot in the chest. But Pule is not the only one, but rather was one of eight women who were murdered by men in South Africa just that day. In South Africa, a woman is killed every four hours, but those murders are rarely reported, leading to the victims' families not getting the justice they deserve.²⁰

Within the category of femicide, so-called “honor killings” have a range of understandings and definitions, generally being seen as the murder of a family member because they might dishonor or shame the family. These killings are usually of women and girls and are mainly committed by family members. Like femicide and the other forms of VAWG, honor killings are severely underreported globally mainly due to the honor aspect of the murder. These

¹⁹Erin Beck and Amir Mohamed, “A Body Speaks: State, Media, and Public Responses to Femicide in Guatemala,” *Laws* 10, no. 3 (October 2021): p. 73, <https://doi.org/10.3390/laws10030073>.

²⁰Thabi Myeni, “Our Bodies Are Crime Scenes’: South Africa’s Murdered Women,” *Women | Al Jazeera* (Al Jazeera, June 5, 2021), <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/6/5/our-bodies-are-crime-scenes-south-africas-murdered-women>.

acts are rooted in social standing, cultural norms, deeply patriarchal cultures, and the institutions in place, the family aspect of them providing justification for the act. Victims can be buried in unmarked graves, eradication of records, and perpetrators are rarely punished.²¹

Honor killings are more prevalent than one might think. Last year, a video of a woman named Alham who was in her late 30s, getting beaten to death by her father and brothers with a brick in Jordan, went viral. She had been returned to her family after divorcing and being placed in a women's detention facility for complaining about her husbands' domestic abuse. Stories as such happen to women of all ages. According to Human Rights Watch, there are 15 to 20 reported honor killings in Jordan annually, which does not include the ones that go unreported.²² Although honor killings stem from culture, they are not restricted to this region of the world. Honor killings are not restricted to a certain culture or country as even Canada has reported over a dozen honor killings between the years 1999 and 2009.²³

Sexual violence can happen both in private life and public life. Sexual violence is seen as an international crime and a crime against humanity, making it a violation of the Geneva Conventions. The exploitation of women and girls and economic and cultural tensions in post-conflict situations is a common occurrence that plays a major role in the understanding of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA).

²¹Andrzej Kulczycki and Sarah Windle, "Honor Killings in the Middle East and North Africa," *Violence Against Women* 17, no. 11 (2011): pp. 1442-1464, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801211434127>.

²²Abigail Roberts, "Video of Father Beating Daughter to Death in so-Called 'Honor Killing' Sparks Protests in Jordan and Online," ABC News (ABC News Network, July 23, 2020), <https://abcnews.go.com/International/video-father-beating-daughter-death-called-honor-killing/story?id=71903071>.

²³Department of Justice Government of Canada, "Preliminary Examination of so-Called 'Honour Killings' in Canada," Apparent Modern-Day Incidence in Canada - Preliminary Examination of so-called Honour Killings in Canada, December 8, 2021, <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/hk-ch/p2.html>.

According to the WHO Policy and Procedures glossary, sexual exploitation is defined as “any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, threatening or profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.” and sexual abuse is defined as “the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.”²⁴

It can be seen that cultural, economic, and social factors contribute to the prevalence of SEA in communities, making religion have a large impact given its power over said communities.

Approximately 6% of women globally have experienced sexual violence by someone other than their partner, which is a highly underreported statistic due to stigma surrounding sexual forms of VAWG as approximately 15 million girls between the ages of 15-19 have been forced into sexual acts. Because of cultural stigma, even health organizations can cause harm to victims of sexual violence. Young girls who are raped usually seek assistance from women's health organizations in their area and in many regions due to culture, employees in such organizations tell the young girls that they will never be married because they are not valued brides if they are not virgins.

From this data, it is clear that all forms of VAWG are prevalent globally, a range of factors influencing the continuation and perpetration of different forms of abuse. With culture, social structures, and gender dynamics having an impact on the lack of action being taken against such acts, the secular and non-secular peacebuilding space needs to become more creative in their efforts to find a solution for women and girls globally.

²⁴“WHO Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Prevention and Response,” March 2017.

Section 2: Literature Review

The scholarship collected for this literature review can be divided into three main groups of scholarly and religious literature that has previously been used to address violence against women in the religious context. The first describes Islamic scripture, the second describes Christian scripture, and the third describes Jewish scripture.

Commonalities and differences are found in the literature presented, the overall consensus based on all three theological beliefs being that sexual and domestic violence are thought of as sin due to the spiritual violation of the act. It is also found that one of the main issues within the practice of this scripture is proof texting, or the selection of text out of context to support one's position. Lastly, a commonality that is found is the gender roles and dynamics that impact the structure and impact of the congregation community as well as the impact the community can have on victims. Commonly, when a spouse is being domestically abused, their abuser will isolate them from other contacts and social settings. Although isolation from the church is rare, leading to the Church and religious leaders playing an integral role in stopping the cycle of abuse. In Islam, Prophet Mohammad taught the ideas of good deeds and a positive spiritual, mental, and emotional being. Imams continue the teachings of the Prophet as well. They do not just teach Islam, but teach the community those ideals, being there to listen and support survivors of abuse. These beliefs are shared in the Mosque, being a place of love, kindness, community, and the support of others.²⁵ In Judaism, presence of a female Rabbi can increase the chances that female victims will come forward in the faith community. These sentiments by religious leaders play a part in improving the overall safety of faith communities and makes it known that they are a space safe that welcomes them to open up when they want to.

²⁵Anisa Masood, "Ending Domestic Abuse A Guide for Mosques and the Muslim Community", Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence Partnership, 2020.

2.1 Islamic Scripture

The first group describes the study of Islamic scripture. The following information is a collection of Islam's perceptions of VAWG from teachings of the Qur'an and through the Sunnah, which is the way of the Prophet Mohammad.

2.1.1. The Practice of Islam

The general understanding of VAWG and Islam can be taken from traditional Islamic legal discourse and interpretation of beliefs and scripture. It is important to note that traditional Islamic legal discourse on women and gender is still heavily influenced by patriarchal interpretations. Therefore, one must distinguish between male and patriarchal cultural norms and the true practice of Islam when practicing and discussing Islamic tradition and holy scriptures using this legal discourse. It is especially important to understand the distinction between religion and culture when understanding the practice of Islam. Religion and culture are different but cultural norms are always influencing religious practice.²⁶

To help break away from the cultural influence on religious practice and text, scholars discuss the understanding of living religion. For example, scholars such as Dr. Ayesha Chaudry argue that Islam is a living religion, which therefore makes the tradition constantly evolving and changing. As stated:

“The Quran is a meaning generating text, which means that it is always giving meaning to what Muslims believe today. From this understanding, if one does not treat the meanings in what Muslims believe today, you are not respecting the living tradition correctly.”²⁷

- Dr. Ayesha Chaudry

²⁶Ayesha Chaudry, Mohammad Nuruddeen Lemu, and Houda Abadi, “*What is the role of scriptural interpretation on violence against women in Islam, and how can misinterpretations be countered?*”, Forum on Human Rights, 2017

²⁷Chaudry, Lemu, and Abadi 2017

Therefore, when interpreting Islamic belief in a modern day context, it must intertwine the beliefs of present day Muslims, meaning Islam would advocate for dignity, equality, peace, and justice.

Although, within this understanding of Muslim belief comes the issue of representation of the Muslim population. There is a gap between the beliefs of the non-representative group of Muslims that claim the Quran's message and what the majority of the Muslim population actually believes. This is mainly because often the most conservative Muslims are seen as the most authentic, as many secular and Western organizations measure a person's religion based on their physical appearance. This adds to the belief that scriptures need to be shifted from written texts/textual sources from the past to living Muslims beliefs.²⁸

2.1.2. Female Figures in the Quran

The Quran describes a wide range of different female figures and their experiences, showing their power and influence. The Quran sees women as Muslims first, therefore describing them as equals to men in a religious sense and explaining how it sees women and men as each other's protectors (Q. 33:73; 9:71).²⁹ Many scholars note that the Quran is the only religious scripture that has a chapter named after a woman, that chapter being *Chapter 19: Mary*, the mother of Jesus. More importantly, as a religious figure, she is the only female character who is named in the Quran as it relates to talking about her role, responsibilities, and goodness. Beyond Mary, there is a range of women that appear in the Quran. Although only Mariam is named in the Quran, all other female figures are introduced as the mother of someone, the wife of someone, or with no name.

²⁸Chaudry, Lemu, and Abadi 2017

²⁹Kecia Ali, "The Feminist Sexual Ethics Project," Understanding a Difficult Verse, Qur'an 4:34 | Muslim Sexual Ethics | The Feminist Sexual Ethics Project | Brandeis University (Brandeis University, February 11, 2003), <https://www.brandeis.edu/projects/fse/muslim/diff-verse.html>.

2.1.3. Relationship Between Spouses in the Quran

The main focus in literature regarding the treatment of women and violence in the Quran is the relationship between spouses, being described to be founded on mercy, compassion, and tranquility (Q. 7:189; 30:21). The Quran describes the relationship between spouses as garments for one another with an emphasis on equity in the relationship, stating that God said to "live with your wives in kindness and equity" (Q. 4:19; 2:187).³⁰ Furthermore, it prohibits kinds of injustice and oppression, all equaling to a clear stance against domestic violence and intimate partner violence.³¹ When the Prophet Muhammad was asked about a husband's responsibility towards his wife, he said "Give her food when you take food, clothe her when you clothe yourself, do not reveal her face, and do not beat her."³² This is a clear demonstration of the example of the relationship between a man and a woman the Prophet preached and envisioned. Along with this, what the Prophet states cannot be contradictory to the Quran, meaning that it is Muslim belief to treat wives in the way that the Prophet did, with equality.

2.1.4. The Way the Prophet Treated Women

Many other verses and teachings from Prophet Muhammad discuss treating women with kindness and justice (Q. 2:231-233; 4:19-21; 16:90; 65:6). Prophet Mohammed never hit his wives and said "The best among you, is the one who is best towards his wife."³³ Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad's wife, Aisha reported "the Messenger of God, peace and blessings upon him, did not strike a servant or a woman, and he never struck anything with his hand."³⁴ Scholars

³⁰Dalia Mogahed, Tesneem AlKiek, and Jonathan Brown, *"Islam and Violence Against Women: A Critical Look at Domestic Violence and Honor Killings in the Muslim Community"*, Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, May 27, 2017.

³¹Sarah Leavitt, *"Religious Teachings About Violence Against Women"*, BC Association of Specialized Victim Assistance and Counselling Programs, Winter Newsletter, March 2003.

³²Abu Zakaria Yahya Ibn Sharaf An Nawawi, *Riyad as-Salihin* (New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2014).

³³Carla Power, "What the Koran Really Says about Women," *The Telegraph* (Telegraph Media Group, September 15, 2015), <http://s.telegraph.co.uk/graphics/projects/koran-carla-power/index.html>.

³⁴*Sahih Muslim* 2328.

note that examples of the Prophet's treatment of women can be found in the study of the tradition of the Prophet, showing his gentleness and kindness to his wives.

2.1.5. *Nikah* - The Marriage Contract

An important aspect of the understanding of the rights of women in Islam, specifically in domestic situations, are the beliefs around marriage. The concept of marriage in Islam heavily focuses on a contract between a believing man and woman, giving their consent to the marriage. There are some variations in practice because a believing man and woman also includes the People of the Book. In Islamic law, men are allowed to marry women of the people of the Book while women are not allowed to marry a man who is a person of the Book. This understanding is interpreted as post-Quranic because the Quran does not have any specific prohibition or restrictions against a woman marrying a man of the Book. These rules usually come from how Islamic law is written down by scholars. Marriage is seen as the way of maintaining the lineage of families and in an environment where patrilineal marriage is the custom, this has been the found outcome. The concern for scholars is that if a Muslim woman marries a non-Muslim man, her children will be non-Muslim because the father is the head of the family.

Focusing on the contractual aspect of marriage in Islam, *Nikah*, meaning conjugation or uniting, originated in Islam over 1,400 years ago, and acts as a contract of marriage. The main purpose of a marriage contract is to legalize intercourse and make children legitimate. It also details the responsibilities and distribution of roles of the spouses. The rights and duties are different based on gender. The man possesses the control over the relationship and he can end the marriage alone by pronouncing repudiation (*talaq*). Although, for the wife, she must pay the husband a diverse compensation, known as *khul'* or can seek judicial divorce. The inclusion of stipulations in Muslim marriage contracts would be the best way to protect women's rights in a

domestic partnership. Although, many women do not know or do not get to read their contract before marriage. It takes away their rights to divorce, to read the contract first, and money in the case of divorce.

2.1.6. Verse 4:34

The most commonly referred to verse in the Quran to justify the subjugation of women is Qur'anic verse 4:34, which is the clearest example of a hierarchy between men and women.³⁵ One of the main misinterpretations in this verse is the translation of the word *daraba*, which many have translated to “to strike” which is used to justify the beating of women.³⁶ Although, there are many contested translations of this verse, all of which change the overall interpretation of the scripture. For example, in verse 4:35, *daraba* is seen as something that is undesirable. Scholars argue against violent translations of the verse. For example, according to a verbal statement made by Imam Mohammad Nuruddeen Lemu in the roundtable discussion titled *“What is the role of scriptural interpretation on violence against women in Islam, and how can misinterpretations be countered?”* by the Forum on Human Rights, no matter what the meaning of *daraba* is, it should be known that one should not hurt others based on other texts in the Quran.³⁷ Along with this, he stated that the disagreement on the meaning of this text is not between human and the Divine, but rather between human and human, as the scripture is living and as peoples, cultures, and interpretations change, so do people's interpretations of these texts.³⁸ Another example comes from prominent early Muslim jurist Makkan jurist ‘Aṭā’ ibn Abi Rabah (d. 732 AD) has stated that *daraba* refers to a gesture to express one’s anger rather than any form of violence at all.

³⁵Kecia 2003

³⁶Kecia 2003

³⁷Chaudry, Lemu, and Abadi 2017

³⁸Chaudry, Lemu, and Abadi 2017

Many traditional interpretations view this verse as proof of male authority over women, while more contemporary interpretations view this text as the financial obligations of a husband to a wife, rather than power dynamics in the relationship. It is also important to note that when interpreting the Quran, one must also consider the social and historical context in which the verse takes place.

2.1.7. Honor Killings

A more prevalent form of VAWG that secular media combines with Islam is honor killings. Under Islamic law, honor killings are not permissible and a violation of the *maqasid al-Shariah* (the five higher objectives of the law).³⁹ *Shariah* can be generally defined as “the way.” Therefore, *maqasid al-Shariah* generally means the way that was revealed to Prophet Muhammad. Furthermore, there are verses in the Quran that go against honor killings. For example: “And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell to abide therein; and the Wrath and the Curse of Allah are upon him, and a great punishment is prepared for him.” (Qur’an 4: 93). Scholars argue that honor killings stem from culture, not religion and the two should be separated.

2.2. Christian Scripture

Christian literature regarding Christianity’s defense against VAWG ranges from the teachings of God, the teachings of Jesus Christ, to modern day interpretations and stances against VAWG.

³⁹Zaleha Kamaruddin and Umar A Oseni, “Between Ideals and Reality: Violence against Women and the Real Image of Women in Islam”, The Institute of Oriental Philosophy, Journal Volume 23, pp. 79-93, 2020.

2.2.1. Scriptural Counts and Reasoning

There have been later Christian scriptures that condone VAWG or the domination of a woman by a man. Although, these texts must be taken with other passages that speak of peace between man and woman. When taking into consideration the entire context of Christian scripture, there are also many verses discussing caring for a victim and teachings of respecting every one of different classes. For example:

“Even so, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes it and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church, because we are members of his body.” (Ephesians 5:28-29)

It is important to note that while scripture does not condone violence, there are accounts of sexual abuse in different Christian scripture. For example, in the Old Testament, rape is seen as *nebalah*, meaning outrage, which is only used 13 times in the Old Testament, meaning it is reserved for extreme acts against God.⁴⁰

2.2.2. God and Jesus' Teachings

While Jesus did not speak directly of VAWG, he was an advocate for those who were marginalized and saw people with compassion according to the biblical counts of his life. Jesus is a role model to Christians on how to live life and treat others, the biblical text naturally calling for a commitment to justice. Jesus pushed the social boundaries of who to sit with, who to care for, and who to heal. His ministry was about exposing injustice and helping the oppressed and abused (Psalm 56). In some more general understandings of the Bible, it is seen that any violence is considered an offense against God and humanity and that God opposes those who oppress,

⁴⁰Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune and Rabbi Cindy G. Enger, “*Violence Against Women and the Role of Religion*”, National Electronic Network on Violence Against Women, March 2005.

marginalize, and abuse others.⁴¹⁴² Examples of this include when Jesus stopped the stoning of a woman because of the suspicion of adultery and healed her (John 8:1-11; Luke 8:43).⁴³ Furthermore, there are multiple verses discussing God's vision to transform society to help those who are marginalized or treated poorly (Luke 4:18-21; Proverbs 14:31; Matthew 9:13; Mark 3:4-5).⁴⁴

2.2.3. Christian Figures Today

Many Christian figures today following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ have made stances against VAWG, one of the most prevalent being Pope John Paul II. The Pope reminds us that "Christ's way of acting, the Gospel of his words and deeds, is a consistent protest against whatever offends the dignity of women."⁴⁵ The Pope continues to remind us that VAWG is a sin, as during the rise of domestic violence at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, he stated to stand behind the victims of domestic violence, saying that abusers are engaging in an act that is "almost satanic."⁴⁶⁴⁷

⁴¹"What the Bible Says about Domestic Violence," SAFER (SAFER, 2021), https://www.saferresource.org.au/the_bible_on_domestic_family_violence.

⁴²Ally Moder, "What Does the Bible Say about Domestic Abuse?," The Junia Project (The Junia Project, October 12, 2017), <https://juniaproject.com/bible-say-domestic-violence/>.

⁴³Moder 2017

⁴⁴Leavitt 2003

⁴⁵Pope John Paul II, On the Dignity and Vocation of Women (Mulieris Dignitatem), no. 15.

⁴⁶Peace and World Affairs Berkley Center for Religion, "Religious Responses to Domestic Abuse during the COVID-19 Pandemic," Berkley Center fo Religion, Peace and World Affairs, June 1, 2020, <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/posts/religious-responses-to-domestic-abuse-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>.

⁴⁷Reuters, "Domestic Violence Increased in 7 Countries after Pandemic Lockdowns ...," US News (US News, December 19, 2021), <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2021-02-25/domestic-violence-increased-in-7-countries-after-pandemic-lockdowns-review-finds>.

In the broadcast on Italy's top private channel Canale 5, the Pope stated, "The problem is that, for me, it is almost satanic, because it is taking advantage of the weakness of those who cannot defend themselves, can only block the blows. It is humiliating, very humiliating."⁴⁸

The Pope has spoken on this issue on numerous occasions over the past two years, calling domestic violence a "degradation of all humanity" multiple times during different occasions.⁴⁹

In his statements against violence against women, the Pope makes clear the influence Mary and other women of the Bible have on the Christian beliefs. "To hurt a woman is to offend God, who took his human form from a woman." said the Pope during his speech on the annual World Day of Peace. He called women the peacemakers that keep the threads of life together.

The Pope is not the only prevalent Christian figure who speaks up against VAWG. According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), if someone is being domestically abused within their marriage, it should be known that that person can act to end that abuse without violating marriage promises.⁵⁰

"The use of the Bible to support abusive behavior was condemned, another form of proof texting. It is common for the Bible to be used to justify staying in an abusive relationship or a man continuing abuse, stating that the Bible says a wife should be submissive. But rather, according to the Bishops, relationships between a man and a woman are of equality and based on mutuality and love." - United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) statement

⁴⁸Elisabetta Povoledo, "Pope Says High Number of Domestic Violence Cases Is 'Almost Satanic,'" The New York Times (The New York Times, December 20, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/20/world/europe/pope-domestic-violence-almost-satanic.html>.

⁴⁹Elisabetta Povoledo 2021

⁵⁰United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence against Women," USCCB (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2002), <https://www.usccb.org/topics/marriage-and-family-life-ministries/when-i-call-help-pastoral-response-domestic-violence>.

2.2.4. Interpreting Christian Scripture Today

There are many scholars who have discussed how Christian scripture can be interpreted in the modern context. In a roundtable discussion hosted by the Carter Center titled "*Sexual Violence and Sacred Texts*," Dr. Amy Kalmanofsky discussed VAWG in the context of Christian beliefs. She emphasized the need for practitioners to watch for and find assumptions of the patriarchal structure in the scripture that practitioners read. It is important to acknowledge that structure in the readers' interpretations of the text or scripture in order to avoid continuing a cycle of male supremacy and a justification for VAWG through patriarchal interpretations of these texts. Dr. Kalmanofsky makes a point to note that it is important that readers not only think about what is in the text, but what is missing from the text, what gaps need to be filled in the interpretations of the text.

2.3. Jewish Scripture

Jewish literature addressing VAWG and Jewish tradition revolves around universal Jewish teachings and deconstructing the patriarchal structures in the Torah to understand the scripture in a modern-day context.

2.3.1. The Torah

The use of textual interpretation is brought up by many Jewish scholars when discussing its context in the modern day. In a roundtable discussion hosted by the Carter Center titled "*Sexual Violence and Sacred Texts*", Rabbi Sarra Lev, Ph.D commented on the role of Jewish scripture and the interpretations of texts in the context of sexual violence. She discussed how the scriptures themselves are in search of holiness and are used to draw out our holy wisdom, as the texts should be thought of as partners in a quest for holiness.

People speak for the scriptures as the sacred texts are “living texts,” meaning that the scriptures can be interpreted based on the societal contexts in which they can be used. As other religious leaders have discussed,

“the text itself changes depending on how we read it. When we read a text, we get to direct that text, and the meaning of that text changes and shifts. Along with this understanding, if we are reading the scriptures, we should place ourselves in those stories and be able to interpret them as holy beings. These texts call us to action because we cannot accept the notion that holiness can transcend the individuality of all God's creations.”

Although, the Torah reflects the patriarchal society that it was written in. In his article “*Confronting Violence and Injustice Against Women*”, Rabbi Alex Kress discusses the patriarchal nature of the Torah. He uses an example of *Parshat Pinchas*, a story that focuses on injustice against women. The story goes as follows:

“The Torah records the story of a family with five sisters – Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah – and no brothers. When their father, Zelophehad, died, his property was distributed to male relatives, skipping over the daughters. The sisters came before Moses and pleaded: “Let not our father’s name be lost to his clan just because he had no son!” (Numbers 27:4). Unable to render a swift decision, Moses asked for God’s judgment, and God agreed with the women: “The plea of Zelophehad’s daughters is just” (Numbers 27:7).”⁵¹

⁵¹Rabbi Alex Kress, “Confronting Violence and Injustice Against Women,” Reform Judaism, July 23, 2022, <https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/torah-commentary/confronting-violence-and-injustice-against-women>.

Rabbi Kress notes this specific instance in the Torah for two reasons. First, this is a place where women identify injustice and their voices are elevated, and second because God goes against the patriarchal norms.⁵²

2.3.2. Compensation for Violence in the Torah

In the Torah, when one injures someone, Jewish or not, compensation is required and for permanent injuries, retribution is required as well (Exodus 21:15). Converted from the verse “eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise” (Exodus 21:24-25), Rabbi’s have decreed that this compensation now comes in the form of monetary compensation. “One who injures another person is liable on five counts (that is, responsible for paying for five factors): for the injury itself, for pain, for healing, for loss of time, and for embarrassment” (Mishnah, Bava Kamma 8:1), meaning that this compensation can go beyond monetary value.

2.3.3. *B'tzelem Elohim*

Scholars not only discuss specific texts in the Torah, but also Jewish beliefs that can be used as an example of non-violence. In Judaism, all people, both male and female, are created *b'tzelem Elohim*, which means in the image of God or the divine (Genesis 1:27). Within *b'tzelem Elohim* is the belief that our bodies are gifts from God that we must protect and nurture.⁵³ The act of saving a life, or *Pikuach nefesh* is also of importance in Jewish belief. When this belief is taught and practiced as a sacred obligation, it can have a tremendous impact on the importance of the life of a woman.⁵⁴

⁵²Kress 2022

⁵³“Gender-Based Violence: Jewish Values & Positions,” Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, accessed June 1, 2022, <https://rac.org/gender-based-violence-jewish-values-positions>.

⁵⁴Leavitt 2003

2.3.4. *Shalom Bayit*

In Judaism, the family and home are central to not just religious, but also cultural life. This belief is centered around the Jewish value of *Shalom bayit*, meaning peace in the home. This peace means a harmonious home where all are nurtured and respected.⁵⁵ Religious scholar Judith Hertz further discusses this topic in her work “*A Commentary on Religious Issues in Family Violence*”, where she explains how this concept should not be interpreted as respecting the man in the house and be a justification for an abusive marriage. She further goes on to explain how divorce is always an option in Jewish tradition and should not be frowned upon, especially in cases of domestic abuse.⁵⁶

On this same subject, Maimonides has several passages in *Sefer Nashim*, The Book of Women, regarding domestic abuse, as the text reads, "And thus the sages commanded that a man should honor his wife more than he honors himself, and love her as he loves himself. And if he has money, he should increase her benefits according to his wealth. He should not intimidate her too much; he should speak with her gently, and should be neither saddened nor angry" (Mishneh Torah, Sefer Nashim 15:19).⁵⁷

2.3.5. *Tikkun Olam*

Tikkun olam, translates to “repairing/healing the world.” Directly translated in Hebrew, it means world repair.” The term comes up in the Mishnah when it refers to social policy legislation that attends mainly to the disadvantaged. More broadly, it is referring to God repairing the world and preventing social chaos.^{58,59} The term does not appear in the Torah and is

⁵⁵Leavitt 2003

⁵⁶Leavitt 2003

⁵⁷Gender-Based Violence: Jewish Values & Positions 2022

⁵⁸My Jewish Learning, “Tikkun Olam: Repairing the World,” My Jewish Learning, February 14, 2019, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/tikkun-olam-repairing-the-world/>.

⁵⁹Administrator, “Origins of Tikkun Olam,” new header, accessed June 1, 2022, <https://www.betheltemplecenter.org/tikkun-olam/323-origins-of-tikkun-olam>.

post-biblical.⁶⁰ The term then began appearing in daily public prayer in the Aleinu prayer in c. 1200 CE. The second section of the prayer contains the line “l’taken olam b’malchut shaddai”. This line indicates that the goal of Jewish existence is “to establish/fix/perfect the world under the rule of God”.⁶¹ It can refer to the physical world, social order, or divine manifestation.

Today, the term refers to acts of social responsibility. *Tikkun olam* has become synonymous with various social justice activities and initiatives. Within the “disadvantaged” women are included, making this phrase important to not only the prevention of VAWG but also in the healing process for victims.

2.3.6. Marriage and Divorce - the Status of *Agunah*

A rare but severe form of abuse found in Judaism is the concept of an *Agunah*, meaning “the chained woman.” An *Agunah* is a woman whose husband refuses to give her a *Get*, which in Jewish law is a rite of religious divorce. In Jewish law, in a heterosexual couple, a woman's entrance into a marriage is a contractual obligation that comes with a certain amount of property as she becomes part of her husband's house. That contract belongs to the woman which gives her the power over it, meaning that she can ask to leave the contract when she wants. Although, both entities have to agree to end the contract for a divorce to be finalized under Jewish law. In some ways this protects women from being abandoned, but it can also prevent a woman from ever leaving. Without obtaining a *Get* the woman cannot get remarried or continue her life apart from her husband. Women can remain in the status of *Agunah* for decades, being freed from that status only when their husband dies. In more recent times, Rabbinical courts have made efforts to force husbands to give their wives a *Get*. There are now organizations that will work to put pressure on

⁶⁰Administrator 2022

⁶¹Administrator 2022

a man to give his wife a *Get*. There are different types of statues that are being tried both in Israel and in the civil courts trying to help.

2.4. Conclusion

In much of the literature presented, scholars conclude studies with continued research questions for the reader to think about. Much of the literature produced is trying to understand what has been done in the religious space, both in the study of scripture and through the action of current religious figures, to combat VAWG. Now that this question has been discussed, there is a gap in the literature that needs to be filled as to how these beliefs can be tied to the current state of VAWG and how these teachings overlap. The research I propose takes the previous work a step further by examining the beliefs of different religious leaders and scholars and seeing the overlap in their understandings of scripture in relation to VAWG.

Section 3: Interviewee Responses

Spaces with an asterisk () in them indicates that the subsection topic was not addressed during the interview or did not pertain to the knowledge of the interviewee.*

3.1. Mary and Other Women in the Scriptures

Interviewee	Mary	Other Women
Imam	As a religious figure in the Quran, Mary is the only one that is named as it relates to talking about her role, responsibilities, and goodness.	<p>Other important women include the first adherent, the Prophet’s wife Khadija and Aisha, the most learned in Islam. These two figures are not really Quranic figures, but they play a major role in the historical evolution of Islam from the beginning.</p> <p>He sees, in his studies, the degradation of women in scripture. When we see the Biblical story of Adam and Eve in the garden and how it says that the snake seduced Eve and Eve, in turn, seduced Adam. The Quran doesn't say that, it says they both slipped. In the Biblical version, we see the prototype of a woman and one of her outstanding attributes is that she is a seductress.</p>
Muslim Scholar	In the Quran, the story of Mariam, the mother of Jesus, is given an entire chapter named after her. More importantly, she is the only female character who is named in the Quran. All other female characters are mentioned as being the mother of, the wife of, or with no name.	Some women hold very high moral standards, like Mariam, and there are some Hadith that talk about Mariam and the Wife of the Pharaoh, as the highest women of Heaven.

<p>Minister</p>	<p>Mary is one of the main characters. The fact that she has the ability to carry this being that is fully human and fully divine and has the authority to do that gives her power. Just like any other woman in the text, her ability to walk in agency in what she does is what we pick up on.</p>	<p>Women like Debrah (a judge), Queen Bashtai (was asked to come naked to a party and she said no). All the women in the text exercise agency and claim it, even the women who are unnamed. Just as they exercise agency it calls us to mirror the same agency into the present day.</p>
<p>Christian Scholar</p>	<p>Mary does not hold the same place as Jesus, who is a male figure. However you understand she carries some divination.</p>	<p>Other figures include Christ Sofia. She is the wisdom of God and is feminine and is all throughout the Hebrew Bible.</p> <p>The holy spirit in Greek and Hebrew is feminine. But the spirit is invisible, just like women are often invisible.</p>
<p>Rabbi</p>	<p>*</p>	<p>There are lots of female figures including the matriarch's - Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leiha - all coming from genesis and all strong figures. A lot of their strength comes from the way they are able to work around the men around them.</p> <p>Miriam led the people, saved the people, stood up to Pharaoh's daughter, and orchestrated a lot. There is a reason she is thought of as a Prophetess and someone who carried an extreme amount of power even though it wasn't talked about and she has been lifted up over time as being a voice of its possible for women to see a situation and know how to navigate through it to work out for everyone.</p>

Jewish Scholar	*	<p>She believes that the bible reflects a kind of patriarchal ideology which is how she would think about it and, her research and spending her lifetime thinking about women in the Bible and the structures and how the Bible constructs women and uses women, she believes that the Bible actively invested in protecting masculinity and being weary of women and female power and actively sort of attempting to curtail and limit that power. That is why she would say there is a true patriarchal ideology in the Bible.</p>
----------------	---	--

3.2. The Controversial Verses

Interviewee	Old Testament: Judges 19: The Story of the Unnamed Woman	Quran: Surah An-Nisa-4:34
Imam	*	<p>The Quran was revealed in Arabic, meaning translation can be tricky. When translating the word <i>Daraba</i>, the first meaning of it when you look in the dictionary is “heal” and it can even mean “feather.” The Arabic language is so expensive.</p> <p>What people have done and taken it because of their cultural exposure or lack thereof of the Quran and used it and then the enemies of Islam have used it to say that this is out of touch.</p>

		You also must consider the context of when it was revealed.
Muslim Scholar	*	<p>She asks the question “What if this verse really means hit? What is your position with your relationship with the Quran and your feminist values?”</p> <p>It probably does not mean to hit someone, but if it is what the text says, then she does not see it in this category of encouraging violence, but rather, having a moral purpose. She does not see any reason for one verse taking injustice on someone, because that cannot be justified with any scripture.</p>
Minister	<p>Having the ability for pastors to theologically think through texts like Judges 19, what it means for the congregation in the present day, and choosing to engage a text like that in a preaching moment, they have more space to do that.</p> <p>With things like IPV, there is still more work to do because of the notion that people don't really want to accept that it is abuse and two they don't want to talk about it.</p> <p>“I decided to use the Judges 19 text because I do think that sometimes we often sway to the texts that make us feel good and all of those things that give us warmth and fuzziness. And so in seminary</p>	*

	<p>we have this conversation of needing to engage, you know, even the dark side of those scriptures that are difficult to sort of take in.”</p>	
<p>Christian Scholar</p>	<p>She thinks the reality of how to deal with these problematic texts is to address them, be honest about them, push back, and then say, not every text has inspiration in it. The lesson may not be the lesson the author wanted us to get but that is just the fact that you are writing about this story and as the author you didn't call out the problem that then becomes the lesson.</p> <p>The authors want us to read these narratives through their lens. We have to teach people to not do that and not just accept that and to read it and ask questions and not be satisfied.</p> <p>In this specific story, the author refuses to call the woman wife but recognizes the male as a husband so it is husband and concubine. Just in that naming, or labeling, that is kind of doing violence against her in a whole other way and not accurately describing who she is in the text.</p>	<p>*</p>
<p>Rabbi</p>	<p>From where she sits as a conservative Rabbi, she has realized that it is not her job to change or convince another person's belief. It is her job to make sure they have the</p>	<p>*</p>

	space to say what they need without drowning out the stories of others. It isn't that one story is better or more accurate than another, it is that there's space for all of them and we need to figure out how to understand them in a modern context. We can understand them working within each other and how we are being respectful in how we debate about them.	
Jewish Scholar	How do we as enlightened, contemporary, feminist, Jews engage ritually with that material. Do you just read it and not comment? Do you read it in a different way? Do you read it and comment? What is our obligation to those stories? That is why for her, the question is a live one.	*

3.3. Marriage and Divorce

	Marriage	Divorce
Imam	Verse 4:34 provides us with the role and responsibility of the man. He is the provider, maintainer, and protector. That is always in the Nikah. He also has to give a dowry. He thinks there is a balance that needs to be there in the contact having even favoritism between both the man and the woman.	The Quran says that God hates divorce, but if you have to do it, you should do it. God wants couples to exhaust all options to try and stay together because God hates divorce.
Muslim Scholar	The concept in the marriage in Islam is very much about a contract. There are some	There is a whole chapter called <i>Divorce</i> in the Quran. It gives both men and women

	<p>variations in practice because believing also includes the people of the Book.</p> <p>She usually sees this as the laws that are addressing an already patriarchal society, aiming to improve the conditions of women.</p> <p>There is clearly a concept of justice and “the protection of the weaker one” in this power relationship. In that sense, she thinks that the majority of the Quranic conjunctions about marriage are addressed to men to restrict or limit them in their practice with their wives because it used to be unlimited, uncontrolled, and unchecked.</p> <p>It might be seen to favor men, but she thinks behind that the intention is to stop men from oppressing and harassing women.</p>	<p>the right to seek divorce and establishes the procedure. It really gives men limits and puts this leash on them to prevent them from arbitrarily divorcing women or not divorcing them but refusing to have sexual relations with them.</p> <p>The divorce chapter was a result of that type of issue where the pre-Islamic Arabs had this custom of the man saying that his wife was too much like his mother so he would not divorce her but he would refuse to have sexual relations with her, leaving her in this limbo at the mercy of the man.</p>
<p>Minister</p>	<p>“I think of marriage as a unit, I think it was talked about and created to sustain a social advantage. The ability to have sex or produce children, to do so within the sanctity of marriage.”</p> <p>She has seen how marriage and the pursuit of it for those who are not married, especially for women, can be deeply hurtful and how if you are not married there are certain people, especially in the church, who think</p>	<p>The notion that divorce is not allowed is toxic and abusive.</p> <p>When the marriage becomes something that is not healthy for you, she thinks that people think that they can't get a divorce because they have committed to God and done with the presence of God and committed themselves to their partners.</p>

	<p>something is wrong with you.</p> <p>When you are married in the Christian context this is a ritual that you are doing in the presence of God.</p>	
Christian Scholar	*	<p>Marriage is seen as a sacrament in the Catholic tradition. That has driven the idea of marriage being something that you can't break because it's a sacrament. As many denominations as there are, there are probably as many approaches as there are.</p>
Rabbi	*	<i>Agunah</i> - a form of abuse.
Jewish Scholar	*	<i>Agunah</i> - a form of torture, power, and control.

3.4. The Prophets as Role Models

	Jesus	Muhammad
Imam	*	<p>Muhammed demonstrated gentleness with his wives and how he took advice from his wives.</p> <p>For us, we say we follow the tradition of the Prophet. So, in many instances, what we see in our way of life in Islam is that the tradition of the Prophet is not being followed, but the cultures that many of those countries and environments where Islam came to be prominent. We find that the cultures superseded what Islam calls you to and what the Quran</p>

		calls you to. We find that those societies are patriarchal and what has happened is that the culture places the woman in a lower role than the Quran and how the Prophet exalted that in his day-to-day life.
Muslim Scholar	*	<p>He did not have a concern about having a male heir. He could have married again and again until he had a male heir but he didn't.</p> <p>He went against the patriarchal traditions.</p> <p>There are all these examples of how the Prophet did his own housework and he did not expect this role of his wives.</p> <p>The Prophet was very much about expressing his intimacy and his love, his affection for his wives.</p> <p>“The Prophet is kind of combining in himself the right amount of masculine and feminine qualities in the context of his own time.”</p>
Minister	<p>Christians use Jesus as the model of how to live our lives and how to treat other people.</p> <p>Pointing out instances when Jesus was compassionate and the fact that Jesus often pushed the social boundaries of who to sit with, who to care for, who to heal, and highlighting that Jesus's focus</p>	*

	<p>and concern was also with women who society had marginalized and outcast.</p> <p>Naturally, the biblical texts calls us into acts of justice and it is very difficult for her to identify as Christian and not be concerned with matters of justice because that's all what Jesus was doing in the biblical accounts - healing, miracles, providing for people who did not have what they needed.</p>	
Christian Scholar	<p>A focus on his life, and then therefore how he lived compassionately, is the key.</p> <p>It is making those texts central and then helping people not just see them as oh what an interesting text but to give people kind of concrete actions for how they can respond to that. It is making those texts central and then making sure that people have concrete ways of responding to them. So, helping people know how to put that into action rather than just taking it as a nice story. That is what Jesus did. He didn't only teach compassion but in many ways, he taught it by what he did.</p>	*

3.5. God Loves Everyone, Even Abusers?

Imam	<p>One of the things is that they cannot deny an individual.</p> <p>They apprise the people of the situation.</p>
------	---

	<p>If someone is abusive to their wife, the first thing they would recommend is the individual seeking counseling and there needs to be verification that the individual is in counseling or completed counseling in order for them to be a participant.</p>
Muslim Scholar	<p>This is debatable because God does not love oppressors. This is what is said in the Quran. God does not love liars. Love, in the Islamic point of view, is given to the potential human being.</p> <p>When you say “God loves everyone” it is a very Christian understanding where you see that the sacrifice of Jesus was a sign that God loves all and it is not exactly what the Islamic understanding of salvation is like.</p> <p>Everyone is still individually responsible for their moral path and their moral decisions. Who does Allah love is the question that needs to be addressed. In the Islamic tradition it is addressed based on the moral conditions. Obviously you believe in Allah, then you act in a moral way that Allah allows you.</p>
Minister	<p>In christinaity, they believe in the resurrection and that even after death, there is life. Even after something really difficult happens, there is the ability to rise from where you are.</p>
Christian Scholar	<p>The ability to not get into a binary is a helpful model. The challenge is binary and dualism. You're either good or you're evil. The truth is often in the middle.</p>
Rabbi	*
Jewish Scholar	*

3.6. Patriarchal Structures in Religious Texts

Imam	*
Muslim Scholar	<p>“From my experience, I see it as an attempt to bring some moral standards to this patriarchal rule. Instead of, you know, completely turning it upside down, the attempt in the text is to give it some moral standards like limiting the number of marriages, limiting the number of occasions resorting to the use of violence if that can be interpreted as violence, and it is all reminding them that the purpose of family and marriage is to support each other, its mutual responsibility and all these things and what matters is your God consciousness at the end of the day. These things are giving that existing patriarchal system some moral standards and that's what we can achieve to a greater extent. It is so hard to dismantle patriarchy altogether and if we do that it will be replaced with something that is equally authoritative. The purpose is to bring some moral standards to them, to bring justice and</p>

	dignity and those kinds of... centering one's relationship with God in those relationships.”
Minister	*
Christian Scholar	<p>She uses Buddhist scholar Ritta Gross’ image of an onion to think about both texts to say that she thinks that patriarchy is so heavily baked in that if you pull back all the layers you will never get to the true essence of Christian tradition or Jewish tradition because it is all too much a part of the whole.</p> <p>You can never move beyond that because there is so much patriarchy embedded in the pages. So then the question becomes, how do I navigate using patriarchal texts in a way that doesn't continue to promote patriarchy in current contexts?</p>
Rabbi	*
Jewish Scholar	<p>She thinks that the Bible actually does lean into a kind of patriarchal ideology with great intention and that there is a lot of conversation around whether ancient Israel was in fact a patriarchy and if we can use terms like that to describe an ancient culture.</p> <p>She believes that the bible reflects a kind of patriarchal ideology which is how she would think about it and, her research and spending her lifetime thinking about women in the Bible and the structures and how the Bible constructs women and uses women, she believes that the Bible actively invested in protecting masculinity and being weary of women and female power and actively sort of attempting to curtail and limit that power.</p>

3.7. Honor Killings

Imam	<p>“Honor killings come out of culture.”</p> <p>The Quran says to take a life is like taking a life of the whole of humanity and to save a life is like saving the whole of humanity. Applying that logic, the whole idea in Islam is that the most outstanding attribute of God is mercy.</p>
Muslim Scholar	<p>It is more of a cultural thing and you can connect it back to female infanticide, the risk of the honor, and the female members of the tribe threatening the honor of the family. It is very much a tribal tradition, rather than an Islamic tradition.</p> <p>It is a discursive construction where honor killings are made about Islam, whereas in reality, they are about tribal structures, not Islam. In that structure, your religion does not matter, you would still be treated the same way. We see culture being more powerful than religious faith and cultural customs are</p>

	taken more seriously than religious ones, and honor killings are one of those cases.
--	--

3.8. *B'tzelem Elohim, Shalom Bayit, and Tikkun Olam*

	<i>b'tzelem Elohim</i>	<i>Shalom bayit</i>	<i>Tikkun olam</i>
Rabbi	<p>The concept gets overused and kind of starts to lose what it means. The things that get done in the name of can sometimes weaken or strengthen the argument.</p> <p>The concept is interpreted as "the image of God" but we don't know what God looks like. In Judaism we don't have a similar image of God. God is a non physical source.</p> <p>It becomes this catch all and the challenging part is realizing that the abuser is also created b'tzelem Elohim and what does that mean.</p>	<p>Again, this is one of those phrases that you should strive for. You should strive to have your home be a place of peace.</p> <p>For too long, that meant you would stay together for the sake of Shalom bayit and even though these things were happening you needed to maintain Shalom bayit. And it's the woman's job to make sure that the home stays a home.</p>	<p>It has become a rallying piece of progressive Judaism to say that the world is not finished and there are pieces of the world that are broken and just not as they should be. It's our job to make the world better.</p> <p>There is a communal responsibility to take care of people who are abused, to get women out of these situations, and for communities to understand how and why she didn't just leave.</p>
Jewish Scholar	<p>It is the bottom line: everyone is in the image of God and is equal in the image of God.</p> <p>It is a valuable sense of shared humanity but she doesn't think the concept negates a hierarchy or a system of oppression.</p>	<p>It can be used or abused.</p> <p>You could say for your kids to have peace in the home you should get divorced. Everyone in the home receives respect. On the other hand, it can be abused. For Shalom bayit don't challenge your husband's authority. Keeping peace in a household could not necessarily be in the people's interest.</p>	<p>Any system of oppression and violence that we see in our homes and our societies, we want to repair the world and remove them. Removing any kind of oppressive system that relies upon violence, this would demand that we dissolve that system.</p>

Section 4: Interviewee Analysis

This analysis will be using a thematic content analysis of the interview transcripts and data collected from them to find similarities and differences in answers given by interviewees regarding different aspects of scripture in combating VAWG. Thematic content analysis is a form of inductive methodology that allows for the researcher to approach the data without a predetermined framework, identifying common themes as the material is reviewed.

4.1. Mary

Mary was a primary figure in the scripture that was brought up in four of the six interviews. Addressed by both the Islamic Scholar and Imam, Mary is a central figure in the text, being described for her goodness and kindness. Imam El-Amin brought up the debate of whether Mary was a prophet because she was inspired by God. According to the Imam, “you can’t deny that regardless of if you believe that or not, she was inspired by God and she was given certain protections by God.” Based on this information, Mary and her role is an exalted role, that she was able to produce the Prophet, Jesus. This value that is placed on Mary helps elude the value and respect that should be placed on all women in the religious setting.

The Minister made similar comments when asked to address the role of Mary in the Church. She discussed how Mary introduces this Christological narrative in the fact that she has the ability to carry a being that is fully human and fully divine, further emphasizing the authority that is given to her to do that. She focused on Mary and other women in the text's agency and how that should be observed when studying the text. As she stated, “All the women in the text exercise agency and claim it, even the women who are unnamed. Just as they have excessive agency it calls us to mirror the same agency into the present day.”

The Minister also discusses how Mary is one of the main characters in Christian scripture. It is the fact that Mary had the ability to carry a being that is both fully human and fully divine that gives her the power in this context. As the Minister said, it is about the “authority she has to do that.” In the context of strong, female figures, just like any other woman in the text, her ability to walk in the agency in what she does is what is discussed in the VAWG context. Mary had the freedom and agency to do as she chose, not simply because she was the mother of Jesus.

From this discussion of Mary, it can be derived that each religion places a high value on her character in the scripture not only as a mother, but a figure of goodness. While the role of Mary is taught, the value of this female figure in the scripture should be taught in the context of the value of women in general and their power as figures in the religious community and mothers. In both the Christian and Muslim context, the value of Mary as a mother and a figure of goodness is emphasized, which can be brought into both Christian and Muslim spaces in the present day.

4.2. Other Women in the Scriptures

Apart from Mary, women have played an integral role in the establishment of Islam and also in the establishment of human life. There are other stories of women besides Mary and powerful figures. Examples that were introduced by interviewees include the first adherent in Islam. After the Prophet, the first convert to Islam was a woman, the Prophet's wife Khadija, who played a major role in the establishment of Islam. Another figure is Aisha, the most learned in Islam. While they are not really Quranic figures, they play an integral role in the historical evolution of Islam from the beginning and harbour an immense amount of respect for the teachings and continuation of Islam.

From the Christian and Jewish perspective, the central focus on female figures in the text revolved around the idea of agency. Jewish interviewees discussed women like Debrah, a judge, and Queen Bashtai who was asked to come naked to a party and she said no. All the women in the text exercise agency and claim it, even the women who are unnamed. This theme of the agency is exercised by the woman in the text and gives an example to both women and men reading the text, calling on the readers to mirror that same agency in the present day and calling on men to respect that agency.

Addressed by three interviewees, the idea that these stories give feeling and emotion beyond agency is emphasized. The characters are not present in the stories because of their gender but because of their moral actions. As the Muslim scholar discussed, this is what is seen in the Quran: a moral lesson showing that you are expected to do the right thing and are not limited by gender identity in the Quranic stories. This idea of emotion and moral action rather than gender should be emphasized when referencing Mary and women in the text as examples of the value of women. Just as male figures in the stories hold power, so do the women, despite their gender. These moral actions allow for scriptural interpretation to place value on the morals of women. While not directly referencing VAWG, it allows for the value of women to be uplifted in the religious setting.

While these important points on the power of religious female figures were discussed, there was also an emphasis on the degradation of women in scripture, an important aspect of the scripture that must be discussed, beginning with the Holy Bible. Three interviewees discussed the Biblical story of Adam and Eve. In many versions of the story, it is told that the snake seduced Eve, and Eve, in turn, seduced Adam. The Quran, in contrast, says that they were both seduced. In the Biblical version, the story of Adam and Eve gives this prototype of a woman

whose outstanding attribute is that she is a seductress. That story has had a profound effect on subjugating women and their rights and men's control over the female body and image in the modern day religious context. This prototype of women has been taken out of context and has influenced how women are viewed in societies, Muslim, Christian, or Jewish. The contrast between the Islamic, Jewish, and Christian story should be used to emphasize the array of ways Adam and Eve can be interpreted, moving away from the seductress perspective of Eve, to a less gender conforming understanding of the story.

Another note brought up by three scholars is the risk of essentializing certain characteristics of the women in the text as it can lead to the perpetuation of patriarchal systems. For example, the Muslim scholar stated they “are praised in the tradition, their motherhood, virginity, obedience, chastity. If they become essential to a woman's character, that simply repeats or perpetuates that patriarchal system that keeps women in the passive position and men in the active position.” Keeping this in mind, the high power of women in religious history and scripture can be a key point in discussing the value that is placed on women in the religious space. In all three religions, the value of different female figures along with Mary is essential to not only increasing the respect and value placed on women within independent religious communities, but also when discussing the overarching issue of VAWG in religious and secular peacebuilding spaces.

4.3. The Controversial Verses

The two scriptures that were discussed by scholars as the main justifications for VAWG were Judges 19: The Story of the Unnamed Woman in the Old Testament and Surah An-Nisa-4:34 in the Quran. Beginning with Verse 4:34, the first aspect noted was that the Quran was revealed in Arabic and the translation of the text can be different because the Arabic

language is so expansive. The translation of the Surah is essential to the understanding of its use mainly because of the debated word *daraba*. The first meaning of this word when you look in the dictionary is “heal.” Other translations even translate it to mean “feather.” In one translation it translates to strength, meaning physically strong. It could also translate to men who are standing up to their responsibilities.

Three scholars noted that people have twisted the meaning of this verse because of cultural exposure or lack of exposure to the Quran, being used by both enemies of Islam and enemies of the true teachings of Islam. The Imam explained that his context for understanding this verse is in the separation of the bed, meaning that a relationship can be healed through the separation of the bed.

Two scholars acknowledge the context in which the verse is revealed, referencing the contemporary context at the time. For this specific scripture, it is important to note not only the historical context, but also if it is a Meccan Surah or a Madinan Surah. In this case, Verse 4:34 was revealed after the Hijrah, making the context with the Prophet and his wives and disorganizations happening within the confines of that house.

An important note that is brought to attention by four scholars is if the verses truly mean what is argued. What if *daraba* in Verse 4:34 means hit? Once that question is raised, the reader must decide what their position or relationship is with the text as a feminist, or mainly, as a human. Scholars argued that despite the meaning of the verse, as scholars and practitioners, we must interpret the verse using an understanding of the overall teachings of the text. As stated by the Muslim scholar, “At the end of the day, it does not matter that much because that is not the Quranic community that was established by the Prophet. We do not see women being oppressed in that society, they were actually quite powerful and even men were complaining that Islam was

giving too much power to women in that time period.” The Quran is telling men that there is only Allah who is powerful, you do not have that power so do not be a tyrannical father and husband to your wife and children. This is an important way of understanding where you stand in relation to what these controversial verses could mean.

In Christian and Jewish texts, the scripture that is mostly used as an example of VAWG is Judges 19 in the Hebrew Bible. Again, the idea of context and interaction with the text in the present day is discussed. The Minister notes that some might not even know that things like this happen in the modern-day and have been happening for some time. Even in the naming of the story, violence is committed against the woman. The author refuses to call the woman wife but recognizes the male as a husband, so it is husband and concubine. Just in that naming, or labeling, we can see an act of oppression or dehumanizing the woman in the story, acknowledging the psychological aspect of VAWG.

It was discussed that these texts should be approached by changing the narrative of how we relate to the text. For example, with Judges 19, rather than seeing it as a condemnation of VAWG, it should be seen more as demonstrating that at a point in time this is the way women were treated and give direction on how to change that, which requires both religious leaders and practitioners to change their perspectives to note that this action against women is not okay. Furthering this idea, the Biblical text is meant to be interpreted and it is the work of present-day people to interpret the text. Part of the responsibility of the practitioner is acknowledging that the narrative is not condoning violence but it is holding up a mirror to how we are treating women and girls in the present day, letting the community know that the condition of women and girls is still not where it needs to be.

All religious leaders discussed that for people of faith who ascribe to any of the Abrahamic faith, it must be acknowledged that not everything is good and there is this sense of relativity or commitment to the faith where the aim is to make things better and not repeat things that have been done in the past. As discussed by the Christian scholar, a lot of the history of the Abrahamic faiths is not discussed or acknowledged, making one of the steps necessary the acknowledgment of the problem at hand. Furthermore, Dr. Weddle discusses how reading against the text and pushback must also be taught. Just as context is important, so are perspectives. The authors of these texts want us to read these narratives through their lens. Rather than that, it must be taught that practitioners should not just accept that perspective, but rather ask questions.

Another way of approaching the text was brought up by the Christian Scholar, as she stated, that the lesson from this text might not be the same as the author had originally intended, but it is our responsibility to interpret the text based on our contemporary understandings. The fact that the author wrote Judges 19 and did not call out the wrongdoings within it becomes the lesson. The author used this story to say the people had fallen so far away from the ideas that God had for them that they should move from having a judge to having a King (Israel should have kings because the whole way of judges was not working and you can see this spiral going down) and she wants to say do not accept that as the message for us. Instead, look at how the author used this failing to call out the problem here for this particular woman.

The main factor in the discussion of controversial verses in the present day is the environment in which they are discussed. If the environment is of scholars who know the text and the interpretation of the Quran, it is easier to talk about controversial verses naturally. In a political situation, where it is more blame than understanding, it is difficult to talk with these

people because that is not what scripture should be used for, it's not a weapon, it is a tool to be a better person and go down the moral path.

Mainly, these verses do not define the whole scripture. The overall message and teachings of the Quran and Hebrew Bible should be looked at when understanding the message of the texts. All scripture should be interpreted with the spirit that the Quran and Hebrew Bible does not intend to harm people, to hurt women, and it would never tell men that you can beat your wife.

4.4. Marriage and Divorce

Marriage and divorce practices can have a large impact on the freedoms of women and girls in religious and cultural communities. Marriage and divorce practices were discussed with scholars and religious leaders to gain a better understanding of how they can be used to give women and girls more freedom in the domestic context.

In Islam, it is important to note that while the standards of equality in Islamic marriage practice do not meet the standards of modern feminist expectations of equality, they aim to create an equal field between a man and a woman. There is clearly a concept of justice and “the protection of the weaker one” in the power relationship. In that sense, the majority of the Quranic conjunctions about marriage are addressed to men to restrict or limit them in their practice with their wives because it used to be unlimited, uncontrolled, and unchecked. Therefore, Quranic marriage practice might be seen to favor men, but Muslim interviews argued that the intention is to stop men from oppressing and harassing women. This view of Islamic marriage practice should be emphasized when teaching these verses. Rather than seeing it as the man having the power, it should be viewed as addressing the man's limit on his power in the relationship.

In Islam, the *Nikah* contract can be seen as a way of suppressing a women's autonomy in her marriage. Alternatively, as discussed by scholars, it also brings balance to the relationship and an understanding of the roles and responsibilities in contemporary time. There are certain concepts that can be derived from a *Nikah* contract, like the *Meher*, the practice of dowry, that can be used to give value and protection to the woman. The Islamic principle requires that the money is given directly to the woman and she keeps it, which is a great point that needs to be emphasized in marriage contracts to not make women suffer financial dependence on the husband. It could be argued that the payment to a woman could be seen as prostitution. Although, that is very un-Islamic and the idea of marriage in Islam is about finding mutual support, not just sexually, but emotionally as well.

In Judaism, limits to a woman's freedom within marriage brought up the concept of an *Agunah* with the clear distinction that there are many different ways of practicing Judaism. This is a form of abuse that is seen in the Orthodox community and others. Leaving a woman in a place where she cannot get a divorce under Jewish law is a form of torture, power, and control. There are women who have been in the status of *Agunah* for decades. This is a form of abuse because it allows for the emotional and psychological manipulation of a woman to continue well after anything else has ended. Therefore, rather than the issue of abuse being in the marriage, the issue comes at the time of divorce. Having conversations about emotional and psychological forms of abuse like being an *Agunah* are essential for youth to understand the importance of respecting women in marriage and even in cases of divorce.

The Quran includes a chapter about divorce. It gives both men and women the right to seek divorce and establishes the procedure. There are the recommendations of stages to avoid this decision as much as one can. Examples of these steps include seeking arbitration, spending

some time apart, and then coming back together. There are also rules to protect women such as the amount of times a man can divorce his wife which gives men limits to prevent them from arbitrarily divorcing women or not divorcing them but refusing to have sexual relations with them. In this chapter, it is stated that the Quran says that God hates divorce. Although, God hates divorce in the sense that God wants couples to exhaust all options to try and stay together, but if you must, you can. Based on this understanding, if a man is abusive, a woman should receive a divorce because abuse is a legitimate reason.

In Christianity, the idea of marriage is more of a unit, the ability to have sex or produce children within the sanctity of marriage. In the Christian context, marriage is a ritual done in the presence of God. In the case of divorce, the Minister discussed the belief that people believe they cannot get divorced because they committed themselves to God and the ceremony was done with the presence of God. Although, this notion that you cannot divorce a partner who is toxic and abusive because of this fear of a broken relationship with God was agreed to be abusive in the struggle it gives women in the relationship with God but also as a victim of abuse. Marriage is a covenant that you have entered and you or your partner acting in this abusive way breaks the covenant. It is not something that you are doing that you are affecting your relationship with God. This is a covenant that has been broken and you have the capacity and agency to do something about it.

Furthermore, the topic of how deeply hurtful the pursuit of marriage is was discussed by both Jewish and Christian interviewees because of the assumption that if you are not married by a certain age, there is something wrong with you, rather than accepting the agency of women to be able to marry, if or whenever they want. Furthermore, the sexism within the marriage pursuit was also discussed in the interview with the Rabbi, in which we discussed how when she and her

colleagues would go to congregations for Shabbat visits or to be a featured speaker, questions were always directed to the women and never the men. They were bombarded with questions like “Are you married?” “Do you have a boyfriend?” “Can I connect you with my grandson? He’s single, are you single?” “You’re so pretty, are you sure you want to be a Rabbi?” “You look so young to be a Rabbi.”

While marriage and divorce practices today are heavily influenced by civil law and civil courts, many still have a strong impact on the psychological and emotional wellbeing of women within heterosexual marriages. It is important to discuss these topics in relation to religious marriage practices and change the narratives around leaving an abusive partner.

4.5. The Prophets as Role Models

Jesus and Prophet Muhammed were used as examples of the proper treatment of women during interviews. Using scriptural stories that point out instances when Jesus was compassionate, interviewees highlighted that Jesus's focus and concern was with women who society had marginalized and outcasted. This includes highlighting and preaching about the narratives around menstruation and other gendered topics through Jesus’ compassionate lens, taking these stories from the perspective that this is not a woman who is struggling, but rather someone who had been marginalized by society.

These stories can be used to empower women without perpetuating the essentialization of qualities such as motherhood or purity. Motherhood in itself is not a moral action or gives a woman value. An example of this can be found in the stories of the Prophet's wives in Islam. Only two of the Prophet's wives were mothers, the rest did not bear children with the Prophet. He also did not have a concern about having a male heir. Both of the Prophet's sons died as infants and his only child to survive was Fatima, who maintained her line until today. The Prophet went

against patriarchal traditions with his wives and children and his wives were still held in high esteem. Furthermore, regarding the concept of virginity and purity, the Prophet's wives were widows and not virgins, apart from his last wife Ayesha. This shows that this is not something the Prophet sets as a moral character or moral standard. It is characteristics like these that became major characteristics that these figures are praised for when in reality that was not the case, furthering the solidification of the women's position in the private sphere and their exclusion in the public sphere.

Prophet Muhammad's treatment of his wives is the best display of the treatment of women in the modern context. The Prophet was gentle with his wives. He took their advice from his wives on how to do certain things, even in regards to how to move his community and get the community to do certain things. In the Surah, there is documentation of his wife making suggestions and him adhering to those suggestions. Furthermore, there are examples of the Prophet doing his own housework and not expecting this role of his wives, which is another example of the Prophet going against patriarchal norms. The Prophet also expressed his intimacy, love, and affection for his wives, especially in the story of Ayesha and how their affection was not something to be ashamed of but rather shared.

Outside of the Prophet's treatment of his wives, his being and presentation of his morals to his people can be used as an example of deconstructing modern-day gender norms. The Prophet was not this macho figure. While he was a commander and leader of his community and fought when necessary, he was not a macho character in Islamic tradition. As stated by the Muslim scholar, "the Prophet is kind of combining in himself the right amount of masculine and feminine qualities in the context of his own time."

It is said that you follow the tradition of the Prophet. Therefore, the life of Muslims should follow the Prophet's examples in the treatment of their spouses. Although, in many instances, when the way of the Prophet is not followed, it is because of the cultures that many of the countries and environments where Islam came to be prominent. Three interviewees mentioned the fact that cultures superseded what Islam calls you to and what the Quran calls you to. Furthermore, the emphasis on the patriarchal structures of those societies and the culture places the woman in a lower role than the Quran and how the Prophet exalted that in his day-to-day life.

Jesus and Prophet Muhammed set examples for the treatment of women in society and within domestic relations. These examples supersede specific scripture and should be used when interpreting scripture.

4.6. God Loves Everyone, Even Abusers?

The idea that God loves everyone was discussed with interviewees in the context of asking if God loves abusers or oppressors. From the Muslim perspective, the Imam spoke of not being able to deny an individual, but rather tell the people of the community of the situation. When asked how to approach an abuser in the community, he elaborated on the steps needed to take. The first thing they would recommend is the individual seeking counseling and there needs to be verification that the individual is in counseling or completed counseling in order for them to be a participant. On the opposing side, the Muslim Scholar discussed how God does not love oppressors or liars, as stated in the Quran. Love, in the Islamic point of view, is given to the potential human being. God loves human beings as a species, but he also puts them through the test of life to see if they deserve this love. If you kill, steal, or oppress, God does not love those kinds of mischievous humans.

From the Jewish perspective, both the victim and the abuser have shared humanity and that affords them a degree of respect. It does not mean that justice should not be administered.

From the Christian perspective, the idea of evil was discussed. Like the Jewish perspective, the ability to not get into a binary is a helpful model. Minister Henderson-Edwards discussed the idea of redemption. In Christianity, the belief that even after death, there is life translates to this, that even after something really difficult happens, there is the ability to rise from where you are. Mainly, within the congregation, there is immediate care comprehensively for the victim and holding abusers accountable. The Minister referenced Wesleyan theology that talks about how we are broken humanity. She also references the Genesis text of Adam and Eve and the apple, speaking on how everything changed and because of that people have free will and will someone act in a way that God did not intend. We understand that people, just as they are capable of love, they are also capable of harming others (acting of their free will). After a violation has been made, understanding that there is a way to care for the victim and there is a way to care for the abuser.

In a differentiation between Islam and Christianity, the term “God loves everyone” is a very Christian understanding, seeing that the sacrifice of Jesus was a sign that God loves all. This differs from the Islamic understanding of salvation, where everyone is still individually responsible for their moral path and their moral decisions. In this case, an abuser would not be loved equally by Allah compared to a victim.

4.7. Patriarchal Structures in Religious Texts

“I always like to make the distinction..., between the world that created the Bible and the world the Bible creates.” - Dr. Kendra Weddle

Scholars note that religious texts are literary work that create their own context and environment. It is important to note that the world that the text creates does not necessarily look exactly like the world in which the text came from. For example, the Bible is painting a picture of life in ancient Israel that has an ideological framework.

Specific to the Bible, many argue that the patriarchal structures reflected in the Bible are the patriarchy of the ancient world. Although, Dr. Kalmanofsky argues against this, stating that she believes that the Bible does lean into a kind of patriarchal ideology with great intention. She believes that the Bible actively invested in protecting masculinity and being wary of women and female power and actively sort of attempting to curtail and limit that power. That is why she would say there is a true patriarchal ideology in the Bible.

There was also the discussion of gender differentiation in the Bible and its commitment to the gender binary. It wants men to behave like men and women to behave like women, making women who behave like men are problematic and men who behave like women are problematic. Furthermore, it is invested in the gender hierarchy and protecting the males place in power and control over women. Although, given this, it is important to note how many women have remarkable roles in the Bible. They are the ones that ensure that the next generation is born, which is what the story is ultimately about. For example, women ensured that the great savior of the Israelite people is saved. Once you start to peel away the layers, interviewees felt as though the women in the Bible are constructed as powerful figures.

Dr. Kalmanofsky also argues that we cannot use our own language and perspective when describing an ancient culture. She believes that ancient Israel did have patriarchal structures in the sense that women were of the second class status both in terms of the positions of leadership or the positions within the family structure and politically in terms of who are the elders of the

community were and who wielded the power (kings, priests, etc.). Furthermore, they were second class status religiously in terms of who has access to God and the cult that surrounds God.

Similar to that, the Islamic Scholar discussed the patriarchal grounds that the Quran sits on. She discussed how the Quran attempts to bring some justice to the patriarchal society in which it was written. Instead of completely turning it upside down, the attempt in the text is to give it some moral standards such as limiting the number of marriages, limiting the number of occasions resorting to the use of violence if that can be interpreted as violence, and it is all reminding them that the purpose of family and marriage is to support each other, its mutual responsibility and what matters is your God consciousness. These rules and guiding principles are giving that existing patriarchal system some moral standards and that's what we can achieve to a greater extent.

The Christian Scholar referenced Buddhist Scholar Ritta Gross in her answer, who works to answer the question “Is there Buddhism after patriarchy?” The image she described is helpful:

Religion is like an onion and all of its layers. If those layers represent patriarchy, if you were to peel all those layers of patriarchy back, when you get to the core of the onion, do you have true religion, or is patriarchy so much a part of the onion of the religion that what you have at the core is not true religion.

Dr. Weddle uses that imagery to think about the texts and their relation to patriarchal structures. She believes that the patriarchy is so heavily baked into the text that if you pull back all the layers you will never get to the true essence of Christian tradition or Jewish tradition because it is too much part of the whole. To her, the question then becomes how do you navigate using patriarchal texts in a way that doesn't continue to promote patriarchy in current contexts.

These contexts of the scripture become important when interpreting scripture. As discussed in previous sections, all scripture is living and should be interpreted based on the context in which it is being read. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the underlying patriarchal structures of the scripture when interpreting the text to not only avoid a gender binary, but also understand how the scripture relates to modern feminist perspectives.

4.8. Honor Killings

“Scripture is not enough, there is a whole tradition of interpreting that scripture, and that is kind of based on these systems of education that were all disrupted with colonialism and modernity so Muslims had to find new ways of dealing with their scriptures.”

- Dr. Semiha Topal

Honor killings are used as an excuse to target and isolate the Islamic community. Both scholars agreed that “honor killings come out of culture.” Honor killings come from culture and can connect back to female infanticide, the risk of the honor, and the female members of the tribe threatening the honor of the family.

The Quran says to take a life is like taking a life of the whole of humanity and to save a life is like saving the whole of humanity. Applying that logic in Islam, the most outstanding attribute of God is mercy, the Quran starting with “In Gods name the Merciful Compassionate, the Merciful Redeemer, The Merciful Benefactor.” If this is the most outstanding belief of God in the Quran, there is no room for honor killings or the justification of such.

When discussing connections in the Quran, the only remote connection that could be found in scripture is *Zina* (adultery) which is a *hudud* crime. Although, the rules about adultery in the *hudud* punishment in classical Islamic law cannot give way to honor killings.

It is a discursive construction where honor killings are made about Islam, whereas in reality, they are about tribal structures, not Islam. In that structure, your religion does not matter, you would still be treated the same way. We see culture being more powerful than religious faith and honor killings are one of those cases.

4.9. *B'tzelem Elohim, Shalom Bayit, and Tikkun Olam*

The following three beliefs stem from the Jewish tradition.

B'tzelem Elohim can be used to help teach equal respect and dignity to that of a man and a woman. Everyone is in the image of God and is equal in the image of God. The belief was described to be a valuable sense of shared humanity. At its core, coming from genesis and some of the very first lines within the Torah, it is a cornerstone of who the Jewish people are, what they do, and how they navigate through the world.

Shalom bayit, meaning peace in the home, can be used to combat domestic violence. Along with this, it means that everyone in the home receives respect. All should strive to have your home be a place of peace. In history, this meant that spouses would stay together for the sake of *Shalom bayit* even though abuse was happening or it would mean that you must maintain *Shalom bayit* despite abuse. Furthermore, it can be used to justify women's submissive position in the home by saying that it is the woman's job to make sure the home stays a home. In the past 20-25 years, there has really been a shift of sometimes *Shalom bayit* means that a couple is not together. If divorce means that there would be peace in the home, divorce should be accepted. Judaism fully embraces divorce as a meaningful and sometimes necessary part of a marriage.

Contradicting the above statements, it is also important to note that you can recognize that people are *b'tzelem Elohim* but that does not abandon violent social structures. For *Shalom*

bayit, it could be used to say not to challenge a husband's authority. Keeping peace in a household could not necessarily be in the people's interest.

Tikkun olam, referring to acts of social responsibility, can translate to a way of respecting women in the household and in daily life. This belief means the effort to remove any system of oppression and violence that we see in homes and society and repair the world. This belief has become a rallying piece of progressive Judaism to say that the world is not finished and there are pieces of the world that are broken and not as they should be. This includes helping prevent violence, creating awareness, and making sure all faith communities have access to education about VAWG and the resources to help people in these relationships, the community, and the people themselves. There is a communal responsibility to take care of people who are abused, to get women out of these situations, and for communities to understand how and why victims should not have to face the journey of freedom alone.

Section 5: Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that both scripture and faith customs and practices not only overlap, but have a profound impact on the perceptions of VAWG in religious communities. The initial goal of this study was to understand how scripture can be used to combat violence against women and girls by intervieweing religious leaders and scholars and finding covariation between their beliefs and answers about scripture and religious practice. It can be concluded that there is overlap in understandings of female figures, prophets as leaders, practices in daily life, and the understandings of verses used to justify violence. These results show that there is a need for communication and overlap between faith leaders in peacebuilding spaces in the future when discussing ways to combat VAWG in their communities.

For years, religion and scripture has been used as a weapon rather than a tool for individuals to follow a moral path. By approaching scripture with a moral purpose, we are able to find common points beyond basic knowledge. Religions have a moral purpose and the adherents of religions must assert that moral aspect more than the intellectual aspect when studying scripture. It is possible to find distasteful parts of all texts, even in the modern ones, but instead of fighting to see which religion is the true religion or the holiest, we should focus on how these beliefs can be used to make our societies more caring through these moral principles.

Section 6: References

- Administrator. "Origins of Tikkun Olam." new header. Accessed June 1, 2022.
<https://www.betheltemplecenter.org/tikkun-olam/323-origins-of-tikkun-olam>.
- Ali, Kecia. "The Feminist Sexual Ethics Project." Understanding a Difficult Verse, Qur'an 4:34 | Muslim Sexual Ethics | The Feminist Sexual Ethics Project | Brandeis University. Brandeis University, February 11, 2003.
<https://www.brandeis.edu/projects/fse/muslim/diff-verse.html>.
- Beck, Erin, and Amir Mohamed. "A Body Speaks: State, Media, and Public Responses to Femicide in Guatemala." *Laws* 10, no. 3 (2021): 73.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/laws10030073>.
- Benebo, Faith Owunari, Barbara Schumann, and Masoud Vaezghasemi. "Intimate Partner Violence against Women in Nigeria: A Multilevel Study Investigating the Effect of Women's Status and Community Norms." *BMC Women's Health* 18, no. 1 (2018).
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-018-0628-7>.
- Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs. "Religious Responses to Domestic Abuse during the COVID-19 Pandemic." Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, June 1, 2020.
<https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/posts/religious-responses-to-domestic-abuse-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>.
- Cole, Diane. "U.N. Report: 50,000 Women a Year Are Killed by Intimate Partners, Family Members." NPR. NPR, November 30, 2018.
<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/11/30/671872574/u-n-report-50-000-women-a-year-are-killed-by-intimate-partners-family-members>.
- "Devastatingly Pervasive: 1 in 3 Women Globally Experience Violence." World Health Organization. World Health Organization, March 9, 2021.
<https://www.who.int/news/item/09-03-2021-devastatingly-pervasive-1-in-3-women-globally-experience-violence>.
- "Facts and Figures: Ending Violence against Women." UN Women – Headquarters. Accessed May 31, 2022.

- <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>.
- Fortune, Rev. Dr. Marie M., and Rabbi Cindy G. Enger. "Violence Against Women and the Role of Religion." National Electronic Network on Violence Against Women, March 2005.
- "Frequently Asked Questions: Types of Violence against Women and Girls." UN Women – Headquarters. Accessed May 31, 2022.
<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/faqs/types-of-violence>.
- "Gender-Based Violence: Jewish Values & Positions." Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. Accessed June 1, 2022.
<https://rac.org/gender-based-violence-jewish-values-positions>.
- "Global and Regional Estimates - World Health Organization." World Health Organization. World Health Organization, 2013.
https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/85239/9789241564625_eng.pdf?sequence=1.
- Government of Canada, Department of Justice. "Preliminary Examination of so-Called 'Honour Killings' in Canada." Apparent Modern-Day Incidence in Canada - Preliminary Examination of so-called Honour Killings in Canada, December 8, 2021.
<https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/hk-ch/p2.html>.
- "International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women." United Nations. United Nations, November 2021.
<https://www.un.org/en/observances/ending-violence-against-women-day>.
- Kamaruddin, Zaleha, and Umar A Oseni. "Between Ideals and Reality: Violence against Women and the Real Image of Women in Islam," 2020.
- Kishor, Sunita and Kiersten Johnson. 2004. Profiling Domestic Violence – A Multi-Country Study. Calverton, Maryland: ORC Macro.
- Kress, Rabbi Alex. "Confronting Violence and Injustice Against Women." Reform Judaism, July 23, 2022.
<https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/torah-commentary/confronting-violence-and-injustice-against-women>.
- Kulczycki, Andrzej, and Sarah Windle. "Honor Killings in the Middle East and North Africa." Violence Against Women 17, no. 11 (2011): 1442–64.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801211434127>.
- Lawson, Jennifer. "Sociological Theories of Intimate Partner Violence." Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment 22, no. 5 (2012): 572–90.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2011.598748>.
- Leavitt, Sarah. "Religious Teachings About Violence Against Women", BC Association of Specialized Victim Assistance and Counselling Programs, Winter Newsletter, March 2003.
- Masood, Anisa. "Ending Domestic Abuse A Guide for Mosques and the Muslim Community." Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence Partnership, 2020.
- Moder, Ally. "What Does the Bible Say about Domestic Abuse?" The Junia Project. The Junia Project, October 12, 2017. <https://juniaproject.com/bible-say-domestic-violence/>.
- Mogahed, Dalia, Tesneem AlKiek, and Jonathan Brown. "Islam and Violence Against Women: A Critical Look at Domestic Violence and Honor Killings in the Muslim Community." Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, May 27, 2017.

- My Jewish Learning. "Tikkun Olam: Repairing the World." My Jewish Learning, February 14, 2019. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/tikkun-olam-repairing-the-world/>.
- Myeni, Thabi. "Our Bodies Are Crime Scenes': South Africa's Murdered Women." Women | Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera, June 5, 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/6/5/our-bodies-are-crime-scenes-south-africas-murdered-women>.
- Povoledo, Elisabetta. "Pope Says High Number of Domestic Violence Cases Is 'Almost Satanic'." The New York Times. The New York Times, December 20, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/20/world/europe/pope-domestic-violence-almost-satanic.html>.
- Power, Carla. "What the Koran Really Says about Women." The Telegraph. Telegraph Media Group, September 15, 2015. <http://s.telegraph.co.uk/graphics/projects/koran-carla-power/index.html>.
- Reuters. "Domestic Violence Increased in 7 Countries after Pandemic Lockdowns ..." US News. US News, December 19, 2021. <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2021-02-25/domestic-violence-increased-in-7-countries-after-pandemic-lockdowns-review-finds>.
- Roberts, Abigail. "Video of Father Beating Daughter to Death in so-Called 'Honor Killing' Sparks Protests in Jordan and Online." ABC News. ABC News Network, July 23, 2020. <https://abcnews.go.com/International/video-father-beating-daughter-death-called-honor-killing/story?id=71903071>.
- UN General Assembly, *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*, 20 December 1993, A/RES/48/104.
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. "When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence against Women." USCCB. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2002. <https://www.usccb.org/topics/marriage-and-family-life-ministries/when-i-call-help-pastoral-response-domestic-violence>.
- "Violence against Women Must Stop; Five Stories of Strength and Survival || UN News." United Nations. United Nations, November 24, 2021. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/11/1106322>.
- "Violence against Women." World Health Organization. World Health Organization, March 9, 2021. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>.
- "What Is Domestic Abuse?" United Nations. United Nations. Accessed June 1, 2022. <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/what-is-domestic-abuse>.
- What Is the Role of Scriptural Interpretation on Violence against Women in Islam, and How Can Misinterpretations Be Countered? The Forum on Human Rights at The Carter Center. Carter Center, 2017. <https://forum.cartercenter.org/media/scriptural-interpretation-and-violence-against-women-islam>.
- "What the Bible Says about Domestic Violence." SAFER. SAFER, 2021. https://www.saferesource.org.au/the_bible_on_domestic_family_violence.
- "WHO Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Prevention and Response." World Health Organization, March 2017.
- Zakaria Yahya Ibn Sharaf An Nawawi, Abu. Riyad as-Salihin. New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2014.

Section 7: Interviewees

Muslim Faith Leader: *Imam Earl El-Amin (he/him)*

Identifies as Muslim and does not ascribe to a sect

Bio: Imam El-Amin is the Resident Imam at the Muslim Community Cultural Center of Baltimore and also serves as Vice President of Program Development at the National Centers on Institutions and Alternatives, a human services organization. Imam Earl S. El-Amin was raised and educated in the Baltimore Metropolitan area and is a graduate of Morgan State University and Sojourner Douglass College. Imam El-Amin was a member of several distinguished delegations accompanying Imam Wallace D. Mohamed abroad, representing Muslim American interests; he was a participant in the first historic dialogue between Imams and Rabbis in North America, and also was present at President Barack Obama's presentation to Muslim leadership in Baltimore.

Interview Background: Imam El-Amin described his knowledge of VAWG by being confronted with it all the time in the patriarchal society we are part of, manifested neighborhoods, movies, and elsewhere.

Muslim Scholar: *Dr. Semiha Topal (she/her)*

Identifies as Muslim under the Sunni practice

Bio: Semiha Topal received her PhD in 2012 from Arizona State University in Religious Studies. She holds an MA degree in Gender Studies and Religion from SOAS-University of London in the UK. Dr. Topal's research focuses on the question of subjectivity, self-construction and women's agency in contemporary Muslim societies, particularly Turkey and the Middle East. Her current research examines women and piety in Islam, focusing on cases of de-veiling in Turkey. She teaches courses on introduction to Islam, women and gender in Islam, and Islam & secularism and tries to provide empirically-grounded contributions to the complex interactions between religious identity and women's agency.

Interview Background: Dr. Semiha Topal was not introduced to the topics of VAWG in school. She comes from a conservative family in Turkey. Growing up, it was not scandalous for women to be hit by their fathers, husbands, or brothers for alleged transgressions. It was a method of discipline and punishment. Because of that role, the male is seen as being responsible for the female members of the household and given that privilege and thinks it is their right as a father and a husband to discipline their wife or their daughter. It is very much within the framework of the discipline. She began studying it in her studies of gender, women's studies, and activism. To her, violence is more about

cultural norms and traits that can sometimes be justified with the texts. She did not learn VAWG in her religious upbringing, but there are some hints of the limits.

Jewish Faith Leader: *Rabbi Abbi Sharofsky (she/her)*

Identifies as Jewish and a Conservative Rabbi

Bio: Rabbi Abbi Sharofsky is the JCRC's Director of Intergroup Relations/JCRC Rabbi in Residence. She studied at the Jewish Theological Seminary and was ordained in 2012. Rabbi Sharofsky also holds a master's degree from the Davidson School of Jewish Education at the Jewish Theological Seminary, specializing in experiential Jewish education. She previously served as deputy director of the Jewish Welfare Board Jewish Chaplains Council. Rabbi Sharofsky is the recipient of the 2016 JPRO Network Young Professional Award for her dedication to the Jewish community through her work in the Jewish not for profit field. She is a Rabbin Without Borders fellow and currently serves on the Executive Council of the Rabbinical Assembly.

Interview Background: Sharofsky was never made aware of different forms of VAWG in her childhood but was simply taught that abuse was bad. In her Hebrew school education, these topics were not discussed. Through personal experiences, Rabbi Sharofsky became well versed in VAWG, and joined Jewish Women International in college who have done a lot of work with VAWG and Gender Power Based Violence. She elaborates on the fact that most people in the Rabbinical community can recognize that when someone is being physically abused that is a problem. It is the psychological and emotional abuse that still needs to be recognized and understood.

Jewish Scholar: *Dr. Amy Kalmanofsky (she/her)*

Identifies as Jewish and does not ascribe to a sect

Bio: Dr. Amy Kalmanofsky, Blanche and Romie Shapiro Professor of Bible, is dean of Albert A. List College of Jewish Studies, JTS's undergraduate school, and dean of the Gershon Kekst Graduate School. Previously, Dr. Kalmanofsky was associate vice chancellor, serving as an ambassador for JTS, teaching in communities across North America, building relationships with supporters, and sharing the impact of JTS on the Jewish world. As professor of Bible, she teaches courses on biblical literature, religion, and feminist interpretation of the Bible. In her writing and teaching, Dr. Kalmanofsky combines contemporary ideas and critical methods with traditional text study, teaching students to be careful, creative interpreters of Torah.

Interview Background: Dr. Kalmanofsky discussed how she became aware of VAWG through growing up and seeing movies, TV shows, etc. Because she was raised in and inhabited spaces that were very much in conversation with secular culture, life, and feminism, the values of education, and general values of western civilization, she thinks that in the same way she has always been aware of VAWG, she has always been in a

context that is critical. She has always been in spaces that have feminist values and have been critical of the kind of conservative perspective of the Bible.

Christian Faith Leader: *Minister Camille Henderson-Edwards (she/her)*

Identifies as a Protestant Christian Reverend

Bio: Camille Henderson-Edwards is a 2015 graduate of Spelman College, where she completed a host of international service learning and research projects to examine the role of religion in the mitigation of child sex trafficking in the Metro-Atlanta area. Camille later obtained her Masters of Divinity as one of five Robert W. Woodruff Fellows at Candler School of Theology, Emory University. Camille is currently pursuing ordination within the United Methodist Church and serves as an Assistant Minister at Cascade United Methodist Church in Atlanta, GA. Camille is working towards serving as a public theologian, examining the faith community's role in addressing domestic and international human rights.

Interview Background: Minister Henderson-Edwards was raised by her grandmother with her cousin within the Black Church, her grandmother being very involved. The topics of VAWG were not discussed in her community. She described that being able to identify what abuse is was something that the community has struggled with. She was a political science major with a religious studies minor, passionate about the intersection of religion and human rights, particularly in gender-based violence throughout the African Diaspora. She went to Seminary because she wanted to develop a more practical understanding of how to care for women and girls who are going through major life events.

Christian Scholar: *Dr. Kendra Weddle (she/her)*

Identifies as a Progressive Christian and is a member of the United Methodist Church

Bio: Dr. Kendra Weddle, currently the Scholar-in-Residence at Northaven Church, has a Ph.D. in Religion from Baylor University. Her expertise includes spirituality, feminism and religion, biblical and/or theological reflections, intersections of Christianity and culture, and Interfaith trends. She has significant teaching experience as a tenured professor of Religion at Texas Wesleyan University, a tenured associate professor of Religion at George Fox University, and an adjunct professor of Religion at Texas Christian University. Her work entails building bridges across various branches of Christianity. Her academic interests include the intersections of gender and religion as well as interfaith collaboration.

Interview Background: Dr. Kendra Weddle grew up in a religious household. Her family was very involved in the United Methodist Church. Church loomed large in her formative years. Topics of VAWG were never discussed in her upbringing, education, or religious community. She did not have any exposure to these topics until her Ph.D. work.

Acknowledgments

I am endlessly grateful for the guidance, mentorship, and assistance of Mehmet Saracoglu and Ibrahim Anli throughout my time with Rumi Forum. I am grateful to all the interviewees of the different faith groups that took the time to meet with me and speak with me during interviews and follow-up meetings. I learned so much about different faith practices and their overlap. Each conversation and the kindness and openness of each interviewee will stay with me forever.

About the Author

Sascha Shroff was born and raised in Dallas, Texas before moving to Washington, D.C. for college. Sascha is a rising junior at American University's School of International Service where she is earning her degree in International Studies. She specializes in Peace, Global Security, and Conflict Resolution and Foreign Policy and National Security with a regional specialization in the Middle East and North Africa. She is part of the prestigious School of International Service Honors Program. Beforehand, she attended Alcuin School for their International Baccalaureate program and graduated with her I.B. diploma and high school diploma. Prior to interning with Rumi Forum, Sascha was the Political Action Committee Intern at the National Organization for Women, a Coalitions Intern at the Democratic National Committee, and a Bureau Intern with Montessori Model United Nations. On-campus, she is President of Days for Girls at American University. Along with this, Sascha is President of her sorority chapter, participates in various advocacy campaigns, and has interests in Middle Eastern studies, women's rights, and menstrual equity. Passionate about foreign affairs, Sascha hopes to one day work at the federal level, hopefully at the Department of State, with a specific aim of working in the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations.