

The crazy dictator.

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My wife and I watched a movie titled [Joshua](#) a while back (plot spoiler alert). We ended up fast forwarding the second half of the film just to see how it ended, but the first half was both fascinating and painful. The movie is about a husband and father who is trying to keep his family together in the face of constant disruption from his clinically depressed wife and their sociopath nine year old son.

What was so striking to me was how *normal* the movie portrayed a husband having to placate an emotionally unstable wife. She was a one woman disaster, and her husband was constantly trying to find ways to resolve the problems she created without provoking her. She wouldn't care for their newborn daughter, and she flew into a rage when others tried to fill in the gaps. In one sense this shouldn't surprise me, because what the movie portrayed is our current legal climate. The husband/father can be ejected from the home at any time and for any (or no) reason by the wife/mother. When the boss is crazy, [there isn't much the helper can do](#).

I was curious if I was alone in reading the movie as portraying the placating husband/crazy wife dynamic as *normal*. The [plot summary on wiki](#) doesn't even mention the mother as a source of problems, only as a victim of the son; the dynamic was so normal it didn't merit mentioning. The reviewer for the [New York Times](#) however did notice the fact that the husband was constantly having to placate an emotional and less than sane wife, calling the movie *a highly effective family drama cloaked in the stale tropes of the demon-seed thriller*. The review zeroes in on this at the end with:

But it's Sam Rockwell's spectacular turn as the harried paterfamilias that simultaneously binds the film and pushes its boundaries. Whether coddling his character's doped-up wife or reaching out to his wacky son, Mr. Rockwell is never less than convincing as a stressed-out dad whose life is slowly disintegrating.

This dynamic between the coddling husband and the crazy wife is so compelling you could easily re cut the movie to take out the son as the fundamental source of conflict. In fact, you could leave in the early scenes with the son and in psychological thriller form temporarily mislead the audience into suspecting he might be a sociopath and the source of the problems. Such a film would be compelling, as the NY Times reviewer seems to agree. Imagine an entire movie where the protagonist husband constantly has to tiptoe around his crazy wife to somehow care for the children while avoiding provoking his ever-provoked wife. Oh, and he also needs to hold down his high stress job on Wall Street too. While such a movie would not pass the censors in our current culture, it would describe a family dynamic *far* more common than the "demon seed" plotline that bored the reviewer for the Times.

I thought of the movie again when reading a [comment](#) by the always excellent Social Pathologist:

...you'd be quite surprised just how many women find child rearing to being psychologically difficult, to the point of involuntary psychiatric disease. One of the things that "blew me away" when I starting working as a family physician is the significant toll on psychiatric health that children bring, especially to women.

While as a physician he is understandably focused on helping the patient he is treating, the question that came to my mind was *what about the husband who has to deal with an emotionally unstable*

wife who has the power to destroy the family at any moment? No one is taking her finger off the nuclear button. In fact, a husband convincing an emotionally unstable wife that she is unstable is widely seen as a [form of abuse](#).

This is serious business, because not only is our family law system designed to empower wives and mothers (crazy or otherwise) at the expense of husbands and fathers, but crazy is sold to women as a form of empowerment. Cartoons regularly show young girls using emotional outbursts as a form of power, and the message to adult women is the same. Feminism in many ways is the celebration of the [power of emotional outbursts to change the world](#).

This message that *crazy gets you power* (and that more power is what women need) isn't limited to secular feminists. Modern Christians have embraced this idea to an astonishing extent. Are you feeling dissatisfied with your marriage/husband? Why not take a trip down crazy lane? It is sure to solve your problem. If you don't already know how to put crazy to work in your own life, try an [emotional temper tantrum](#) involving loading the kids in the car and threatening to break up the family if you don't get your way. Or if that isn't your preferred brand of crazy, try [lining up expensive china on the mantle and breaking it with a hammer](#).

Making all of this worse is the near universal assumption that divorce and the ensuing process is a *just punishment* for men. Dr. Helen had a [post](#) a while back about a man who was regularly thrown in jail due to his inability to pay exorbitant amounts of alimony and child support:

“When I tell people what’s happened to me these last two years they say, ‘Your story can’t possibly be true, and you must be in court because you beat your wife,’” Schochet said.

The message to husbands is *find a way to keep her happy, and if you can't you deserve what is coming to you*. But what happens when the woman isn't just using crazy the way society tells her to use it, as a pragmatic tool to gain power? What if she isn't driving the crazy, and instead the crazy is driving her?

Unfortunately there is no legal process to distinguish between wives who are using crazy pragmatically, and those who aren't *playing* crazy. The Good Men Project posted an article back in August titled [What Do You Do When A Girl Hits You?](#) The author recounted being arrested after his wife brutally assaulted him in a successful ploy to gain an upper hand in their divorce:

She kicked my head into the solid wood base. I blacked out, came to, stood up, bleeding. My daughter was screaming, “Stop hurting daddy!”

Even though *she beat him*, all the wife had to do was say the magic words and *he* ended up being arrested and unable to see his children:

The two officers escorting me to and from the hospital and then to central booking didn't have any advice when I asked what I should have done. “Sorry, man.”

...

Thirty hours later I stood in front of a judge and had a county prosecutor argue against me: "His wife is afraid of him. She said he..."

Released on my own recognizance; order of protection outlaws me from contacting her or my kids for a year.

The thing to remember is this isn't the failure of a system designed to protect men and women. This is the system working as designed. This is the whole point of the Good Men article; what should he have done differently given a violent and unstable wife? The only answer is to walk on eggshells and keep her from becoming unhappy, and focus on taking precautions to make it harder for her to use the domestic violence system against him. If a wife gets unhappy and either beats her husband or he ends up in jail due to unpayable child support or alimony, then he obviously had it coming.

Aside from keeping her happy, a husband with an emotionally unstable wife needs to focus on avoiding the domestic violence machinery. Web MD quotes an expert from a domestic violence hotline for men in their article [Help for Battered Men](#):

We tell men if they have to be in an argument, do it in a room with two doors so they can leave; a lot of times a woman will block the door, the man will try to move her, and that will be enough for him to get arrested.