

## God Wants Us to be Equal: Why Gender Matters in Feminism

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I have struggled over writing this paper. What hasn't been said about this topic already? There are numerous historical studies on the rise of feminism and the response of Christianity to that rise. Same with feminism and Islam. Right now, I am staring at a stack of books that address both: Susan Hill Lindely's *You have Stept out of Your Place*, Mary Malone's *Women and Christianity*, Irshad Manji's *The Trouble with Islam Today*, Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety*, and others as well. What will my voice add to this area? What new insight do I have in this area? Then, it came to me: write what I know, the #1 strategy for any writer. And, what I know is this: so much has been written about this topic historically and contemporarily, but feminism has lost its core: feminism is a gender issue, gender does matter, and by examining the history of feminism, its battles with the religious and scientific communities of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, we can see where academic feminists of today, the bourgeoisie of scholarship, went awry and have made feminism a four letter word.

I have taught feminism for years, on the undergraduate and graduate level, within a variety of courses, as a political, socio-economic movement and as an analytical tool, and have seen how students react to the very term, feminism. Feminism can make male students feel threatened. After all, who wants to be seen as the descendents of those who denied women their rights? For male students, learning of feminism can be uncomfortable even if they firmly believe in women's rights. And, men aren't the only ones uncomfortable. So, too are many women, who fear that feminism is man-hating, controlled by a group of radical fem-nazis who want to rise up and abolish the patriarchy in favor of a woman controlled society. But, why is this? Where did feminism go wrong, for the foundations of feminism, the grandmothers of feminism, if you will, strongly urged women to take a stand on their own as women, to have voices that demand equality under the law, to have the right to go to school, have a job that pays the same and has the same status as a man, and to take pride in being a wife, mother or neither too. It went wrong when feminists of the 70s started to deny their gender, believing that androgyny was the key to equality, and it continued through 80s and 90s when gender became the very problem that many feminists wanted to eradicate. If they could just get society to stop thinking in terms of gender, then women would truly be equal. If they could just get women to stop thinking of themselves in regards to gender, then women would be truly equal. But, that isn't the problem: the very idea that woman can become completely separate from her gender and want to do so is the problem. If feminism is going to work globally, nationally and regionally, gender has to be a part of the equation. The feminists of the past didn't separate their gender from themselves. Instead, as women, as wives and mothers, and as single women, they took on the patriarchy and demanded, pleaded for and eventually, achieved something remarkable, a society, in some parts of the world, where women have remarkable freedoms and opportunities. To explore this subject in some depth, this paper will be focus on four interconnected points: a brief history of feminism and its ties and conflicts with 19<sup>th</sup> century Christianity, the use of gender science as a factor in subordinating women in 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and even 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the wrongness of erasing women's gender to achieve equality as the goal of post-modern feminism globally, and the turmoil between Islam and feminism with the rise of Islamic extremism.

### PART 1

If we look at the history of feminism, we see women, as women, fighting for the cause of women's rights, whether they are tackling political, religious or societal prejudices about women and six women, out of the many, stand out in regards to their stance on feminism and the power of their persuasive voices: Amelia Lanyer, Mary Wollstonecraft, Frances Wright, Margaret Fuller, Sarah Grimke and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Now, there were many others, male and female, who helped the feminist cause, but these six women take on the political/religious establishments directly with their writings in such a way that they are still role models of

feminism today, for they take on the patriarchal establishments in regard to their gender and use the belief in God, whether philosophical or religious in nature, as the primary reason women should be given the same rights as men. Each sees herself as a woman who wants herself and other women to be respected in the patriarchal society of her time. The first, Amelia Lanyer, wrote “Eve’s Apology,” perhaps written in a moment of extreme frustration over women’s tightly controlled place in society, which urges men to respect women as wives and mothers. Through the voice of Pilate’s wife, Lanyer asks her readers why the Christian society of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century is not supporting women by giving them a better place in society:

Then let us have our liberty again,  
And challenge to yourselves no sovereignty.  
You came not into the world without our pain,  
Make that a bar against your cruelty (Lanyer 2000, 187);

Despite a few other women writers, such as Anne Ingram and Mary Leapor, most voices of feminist thought are rarely heard until Mary Wollstonecraft roars her voice on the subject matter in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Wollstonecraft approaches the rights of women from two perspectives that she combines into one: reason, a god given right and, since God gives humans, both genders, the right to this faculty, women have, by God’s ordinance, the right to reason and the right to use reason to improve their lot.

Reason is, consequentially, the simple power of improvement, or more properly Speaking, of discerning truth . . . but the nature of reason must be the same in all, if it be an emanation of divinity, the tie that connects the creature with the Creator (Wollstonecraft 1996, 53).

Instead of finding fault with women’s sentimentality, their love of pleasure, their weaker intellect as men such as Pope, Kant and Rousseau have done, Wollstonecraft demands that men look at themselves for why women behave this way, for women, by their subordinate status in society, make themselves servile to get what they can have through marriage: social position and comfort. Wollstonecraft implores women to do something, be active, be educated, be better

mothers, any thing that will make women use both their bodies and minds. Thus, she throws down the gauntlet, demanding change in how women are treated, educated and thought of by both women and men. Wollstonecraft blames both genders for women's current predicament, for women have fallen into this submissive pattern for far too long. It has become easy, and in that ease, women have become vacuous.

What can be a more melancholy sight to a thinking mind, than to look at the numerous carriages that drive helter-skelter about this metropolis in a morning full of pale-faced creatures who are flying from themselves.

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Women, in particular, all want to be ladies. Which is simply to have nothing to do but listlessly to go they scarcely care where, for they cannot tell what (Wollstonecraft 1996, 151-52).

Wollstonecraft wants women to get an education, to become “physicians and nurses” (2006, 53) shopkeepers, manage a farm, go into politics, become teachers, any thing that will save them from having to marry because that is their only way to economic security. Then, women will be free to want to be married if they so wish it. However, to have this chance, women need to have a “civil existence in the state,” and that has been denied to them.

But, what amazes me the most with Wollstonecraft is this passage:

Cold would be the heart of the husband, were he not rendered unnatural by early debauchery, who did not feel more delight at seeing his child suckled by its mother, than the most artful wanton tricks could ever raise (1996, 147).

Wollstonecraft is for marriage, for family? Historically, feminism ties into the family. For Wollstonecraft, women, by their very act of being mothers, hold an incredible power to change society, yet, as she points out, the women of the upper class chose not to embrace their roles as mothers; instead, they let others nurse and raise their children:

To preserve their duty, and wear the flowery crown of the day, which gives

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them a kind of right to reign for a short time over their sex, they neglect to stamp impressions on their husbands' hearts, that would be remembered with more tenderness when the snow on the head began to chill the bosom, than even their virgin charms ( 1996,147).

Wollstonecraft admires the woman who rears her own children, who, even if wealthy, takes the time to nurse, cuddle and care for her children than letting others do it for her. For the poor woman, taking care of her child is her priority, and so to with the working class woman. They can't afford to have another raise their child, but to Wollstonecraft, why would any mother not want to raise her child? Motherhood and women's equality go hand-in-hand according to Wollstonecraft: "The wife, in the present state of things, who is faithful to her husband, and neither suckles or educates her children, scarcely deserves the name of wife and has no rights to that of a citizen" (1996, 131).

Wollstonecraft was an oddity for her time: an independent woman, a woman who moved into the public sphere of society in ways that women of her time did not do. Wollstonecraft's horrible upbringing—an abusive father, who drank, gambled and spent her and her sister's inheritances, thereby denying them a possibility to make decent marriages—laid the ground work for her cause, the feminist cause. *Vindication* is the feminist manifesto of its time period and a few more contemporary feminists need to read this document again to get their grounding in what feminism means, not a denial of gender, but an endorsement of woman as a woman, who should have all the rights, privileges and responsibilities as a man.

America had its Wollstonecraft too, a woman who had a child and wasn't married, who spoke in public, who demanded women be accepted as equals by men, and who wrote about it as well: Margaret Fuller. A member of the Transcendental Club, Margaret wrote *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* as an exploration of women's roles in 19<sup>th</sup> century society and why women, from the ancient Greek and Roman times to the present, still have to fight for legal and social recognition by men: ". . . the free American so often feels himself free, like the Roman, only to pamper his appetites and his indolence through the misery of his fellow beings" (1999, 9). The worst man is the one who professes to use "Christianity" to keep woman in her place, for he has forgotten that "man is born of woman, and her face bends over him in infancy with an expression he can never quite forget" (1999, 22).

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One of the first women in America to take on the issue of women's rights from a religious perspective was Frances Wright, who actually lectured audiences, a mix of men and women, on the rights of women. Like Amelia Lanyer a few centuries before, Wright also tackles the Eve story, stating that "insatiate priestcraft" tries to keep women in "mental bondage." Men of religion are the "fishers of women," using their interpretation of the bible to entangle women into being "hoodwinked and unawakened" to knowledge of the world and their rights as free people equal to men (Schneir 1992, 20-21). Sarah Moore Grimke was another woman who took on the established religious view of women in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sarah, along with her sister, Angelina, were devout Quakers, who originally came from a slave owning family in South Carolina. Unlike other colonial religious denominations, Quakerism endorsed a more equal role for women. They can speak at the pulpit and hold positions of authority within the church, a far cry from other denominations who demand women to be submissive of church authorities and of males in general (Lindley 1996, 3-8). The sisters became part of the abolition movement and began to speak to small groups about the issue, but as ladies, they had no right to speak in public about any topic, and were admonished by the Congregationalist Clergy of Massachusetts for their behavior:

We invite your attention to the dangers which at present seem to threaten the female character with widespread and permanent injury. The appropriate duties and influence of women are clearly stated in the New Testament. Those duties, and that influence are unobstrusive and private, but the sources of mighty power. When the mild, dependent, softening influence upon the sternness of man's opinion is fully exercised, society feels the effect of it in a thousand forms. The power of woman is her dependence, flowing from the consciousness of that weakness which God has given her for protection.

We appreciate the unostentatious prayers of woman in advancing the cause of religion at home and abroad: in Sabbath-school; in leading religious inquirers to the pastors for instruction; and in all such associated efforts as become the modesty of her sex . . . But when she assumes the place and tone of a man as a public reformer . . . she yields the power which God has given her for her protection, and her character becomes unnatural. If the vine, whose strength and beauty is to lean on the trellis-work, and half conceal its cluster, thinks to assume the independence and the overshadowing nature of

the elm, it will not only cease to bear fruit, but fall in shame and dishonor into the dust (Lindley 1996, 108-09).

Two hundred years early, the ancestors of these Christian religious leaders were so affronted by a woman, Anne Hutchinson, speaking out of place, that she was forced to leave the congregation, for she had “stept out of her place” (Lindley 1996,5) but surely times have changed by the 19<sup>th</sup> century? Women have more rights in the new United States? Well, no they don’t. Their rights are based on the whims of men, and that letter above, read from every pulpit and published in local papers, showed just how little women’s lot had improved by the mid nineteenth-century. However, Sarah Grimke was no pushover. Taking on the challenge of refuting this so called religious call to arms against women, Sarah wrote in 1837 her response to this attack, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women*. In the letters, Sarah discussed the role of women and how she believed God made women equal to men: “God created us equal;--he created us free agents” (37), yet men hold women in their subordinate social position. She states that she will not “repel the charge [of the ministers] by any counter assertion” but asks that even if Eve was a “great sinner,” there is no reason, “six thousand years” later to still be blaming women for that sin and keeping her in submission: “All I ask of our brethren is, that they will take their feet from our necks and permit us to stand upright on that ground which God designed us to occupy” (Schneir 1992, 38). She comments that Jesus spoke to both men and women, and didn’t believe one was superior to the other. And, in upper case letters, she firmly announces to her reading audience that men and women were “CREATED EQUAL” (Schneir 1992, 40). Both Grimke sisters eventually left organized Christianity altogether, finding its subordination of women intolerable.

The desire to be heard was so strong for both these women that they were willing to speak out publicly about women’s rights, when it was against the law for women to do so. Both Margaret Fuller and Sarah Grimke faced fines in Massachusetts for speaking in public, especially if they were being paid to do so (Schneir 1992, viii).

When Elizabeth Cady Stanton began to speak her remarkable “Declarations of Sentiments and Resolutions” in 1848 at the first women’s rights convention held in the United States, she was denied access to the building by the man who owned it and was renting it to the

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conventioners because Stanton was a woman. Stanton's husband had to vouch for his wife and the other convention women in order for them to get access to the building.

Stanton's *Declaration* says it like it is: Thomas Jefferson, one of the founding fathers of the United States, did not remember "the ladies" according to Abigail Adams, (Schneir, 1992, 3) when he wrote his most famous document, *The Declaration of Independence*: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and pursuit of Happiness." These words, however, are only for a class of men, white men, and that women have completely been left out of the document. By just inserting the word "women" to the original lines of the *Declaration*, Stanton allows her audience to realize the gravity of the situation of American womanhood in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Just as Jefferson listed his litany against the British crown, so too does Stanton list her grievances against the American patriarchy:

He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.

He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice.

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Having deprived her of this first right of a citizen, the elective franchise, thereby leaving her without representation in the halls of legislation, he has oppressed her on all sides.

He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.

He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns.

He has made her morally, an irresponsible being, as she can commit many crimes with impunity, provided they be done in the presence of her husband. In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming, to all intents and purposes, her master—the law giving him the the power to deprive her of her liberty and to administer chastisement (Schneir 1992, 79).

Stanton continues her declaration, listing further complaints: women can't hold office, can't teach, can't become doctors, or lawyers, or any thing where they can use their minds and earn a living. They can't get a decent education, not participate in the "affairs of the Church," (Schneir 1992, 78) all occupations or duties that students in many parts of the world, mostly western, and some eastern, can do today. So, what can a woman do then in the 19<sup>th</sup> century? She can be married.

Marriage in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is usually based on love, but marriage in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries for women of the upper middle class and the upper class was not. Instead, marriages were arranged between families and that through the marriage, one could fall in love, develop a standing affection with someone, learn to tolerate that someone, or end up hating that someone for the rest of her life. For women, marriage offers economic security and social standing. For the man of this class, a marriage with a woman whose family has money or property allows him access to her dowry. Some of these arranged marriages worked, but many didn't, as Brian Dolan discusses in his book about 18<sup>th</sup> century arranged marriages, *Ladies of the Grand Tour* by delving into the private correspondences of these upper class women (2001, 3-45). But, this isn't something new, for Wollstonecraft, a woman of that time, also denotes that marriages made in this manner are usually unhappy ones.

Further, marriage gives the husband, from any socio-economic class, absolute rights over his wife, rights to her property unless her family was smart enough to give her pin money, rights to her very self, for she legally doesn't exist in that marriage. Only her husband does. And, Christianity of the times endorses this ownership of women by their spouses as former slave and feminist/anti-slave activist Harriet Jacobs writes in her personal narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: "future generations will learn that women were articles of traffic in New York, late in the nineteenth century of the Christian religion" (Jacobs 2001, 594). It is shocking to learn that women could be beaten with an inch of their lives in England at this time and the husband could get away with it. This was allowed legally until 1844 when the Matrimonial Causes Act disallowed this type of treatment (Basch 1974, 26-27). Divorce is a social taboo, as well, especially for the woman, who can lose rights to her children, rights to any property that the marriage holds, and can become a social pariah as well.

This legal ownership of women annoyed some women of the time, of course, so much that when they did marry, and they married men who believed in women's equality, that their

marriages would have contracts that gave them certain freedoms the marriages of the time did not offer women. In 1855 American feminist Lucy Stone and her fiancé, Henry B. Blackwell, signed a pre-marriage contract acknowledging they will not follow the traditions and laws of the time which give men absolute power over their wives. To the couple, laws that state women are unequal to men “violate justice, the essence of law” (Schneir 1992, 105). Angelina Grimke and her spouse also agreed that marriage was not about male ownership of the wife, but about an equal partnership (Lindley 1996, 108-11). And, it is apparent that Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her husband, Henry, also had a marriage based on much more equal footing than most marriages of the time.

Cady-Stanton knew she was lucky when it came to marriage, and relentlessly pushed for legislation to help married women have legal property rights, first in 1854 when she addressed the New York State Legislature and stated, “see there how like feudal barons freemen hold your women,” but “Men can neither bind or loose” women, for that “prerogative belongs to God alone, who makes man and woman” (Schneir 1992, 113). Since women were legal non-entities, they had no rights in regards to speaking their own minds, getting an education, finding a job, or, if they were married, they had no rights to the legal custody of their children or their property from that marriage. The second time Cady-Stanton went to the New York State Legislature to speak was in 1860, and sadly, nothing had been done legally to change women’s legal non-existence, but she reminded the legislators that the prejudice for women’s rights was akin to the prejudice against color. However, for Cady-Stanton’s fight wasn’t just a political one, but a religious one as well: “No, the Great Father has endowed all his creatures with the necessary powers for self-support, self-defense, and protection. We do not ask man to represent us . . . [s]o strike the words ‘white male’ from all your constitutions, and then, with fair sailing, let us sink or swim, live or die, survive or perish together” (Schneir 1992, 113). Eventually, in her 70s, Cady-Stanton even writes *The Women’s Bible*, which is still in print today, and is an incredible work on reinterpreting the bible to show the strength of the women; however, this work was mainly disowned by other feminists from the 19<sup>th</sup> century as being too antagonistic towards patriarchal Christianity (Malone 2003, 216). But, for Cady-Stanton, as a Christian, liberation for women has to come from two areas: the political and religious patriarchy that control society. By examining the bible from a feminist perspective, Cady-Stanton begins the quest for biblical accuracy that is still deeply part of academia today, for one of the most intriguing topics in religious academia

today is how the bible was put together, what books were left out, and why. Further, what of the role of Mary Magdalene? Religious theorists suggest that her role in the foundation of Christianity is much stronger than previously imagined, something that Cady-Stanton first wonders about in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Malone 2003, 215-17).

## **PART 2**

Even with Cady-Stanton and other women continuously pushing for women's rights, little happened in Cady-Stanton's life time to change women's role. She died in 1902, years before women achieved the right to vote in the U.S., but her voice, along with these other women, was monumental in starting to change the roles, both public and private, of women. Yet, this ability to ask for political and social rights was hampered not just by the political and religious patriarchy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but was also hindered by science in the form of Biological Determinism, a pseudo-scientific belief that race and gender did matter in who ruled whom. Biological Determinism, and its social stigmatizing parallel, Social Darwinism, caused more grief for those who were conquered during 19<sup>th</sup> century British, French, American, Spanish and German imperialism, for it justified, "scientifically," the right of the conqueror to treat the conquered in a subordinate and many times inhumane way. A bio-determinist believed in the great race theory, a theory that purported white, western European males and their American counterparts, as the justified rulers of the world. Thus, bio-determinists, such as Thomas Jefferson, Louis Agassiz, Paul Broca, Gustave le Bon, Charles Lyell, Alexander von Humboldt, Alfred Russel Wallace all supported bio-determinism and their works were used as political tools to justify racism. And, it was also used to justify women's subordination by men.

Most of these bio-determinists employed craniometry to prove woman's biological and intellectual inferiority. Professor Paul Broca, one of the first scientists of craniometry, claimed that woman's small head measurement and lighter brain weight, when compared to man's, reaffirmed her inferiority: "In general, the brain is larger . . . in men than in women, in eminent men than in men of mediocre talent, in superior races than in inferior races (Gould 1981, 83). Carl Vogt, a Swiss physician who agreed with Broca's findings, also did his own research, which showed "that the type of the female skull approaches, in many respects, that of an infant, and in a still greater degree that of the lower races" (1864, 81). Gustave Le Bon, another bio-determinist from the Broca school, declared that woman's intelligence was below that of a "gorilla"

according to craniometry (Gould 1981, 104). George J. Romanes, another 19<sup>th</sup> century bio-determinist, also using craniometry, declared that woman's "inferiority displays itself most conspicuously in a comparative absence of originality, and this more equally in the higher levels of intellectual work . . . Woman cannot reason; instead her intellectual capacity reveals itself in her higher developed sense organs. . . The female mind stands considerably below the male" (1887, 655).

One of the least likeliest bio-determinist was Charles Darwin, who in his *Descent of Man*, equated woman's brain size with her intellect, concluding that her brain, being "intermediate between the child and the man," also disclosed woman's physical and mental inferiority. Woman's "maternal instincts" as well as her "great tenderness and less" selfish nature are admirable, but these "faculties are characteristics of the lower races, and therefore, of a past and lower state of civilization" (Darwin, 642-43). However, Darwin believes that through education, women can "reach the same standard of man if she is trained to energy and perseverance and to have her reason and imagination exercised to the highest point" (645). But, who is going to educate her this way?

The battle over how to educate women wasn't just a feminist issue, but a social issue toiled over by the patriarchy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. To the anti-feminist man (and sometimes woman), woman needed to be educated, but educated to please man. Hence, social critics and writers such as Coventry Patmore and John Ruskin created their versions of the ideally educated woman, the "Angel in the House" or the Queen of the home who, gently prodded by their fathers and husbands, became women who knew just enough information to hold a conversation, but were not to tamper with religion or science. This is what early feminists and women in general had to put up with: being told their brains weren't big enough to hold an intelligent thought when compared to a white man's brain. Is it any wonder that women had such a hard time, whether they were religiously based feminists or New Women, in trying to get social and political equality?

But, women, as shown in this paper, did tamper with religion, did try to speak from the pulpit, so some bio-determinists took another approach to showing women's inferiority to man by claiming that Christianity and religion in general were a sign of a lower way of thinking! For Carl Vogt, "Woman is the conservator of old customs and usages, of traditions, legends and religion; so in the material world she preserves primitive forms . . . in the formation of the head,

the earliest stage from which the race or tribe has developed” (1864,82). Vogt can easily dismiss religious belief as being primitive, but another bio-determinist, George Romanes, is actually peeved that women, while inferior to men intellectually, seem to have the keys of the kingdom in regards to religious devotion: “Christianity . . . threw the vesture of sanctity over all the other virtues which belong by nature to the female mind. Until the rise of Christianity the gentler and domestic virtues were no where recognized as at all comparable, in point of ethical merit with the heroic and the civic” (1887, 659). But, this back-handed compliment to women turns when he pouts, it is “extraordinary a collision between the ideas of virtue, it should have been woman who first flocked in numbers around the standard of the Cross” (1887, 659). To Romanes, why did subordinate woman understand the meaning of Christ’s message and men did not when men are supposed to be superior to women intellectually? It dumbfounds him but he has no answer.

### **PART 3**

With religion, social views, and even science being used to keep women in a secondary status when compared to men, it is no wonder that feminists of the past and present centuries began to view gender as the issue. It still happens, the bio-determinist views, even today. Starting in April of this year, women civil servants in India have to fill out Form IV, a form that asks for details of a woman’s menstrual cycle, especially if she wants to take maternity leave. According to the Ministry of Health, this is done to “evaluate the officer’s fitness” (bbc.news.com). Men are not asked to fill out papers detailing their testosterone cycles. Likewise, in India, women rights activists are worried about a growing trend in the country, the use of ultrasound to detect a fetus’s gender, and if that fetus is female, the push by some families to abort that child before it is born since it is a female. China has the same problem, female infanticide, even though there are laws against it (George 2006). The view that women are inferior or less valued than men, even before birth, has a long tradition, and bio-determinism is still used to support that prejudice, usually in conjunction with religious beliefs. The two are being used hand-in-hand still according to Lana F. Rakow and Laura A. Wackwitz in their article, “Difference in Feminist Communication Theory” (2004, 13-28). Both theorists comment that both “biology and religion” still constrain to see gender, not as a political, social, economic or cultural identification marker, but are used to “excuse differentiation and the subordination or invalidation of certain groups on the basis of such factors as sexuality, gender, race, culture, nation, ability and class,” ( 2004,15). Thus, “science and religion” police “sex and gender within and among other cultural categories .

. . and is an oppressive means of hierarchal classification, the dominant sex gender is organized around the term *woman*”(2004, 16). Both scholars rely on feminist theorists from the 1980s to the present to support their view that women are still being seen in this derogatory manner, and right they are.

In fact, I can go back to the 1950s to the source of this view, Simone de Beauvoir and her ground-breaking work, *The Second Sex*, which was further elaborated upon in 1960 by Betty Freidan’s *The Feminine Mystique*. I can skim through the used bookstore of feminism and find books from the 1970s and 80s on the “Cinderella complex,” the “Sleeping Beauty Myth” and take a look at Susan Brownmiller’s expose’ on American womanhood, *Femininity*, and realize that women have been indeed, subordinated by their very gender countless times. To Rakow and Wackwitz, as well as other feminist scholars, the answer is to obfuscate gender, just get rid of it. As they state, “gender is assigned,” and “sexual orientation does not always and necessarily correspond” or “become permanent and stable” (2004, 17). And, right they are again. There are people who are born of one gender but feel they should be of another, and do change their gender; the two scholars also use homosexuality and hermaphroditism to support their view, and that makes sense, too. To both theorists, seeing gender is what is wrong with the world. If women and men form a new androgyny, then the idea of one gender being superior and one being subordinate to the other will disappear. One interesting side to this theory, purported by Teresa de Lauretis, is that gender is completely a technology, and she borrows heavily from Foucault ‘s view of sexuality to support this, believing that “the sex-gender system, in short, is both a sociocultural construct and a semiotic apparatus” (2004, 217), and it limits women in their ability to see beyond their gender, for they become the *woman*, an ideological stereotype (2004, 221). She also believes that obfuscating gender is the goal to achieve women’s equality.

But, is that the goal? Many contemporary feminists believe it, and I had that drummed into my head throughout graduate school that androgyny was the goal for women if they truly wanted to be seen as equal to men. Gender isn’t the problem, though, and like the classical feminists of the past knew, never was the problem. It was *how* women’s gender was perceived that was the problem. That is still the issue today. Men and women are different. We are two sexual parts of the same species, and the science of gender isn’t about using gender to subordinate another but about what makes men and women different and does that difference make us think differently about the world? Carol Gilligan, in her groundbreaking work, *In A*

*Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, first explored this issue in earnest fifteen years ago, and many feminists trounced on her and some dismiss her today for her views that women and men do think differently, do react differently to social and moral issues, and probably that is due to how women are raised versus men and how women *are made* versus men (1993, 64-105).

Leonard Sax, M.D., Ph.D. also explores this subject in his book *Gender Does Matter* (2005), and emphasizes by exploring the differences between the sexes more, on a basic, biological level, we will learn that gender can and does influence or view of the world as individuals and that we different, “Not one better than the other. Not one worse than the other. Just different”(2005, 15). According to Sax, men and women do have some basic and subtle differences biologically that go beyond what we visually see in regards to a man or a woman. Our brain tissues are somewhat different and are “*genetically programmed*” because in “men, many areas of the brain are rich in proteins that are coded directly by the Y chromosome. These proteins are absent in women. Conversely, women’s brain tissue is rich in material coded directly by the X chromosome.” These chemical differences seem to affect us in how we see, hear and in how our brains function. Supposedly, newborn baby girls hear better than newborn baby boys and music therapy seems to work well for girls but not for boys. Women and girls “interpret facial expressions better than most boys and men” (18). Is it social? yes. But, according to researchers at Cambridge University (2005, 18-19), it is also biologically based, for women have more cone shaped cells in the retina, which project images to the brain via the inferior temporal cortex (which has neurons that seem to focus primarily on color, objects and faces); however, for men, rod shaped cells seem to be more prevalent on the retina and these images are projected to the posterior parietal cortex (which analyzes the function and manipulation of objects), and since each sex is using different parts of the brain for processing this information, perhaps the researchers suggest, they are getting different results about what the images mean ( 2005, 20-25).

Men and women seem to navigate differently too, and this could be due to brain differences: “young women use the cerebral cortex while young men use the hippocampus, a nucleus deep inside the brain that is not activated in women’s brains during navigational task” (Sax 2005, 26). We seem to feel differently too, for the emotions of women seem to reside in the amygdala and the cerebral cortex, but for men, emotions seem to reside in the amygdala, which

could be a reason why women and men do have different feelings over an issue since the cerebral cortex also links to verbal and visual cue areas of the brain, whereas the amygdala does not have that easy connection to those verbal and visual areas (2005, 29-30).

Even sexual orientation seems to have a biological basis. Although there are some who believe that homosexuality is still a choice, science continuously erodes that view with both psychological and physical studies of gay and straight people, and homosexuals do seem to be, at least in part, genetically programmed (Sax 2005, 215). Further, the transgender individual, the person of one sex trapped in the body of another gender, seems to lean in this regard as well (2005, 213).

And, if we really don't think gender matters, and that it should be transformed and we all become a genderless society of androgynous beings, then let's look at what happened to one man. As a young boy, he had his penis horribly burned during a routine circumcision when he was seven months old. The doctor in charge of the case and the boy's parents decided to raise the boy as a girl after an operation was performed to remove any outward evidence of his sexuality and he was given hormones in later years to help him become a woman physically. Sadly, we know what happened to this boy: years of feeling like he was a male forced into a female's body, finally learning the truth of who he was supposed to be, and then, killing himself at age 35, when he could no longer deal with what the world had taken from him: part of his very identity, the identity of being a man (Calopinto 2006).

Gender is part of who most of us are. We identify ourselves as men or women, and that can be due to socialization, but it is also due to our very biology, and there is nothing wrong with claiming one's gender as being a part of one's self. When the feminist movement went into the direction of androgyny, it harmed itself immeasurably, for it is denying the very soul of what feminism is about: being a woman and wanting the same rights and responsibilities as a man regardless of race, religion or socio-economic status. Post modern feminists need to stop seeing themselves as *other*. Simone de Beauvoir stated over 50 years ago that one of the weaknesses of women was relying on their otherness to keep them a mystery and that men readily agreed to this pattern of thought; well, unfortunately, post-modern feminism still has the same problem—seeing woman as other—so if we deconstruct, obfuscate or transform gender, that will solve the problem of misogyny. But, it won't and it sure hasn't (1953, 253-263).

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This idea of obfuscating gender is the primary domain of educated middle white women's feminism, and has caused, at least in the United States, feminism to fracture. Bell Hooks writes of this dilemma in "Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory" and argues that white women's feminism did some good, getting the idea of women's equality onto the political and social playing field, but it completely ignored women of color and women of lower socio-economic class, and those women are, according to Hooks, women who are married, who are mothers, and who don't appreciate white women telling them that they should not marry, or not be mothers if they want to get ahead: feminists "ignored the existence of all non-white women and poor white women . . . did not tell readers whether it was more fulfilling to be a maid, a babysitter, a factor worker, a clerk or a prostitute than to be a leisure-class housewife" (Hooks 1984, 863). If feminism is going to survive, Hooks believes that it must change to accept the voices and concerns of women of color, different ethnicities and of class. Other wise, it will continue to stagnate.

Hooks is perceptive yet she leaves out one key point: it is not just women of color or poor socio-economic class who think of feminism in such negative terms, but many women, many white women, who are educated and financially secure who do as well. To see how broad-based this distrust of bourgeoisie feminism is, let's take a look at a popular show, *Oprah*. A few years ago, Oprah Winfrey, the host of the show, had a group of feminists from the 60s, 70s and 80s on her show, like Gloria Steinem and Naomi Wolf, and asked the various feminists to talk of why they became feminists and what they saw as the future of feminism. Most talked about the sacrifices they made not to have children or get married or wait on both in order to move into the traditional man's world of public life. They complained that the young women of today don't appreciate what hardships they went through and without them, the girls of today wouldn't be able to have the lives of freedom and choice that they have now. Then, Oprah asked the audience to reply to the complaint and to just ask questions, and the response from many was that feminism had lost its focus by asking women to choose marriage and family over a career and it didn't have to be that way. In other words, the audience women wanted it all and knew that they could. They didn't have to give up motherhood or marriage to achieve financial success in the public world, and if they chose not to have success in the public world, that was okay, too (2002).

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In the early 1990s, *Newsweek* magazine printed a cover that showed a cartoon image of the modern woman in her 30s crying to herself that she had forgotten to marry and have children in her quest to rise the corporate ladder, and although the magazine cover was gimmicky, it did reveal a glimpse of the distaste of mainstream American women had towards bourgeois feminism, and the *Oprah* show picked up this pulse years later to show the distaste was still there. Until academic feminists realize that it is okay to be a woman, to like being a woman, to embrace their gender, and realize it is a part of themselves, much like Wollstonecraft and Cady Stanton wrote of, academic feminism will stay academic. It won't be accepted by mainstream women, the working class or middle class or upper class women, because it denies the very soul of what it is to be a woman—our gender.

Feminist theorists of today needs to stop arguing about the semantics of the term “gender” and see where feminism is going, how it is being used by women in third world countries as a way to gain political and economic power despite the patriarchy that rules those countries. Obfuscating gender isn't a primary concern for the women of Zimbabwe who have demanded political citizenship from their government in regards to voting and property rights. . Before Colonialism ended in Zimbabwe in the early 80s, citizenship and the rights of property were primarily held by the white colonists. After independence, native Zimbabwe men took over as the shareholders of both, leaving native Zimbabwe women with no voice politically or economically. These women, though, have started to demand their rights to voting, to land ownership, healthcare and to education: “Most significantly, black women could, for the very first time in known African history, confront the state, as individuals who understood that they had rights and entitlements by virtue of being members of that society, regardless of their status on the basis of ethnicity, class or social location” (McFadden 2004, 77). This “ Zimbabwe's Women's Movement” pushed the revolutionary government to allow women “entry into the public domains” and it is starting to work, but it has taken time and it has been done by women who are wives, mothers, singles and widows. The women have not denied their gender but demand their gender be respected by men. In 2000, the movement formed a coalition and created a “Women's Right Charter (McFadden 2004, 80) and still continue to push Mugabe's government to give women full citizenship, which the government refuses to do, a government which still endorses a man's right to legally rape his brother's wife and to take her inheritance upon the death of her husband, and a government which still sees women as the “property” of

their male relatives (Essof 2007). However, the women of Zimbabwe are trying, and these women, with the help of the United Nations, have created an organization, Women's Learning Partnership, to help women at the grassroots level to “help themselves” (WLP 2007). But, until the government not only endorses but supports legal changes in women’s status, it will be a very uphill battle for the women of this nation.

Obfuscating gender won't help the issues of women in India either. According to Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, (2004, 187) Indian women are “constructed . . . through the dominant modes of ideology,” to be the perfect Indian, middle class woman: “excessively hygienic, exercising conscious and deliberate choice as a consumer . . . and is the normative model of citizenship” (2004,189). This woman is educated, idealized in advertising and on television as the “new Indian woman,” but knows her place within the patriarchal hierarchy by not pushing too much for equality until the right time, sort of like Martin Luther King’s white moderate who told King that blacks need to be patient for civil rights, for they will happen in time. For Rajan, Indian women need to see that image is a ruse, a manipulated image shown through the media and supported by the government, especially in regards to women and their place in the religious systems of India because Indian television, “expressed not only through the operation of strict codes of censorship in television programmes but also in ways the latter negotiate representations of the conflict between women and family. Women’s issue—reproduction, health, work—are substituted within the framework of the ‘larger’ good of family and society” (2004,193), and women’s rights are seen as within the framework of what not a western view, but what an Indian woman’s mother has “taught” her (2004,195). This view just plays into the patriarchal system, with women fearing a woman’s movement because it is western, not because it will actually help them achieve more rights within Indian private and public spheres. What Rajan hopes is that women will see through this ploy, and use their education, their knowledge, to ask for changes in the media by becoming more involved in the media themselves, as writers, directors, producers of what is seen by Indian women about India’s women. She list a variety of Indian female artists who are doing just this, Saoli Mitra, Sheba Chachi, Susie Tharu, all who show through their art, the “struggle” of the Indian woman for self identity ( Rajan 2004, 198).

As a republic, Indian women have legal rights in the country, and these rights have been hard fought for, with Indian feminism beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continuing today; however, it is not a feminist movement that is heavy on theory, but on action, with grassroot

efforts, such as Nadu Women's Development Project in India between 1990 and 1998, HealthWatch Uttar Pradesh and the push to educate more young girls and women, thereby broadening the opportunities of women in a country with a 5000 year old history. Indian women also realize the change will be gradual: "It is important to recognise that for a country of India's magnitude, change in male-female relations and the kinds of issues the women's movement is focusing on, will not come easy"(Butalia nd).

Finally, obfuscating gender won't solve the collision course between Islamic feminism and Islamic fundamentalism.

#### **PART 4**

Islamic feminism seems to be an oxymoron these days, especially with the rise of radical Islam in the last decade, which demands, based on a very strict view of the Quran and Islamic law, that women are subordinate to men legally and religiously. Books and articles have been published telling western readers of the horrors for women of Islam who live in these totalitarian Islamic states. Journalist Geraldine Brooks writes of her journey through the world of Islamic women in *Nine Parts of Desire*, and reveals a world that most western women would cringe at being a part of (Brooks 1995). Journalist Jan Goodwin's *Price of Honor* also shows the double standard that many women of Islam have to follow, with chapter after chapter of women being physically, mentally abused, forced into a life of ritual and service for the men of the household, with little to no rights in the public sphere, with the most horrible consequences for these women if they break the rules, especially in regards to honor killings, where if a woman is raped, has a sexual relationship outside of a marriage or chooses not to be forced into an arrange marriage, can be killed for damaging the honor of the family (2003). Online news sources and newspapers also have countless article after article about women in these militant Islamic areas who have little hope of ever seeing the freedoms that women in the more secularly based countries have. Just recently, Iranian police have "launched a crackdown against women accused of not covering up enough," and giving them citations (msnbc.com). These "crackdowns" can lead to not just citations, but physical repercussions for the women if they don't obey. In April of this year, Isabel Kershner of *The New York Times* wrote of the honor killing of a young woman in Ramla, Israel, and how the women of the family decided to speak publically against this killing, seeing it as a crime, instead of as a right for the men of the family, in this case, the young woman's brothers, to kill her when she refused to agree to an arranged marriage (2007). CNN reported in

early May of a young Afghanistan girl, who after being forced into an arranged marriage, tried to kill herself by self-immolation, which is becoming more common according hospital officials at Kuku (Roberston and Sultoon, 2007). On paper, via the country's constitution, women have legal rights, but the reality is far different, with Taliban type views of women still prevailing as a cultural mindset. And, who can forget what happened five years ago in Mecca, Saudi Arabia when a girls' private school caught on fire, and as the girls tried to flee the burning building they were forced to return back to the building by the religious police, the mutawwa'in, because they were not properly garbed, wearing an abaya, to be in public (BBCNews 2002). The end result? Fourteen girls died. Yet, when Saudi Arabia's Propagation Office still publishes a book entitled, *Women in the Shade of Islam*, and this book endorses the beating of women, who are "more attracted to and admirable of" their husbands when beaten, what hope do the women of Saudi Arabia have (Manji 2003)? Recently, U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was in Saudi Arabia and she did ask when are women's roles in Saudi Arabia going to change (CNN.com), for women in Saudi Arabia live in one of the most repressive states in regard to women's rights, since the state follows a strict interpretation of Islamic religious beliefs, endorsed by the Wahhabi sect of Islam, and this narrow view of Islam has spread throughout the Middle East and beyond, thanks to Saudi oil money, in the building and madrassas that preach Wahhabi Islam, and these madrassas are in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Egypt, Jordan, Indonesia etc., .

This misogyny doesn't just occur in the very traditional Islamic states, yet now occurs in Islamic enclaves throughout Europe. In 2002, a young Muslim girl, just 19 years of age, was burned alive by a young Islamic man who was getting even with her for refusing his advances, and while she burned alive, other young, Islamic men cheered him on (MSNBC.com). This horrific murder forced Fadela Amara, a French woman of Islamic descent, to start Ni Putes, Ni Soumises (Neither Whores or Submissives) as a way to combat "basement Islam" (MSNBC.com 2006), and this organization has helped get the French government create shelters for young Islamic women who are victims of male violence. Somalia born and now Dutch citizen Ayaan Hirsi Ali co-wrote and acted in Theo Van Gogh's short film, *Submission*, telling the stories of three European Islamic women who are forced to submit to rape, marriage or physical beatings as "submissive" women of Islam. Sadly, after the shooting of this short film, Theo Van Gogh was murdered by a group of Islamic extremists because he directed the film ([www.ReligionNewsBlog.com](http://www.ReligionNewsBlog.com) 2004).

The United States hasn't seen this type of violence in regards to Islamic women, but the issue of their subordination is also evident in this country. In 2003, a new mosque opened in Morgantown, West Virginia and one member of the Muslim community who attends the mosque, Asra Nomani, wanted to go through the front door of the mosque, just like the men who attend it do, but it is considered a "sin" for her to do. She, like all the other women who attend prayers at the mosque, must go through the backdoor; however, Nomani has tried to change this rule and the results have ranged from lukewarm to hostile. While her father and family support her view, most of the men who attend the mosque do not and have ostracized her family and her for demanding this change, which eventually took place. Nomani also has tried, but has not yet succeeded, in leading a prayer in the mosque, which only Islamic men are allowed to do, yet she did lead an Islamic prayer with an Islamic group at the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John, even though a fatwa had been issued against her, and one man, angry at a woman speaking the prayers, claimed, "If this was an Islamic state, this woman would be hanged" (Barrett 2007, 176).

Why would someone want another person, who happens to be a woman, hanged merely because *she* reads from a holy book? What is the power of the religion that gives some men the belief that they have totalitarian rights over women even to the point of death?<sup>1</sup> This view is evident in Christianity's past, but not to the extent that we are seeing it today in regards to fundamental Islam today. Canadian feminist Irshad Manji, who was raised Islamic, believes that the desert culture view of Islam is the root of the cause here: "What must be stripped from Islam is its desert strain of tribalism, which takes the act of closing ranks to a crushing level" (2003, 138). In other words, remove the Wahabbi or Saudi Arabian influence, with its strong tribal traditions in regards to caste and to gender, and women's lot will improve. After all, there is evidence from the recent past to show that women had more rights and freedoms in many Islamic countries just twenty years ago than they do today according to Saba Mahmood in *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Mahmood, though, doesn't believe that is the problem, but how religion and women are so intertwined within the theology of Islam itself. Women's roles in both public and private life are so strictly laid out according to the Quran and sharia law that it is hard to separate the two, and in many cases, the two have merged together to

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps Virginia Woolf was right: "The history of men's opposition to women's emancipation is more interesting perhaps than the story of that emancipation itself" (1989, 55).

form the ideal woman, one who is modest, respectful and subordinate, and who represents the family's public image in the religious state. This merging can be seen in the growing Piety movement, an offshoot of the growing Islamic revival movement, which unfortunately has as another of its offspring, extreme Islam and its use of terrorism as political and social statement against western ideology (2005, 2-45).

The Piety movement sounds good in theory, for it supports women knowing the Quran and knowing their rights within Islamic law. However, the movement purports that it is women's choice to follow Islamic doctrine in regards to women's place in society: "women's religious participation within such public arenas of Islamic pedagogy is critically structured by, and serves to uphold, a discursive tradition that regards subordination to a transcendent will (and thus, in many instances, to male authority) as its coveted goal" (Mahmood 2005, 3). Thus, what might seem as choice, a woman choosing to join the piety movement and learn of her role in Islam, is really indoctrination when she has no other choices but to do this in a militant Islamic society if she is going to thrive in that environment. Thus, women's actions reinforce the "instruments of their own oppression" (2005, 8). For, as Mahmood believes, "for an individual to be free, her actions *must* be the consequence of 'her own will' rather than that of custom, tradition, or social coercion" (2005, 11). Do these women who support the movement "autonomously" choose to be a part of it, no matter how "illiberal" it is, or is this choice merely falling in line? So, does the Islamic woman who publicly endorses her secondary status in such a state really mean it or is she scared of reprisal? This question comes up many times when I hear, read or see a woman from a militant Islamic background endorsing her culture's view of women. The female suicide bombers are especially hard to comprehend. After all, Islam promises them no paradise where 40 male virgins cater to their every need<sup>2</sup>, but the women who become suicide bombers seem not to care in that regard, endorsing a view of Islam that they are willing to die for yet are not considered worthy of as spiritual, social or political equals to the men. It is hard to wrap one's mind around this issue intellectually, for it comes from some core of a being who isn't thinking on an intellectual level, but purely on an emotional need level, and when one needs to that extent, one will do any thing to get that need satisfied.

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<sup>2</sup> Irshad Manji mentions a possible translation error in the *Koran*: "According to new research, what martyrs can anticipate for their sacrifices aren't virgins but raisins! The word that Koranic scholars have for centuries read as 'dark-eyed virgins'—*hur*—might be more accurately understood as 'white raisins'" (2003, 46).

Other women also try to draw attention to the plight of Islamic women, some by their writings, some by their voices and some by their actions. Islamic feminist Leila Ahmed, a professor at the Harvard School of Divinity, voices a similar opinion to Mahmood on the issue of women and Islam, and notes that the divergent views of women in Islam come from the prophet himself, who on the one hand, believes in all people being treated fairly and justly and, on the other, instills a gender based hierarchal class system that is still firmly enrooted today. Ahmed does note, with worry, in her *Women and Gender in Islam*, on how Egypt has become more Arabic with the rise of fundamentalism just in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but Egypt wasn't traditionally Arabic at all but a separate country ideologically for centuries from the rest of the Middle East (1993, 1-36). Another woman, Mukhataran Bibi, has helped change the lives of women in Pakistan by making her gang rape known to the world, and forcing the government of Pakistan to change its views of looking the other way when rape is used on women as a punishment in accordance to Islamic Law. Strangely, Bibi's brother's relationship with a woman from another tribe is what set this event into motion. As punishment for his relationship with this woman, he was raped by the men of the woman's family although his own family did try to make amends by agreeing to a marriage contract between Bibi's brother, Shaqoor, and this woman, but the woman's family refused. In further retaliation, the men also raped Mukhataran, and expected her, after the rape, to kill herself in accordance to Islamic Law, but she didn't and, with her parents' help, brought formal charges against the rapists, who eventually were tried for rape and sentenced to death (BBCNews.com 2005). Mukhataran also was awarded a settlement for her injuries and used that money to open the Mukhtar Mai Women's Welfare Organization (MMWWO 2006-07). Shirin Ebadi, the Iranian woman and Nobel Peace Prize recipient, has spoken up against abuse of children, women and has been the legal representation for those who have spoken against the Iranian regime (2006). And, Nawal El Saadawi, an Egyptian feminist, writer and physician, has spoken out against the rise of Islamists in Egypt and their misogynistic treatment of women and even received death threats from Islamists due to her outspoken views (Nawal El Saadawi/Sherif Hatata. 2007).

All these women believe that education is one of answers to the growing misogyny of radical Islam and have met with some success, yet women aren't alone in this educational wave. American climber Greg Mortenson has made it his mission in life to help build schools, which focus on girls' education, in poor areas Pakistan through CAI, Central Asia Institute, and it

seems to be working, for he has built 12 schools and hopes, with more funding, to build more. Mortenson couldn't have done this, though, unless the men of the local communities approved of this need and wanted their daughters to have a better chance in life. And, as Mortenson comments, for this to work the schools can't endorse an American view of Islam, nor should they be preaching the madrassa point of view either: "I don't want to teach Pakistan's children to think like Americans. I just want them to have a balanced, non-extremist education. That idea is the very center of what we do" (Mortenson and Relin 2006, 209).

The other answer, equally as important, is that the Islamic based governments create and uphold laws that protect and uplift a woman's place in those societies. Saudi Arabia has begun an about turn on veiling, allowing women to be seen in public without the proper attire, the chador. In Kuwait, women went one step further, being allowed to vote in 2005, even though that voting has to be within the bounds of Sharia (<http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/05/16/news/Kuwait.php>). Baby steps, but steps nonetheless. Laws need to be created and then upheld that condemn honor killings, that disallow the marriage of pubescent girls, that allow women more freedoms in the public sphere and more rights in the private sphere and that allow women to have voices within the religion itself, which might take a long time to occur. It took a long time for this to happen in the United States and Great Britain, with women becoming leaders within their political and religious communities, but it did occur. What will be the drive for Islamic women to make this happen? God wants them to be equal as interpreted by Islamic feminists readings of the Quran: "Oh humankind. We have created you from a single pair of a male and a female and made you into tribes and nations that you may know each other [not that you may despise one another]. The most honored of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you" (Badran 2002). However, the answer to this problem is not transcending or obfuscating gender. It hasn't worked in the west, the east and it sure won't work in the Islamic Middle East.

In closing, a non-Islamic woman writing about militant Islam's mistreatment of women can get one accused of not understanding the culture and having a western point of view, and both are valid complaints; yet, feminist scholar Leslie Bow's reply to this same complaint is my reply as well: "While I do have Western biases, I also have common sense" (2004, 133). The way many women are mistreated due to religion, whether in the past or the present, is just wrong, and unacceptable. That is why women's rights movements formed to begin with and why the

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must continue to form in areas where women are abused, mistreated or labeled as secondary or subordinate in social, political, economic and even spiritual context.

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