

All roads lead to Duluth.

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In the early 1980s a group of feminists put together a model to approach domestic violence called the Duluth Model. Under this new (feminist) model the focus is not on actual violence, but on fighting the patriarchy and “male privilege”. This is something the Duluth organization is very open about. For example, in [Countering Confusion about the Duluth Model](#) they explain (emphasis mine):

The underpinnings of the Duluth curriculum do come from a historical analysis. When Europeans came to this continent, they brought religion, laws, and economic systems that institutionalized the status of women as the property of men through marriage. From the church to the state, there was not only acceptance of male supremacy, but also an expectation that husbands would maintain the family order by controlling their wives. Various indiscretions committed by wives were offenses to be punished by husbands. This system of male dominance (like any social structure where one group oppresses another) was perpetuated by: a) a belief in the primacy of men over women; b) institutional rules requiring the submission of women to men; c) the objectification of women which made violence acceptable; and d) the right of men to use violence to punish with impunity (Dobash and Dobash 1983).

*...Do all men who batter want to dominate women? This is a complicated question. **Clearly, many men who batter believe that women should be submissive to men and there are others who share a variation of these sexist beliefs—“The man is the head of the household” or “You can’t have two captains of one ship.”** However, there are other men who batter that don’t believe that their wives or girlfriends should be subservient because of their gender, but they still batter. These men use violence to control their partners because they can and violence works...*

...we do not see men’s violence against women as stemming from individual pathology, but rather from a socially reinforced sense of entitlement...

Opponents of a feminist analysis of domestic violence continue to argue their theory that women are as violent as men and that the level of mutual violence calls out for changing arrest and prosecution policies as well as advocating for marriage counseling to stop the violence. This may be an attractive theory to some in the mental health field and “men’s rights” activists...

The Duluth curriculum’s central focus is exploring and understanding power relationships and the effects of violence and controlling behavior on domestic partners.

...

The Duluth curriculum is an educational approach. The philosophical core of the model is the belief that men who batter use physical and sexual violence and other abusive tactics to control their partners...

*Back in the 1970s, battered women's advocates were rightly concerned about how the mental health community used psychological explanations to describe wife beating. They correctly worried that battered women would be labeled psychologically and that mental health practitioners would collude with men who batter by treating offenders' personality disorders rather than working to change their **beliefs and attitudes about women, men, and marriage...***

Under the Duluth model, the *idea* of headship is not only abuse itself (male privilege), it is the very root of all domestic violence. The focus of the program is to change men's sexist beliefs (emphasis mine):

*[We want men] to genuinely struggle with **their beliefs** about men, women, relationships, and entitlement.*

*A central assumption in the Duluth curriculum is that nature and culture are separate. Men are cultural beings who can change the way they use violence in relationships because **beliefs about male dominance** and the use of violence to control are cultural, not innate. Facilitators engage men who batter in a dialogue about their beliefs. Through curriculum exercises, group participants are immersed in critical thinking and self-reflection. Some of the men in our groups begin to understand the impact that their violence has had on their partners, children, and themselves.*

*A key teaching tool is the control log that helps group members analyze their abusive actions by recognizing that their behavior is intentional and inextricably tied to **their beliefs**.*

This is critical to understand because when they talk about violence, they really mean *power and control*, and specifically they are concerned about *men* having power and control over *women*. This isn't really about abuse or violence at all, it is about radical feminism. This is why under the Duluth model domestic violence by women is seen as [wholly different](#) than violence by men. Violence by men is a tool of the patriarchy, while violence by women is a tool to fight *against* the patriarchy (emphasis mine):

When women use violence in an intimate relationship, the context of that violence tends to differ from men. First, men's use of violence against women is learned and reinforced through many social, cultural and institutional avenues, while women's use of violence does not have the same kind of societal support. Secondly, many women who do use violence against their male partners are being battered. Their violence is primarily used to respond to and resist the controlling violence being used against them. On the societal level, women's violence against men has a trivial effect on men compared to the devastating effect of men's violence against women.

...

Making the Power and Control Wheel gender neutral would hide the power imbalances in relationships between men and women that reflect power imbalances in society. *By naming the power differences, we can more clearly provide advocacy and support for victims, accountability and opportunities for change for offenders, and system and societal changes that end violence against women.*

Since this is radical feminist theory, *who* and *whom* is paramount. For this reason not only do the Duluth model creators tell us the model should not be used to confront abuse of men by women, but it also should not be applied to women who abuse women or men who abuse men:

Battering in same-sex intimate relationships has many of the same characteristics of battering in heterosexual relationships, but happens within the context of the larger societal oppression of same-sex couples. Resources that describe same-sex domestic violence have been developed by specialists in that field such as The Northwest Network of Bi, Trans, Lesbian and Gay Survivors of Abuse, www.nwnetwork.org.

The other key thing to understand about the Duluth model is that its influence isn't limited to the kooky women's studies departments that gave birth to this kind of analysis. The Duluth model has been widely accepted as *the* model for understanding domestic violence. Not only has this model been [adopted](#) by police departments and courts (criminal and family) across the West, it has saturated both secular and Christian thinking on the topic as well.

Complementarian Absorption of the Duluth Model

Very often the impact of the Duluth model isn't entirely obvious on the surface. For example, according to the CBMW [founding document](#) one of the reasons they created the organization was:

6. the upsurge of physical and emotional abuse in the family

This was in 1988, and while there wasn't an actual upsurge in physical and emotional abuse in the family in the 1980s, feminists had managed to dominate popular thought via the Duluth model earlier in the decade.

A more direct example of the Duluth model influencing complementarian thinking can be seen in the post [Signs of an abusive relationship](#) by CBMW board member and Women's Studies Professor Mary Kassian. Kassian doesn't reference the Duluth model by name, but just as the Duluth model teaches she explains that abuse is about power and control:

An abuser will use a variety of tactics to manipulate and exert power over you...

Power and Control is core to the Duluth model, and chances are at one point or another you have seen an adaptation of the Duluth [Power and Control Wheel](#). In that wheel all of the forms of "abuse" are presented, with violence mixed in with "Using Male Privilege" and "making her feel guilty". Keep in mind that like the feminists who created the Duluth model she (covertly) presents, Kassian is all about power and control, so long as the wife is the one wielding it. Kassian teaches wives to set boundaries for their husbands and enact consequences if their husband doesn't do as she tells him to do. If a husband does this Kassian calls it abuse, but if a wife does it Kassian calls it [submission](#) (emphasis mine):

*Submission is neither mindless nor formulaic nor simplistic. Submitting to the Lord sometimes involves **drawing clear boundaries and enacting consequences when a husband sins.***

Kassian concludes her post on signs of an abusive relationship with a referral to an organization named Focus Ministries:

Get more information and support at [Focus Ministries, a domestic violence and domestic abuse ministry for Christian women.](#)

The Book of Duluth

While Kassian doesn't name the Duluth model when she presents their paradigm, Focus Ministries is very open in promoting the Duluth model. In [Weapons of An Abuser: Power and Control](#) Focus Ministries presents modified versions of the Duluth Power And Control Wheel and the Duluth Equality Wheel, explaining that this slightly modified radical feminist ideology represents God's teaching on marriage. They go so far as to say that the Equality Wheel represents God's design for relationships (emphasis mine):

Domestic Violence Help For Women

Adapted from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project
Duluth, MN

*...[The Power and Control] wheel symbolizes the relationship of physical abuse to other forms of abuse. Each spoke represents a manipulative tactic used to gain **power or control**.*

...

*[The Equality] wheel **represents God's design for relationships**. The eight components are held together by Mutuality, each person submitting and serving the other. The core is Equality for each image bearer of God.*

Focus Ministries presents modified versions of the two Duluth wheels in another article titled [Healthy vs Abusive Relationships: What's the Difference?](#) This article identifies "Using Male Privilege" as a form of abuse, and explains that abuse is about power and control (emphasis mine):

*In order to have a healthy relationship, both partners must treat each other as equal and independent human beings. The husband must respect his wife more than his need to control her. While the wife should respect her husband's role as the spiritual leader of the home, the husband should be an example of Christ's love as he takes the position of a servant leader. Both must submit to the Lord and to each other as they learn how to combine the scriptural principles of Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 13. The relationship becomes abusive when the husband or wife usurps control of the other person's thoughts, actions, emotions, freedom, and individuality. **Abusers believe they have the right to punish their partner when they disobey or fail to measure up, and often use violence to intimidate them, keep them in line, and regain control.***

Again, Kassian teaches women to *set boundaries and punish their husbands* when they transgress, but this isn't abuse, because abuse is about the patriarchy. Wives fighting against the patriarchy by

definition can't be abusive, only husbands can.

In yet another article, this one titled [Power and Control—Weapons of an Abuser](#), Focus Ministries again presents the Duluth model, explaining that domestic violence is about men wanting power and control over women (emphasis mine):

*The Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, Minnesota demonstrates through a “Violence Wheel” chart the kind of behavior abusers use to get and keep control over their partners. This chart uses a wheel as a symbol to show the relationship of physical abuse to other forms of abuse. **Each spoke represents a tactic used to gain power or control**, which is the hub of the wheel. The rim which surrounds and supports the spokes is physical abuse. It holds the system together, and gives the abuser his strength.*

And again, everything is presented as men abusing women, not because the target audience is abused women, but because this is fundamental to the Duluth model. This leads to definitions like:

Using Children

An abuser who wants to use the children as weapons may take his ex-wife to court when she withholds visitation because the children are sick. An abuser will also feel a great sense of control by keeping the children past the court-appointed time of visitation...

Complementarians and the Duluth Model; a Marriage not from Heaven

While feminist activism around the Duluth Model in the 1980s clearly influenced the founders of the CBMW, part of the alignment between the two groups is coincidental. Both groups are deeply hostile to the idea of male headship, and prefer instead to have women in charge. This is why complementarians like Kassian teach that wives should set boundaries for their husbands and enact consequences when they sin, but consider it abuse if a husband even points out that Scripture says a wife should submit to her husband.

Complementarians endorse wives [smashing the family china](#) (a “godly tantrum”) or [threatening to leave and take the children](#), or using denial of sex ([here](#) and [here](#)), in order to gain power and control in marriage. Wives who do this are presented as being forced to take drastic measures by their disobedient husbands. Yet these very same acts would be considered abuse if a husband were to do them. The difference between abuse and [he had it coming](#) comes down to who both the Duluth model creators and complementarians think should rightly be in charge. The fundamental difference between the two groups in this respect is the Duluth model creators are honest about their feminist objectives, while complementarians *claim* to support biblical headship.