Redefining Gender Roles:
Developing relationships between Sacred Texts and Feminism
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor Håkan Bengtsson for the useful and helpful comments, remarks and engagement through the process of this thesis.

Also, I must express my very profound gratitude to my parents and to fiancé Erik Castillo and friends Erica Nichols, Deanna Spence and Pilar Miyasato-Lee for providing me with constant support and continuous reassurance throughout my years of study and through the process of researching and writing this thesis. This accomplishment would not have been possible without them.

Thank you!
Abstract

This thesis utilized the field hermeneutics within the study of gender roles of women within religion. It argues the relevance of interpretation that have lead to the patriarchal structures within culture and society. In effort to restructure their place in society, women are redefining gender roles through a combination of hermeneutics and Feminism. They are looking at commonly misinterpreted verses that have lead to their subordination to male culture, while also bringing attention to texts and stories within the Bible and the Quran that have long been neglected to show the equality that lies within their religions.

Keywords: Feminism, hermeneutics, scripture, texts, gender roles, faith, theology
Introduction

As long as discrimination and inequities remain so commonplace everywhere in the world, as long as girls and women are valued less, fed less, fed last, overworked, underpaid, not schooled, subjected to violence in and outside their homes—the potential of the human family to create a peaceful, prosperous world will not be realized.
-Hillary Clinton - United Nation’s Fourth World Conference on Women 2015 (McCray, 2015)

The quote above symbolizes the diversity within women that have lead to a movement within the United States and around the world that is fighting for the equality of women. Women in all walks of life are joining forces to redefine the roles that have traditionally been placed upon to be the lesser of the sexes. In our current cultural climate, the United States stands at the forefront of the pursuit of women’s equality. Through the various types of different Feminism, issues are being transformed and reevaluated. Feminists is not a uniform construct due to the variety of cultures influences it can be contradictory within itself. It carries different weight amongst Feminists though they all share a goal of defining a state of being to where women hold equal standards as that of their male counterparts. Though Feminism has taken form in many different and even sometimes opposing ways, women around the world carry the same goal and carry similar intentions. This paper will focus on the role sacred texts play in the interpretation of the gender functions.

The women of the United States are redefining the barriers that have been placed before them. Through the use of hermeneutics, they focus reinterpretation of religious texts and religious stories that have long neglected women and have been male-focused. (Ingersoll, 2003) Men have long believed that women were made to be complementary
to them. Women have been treated as objects that a complement their lifestyles; to serve, obey and be submissive. (Mahowald, 1975) One focus will be the common stereotypes that have been established through the male-dominated field of hermeneutics and how women are beginning to participate in this area to regain help promote equal rights.

Women in all religions live by a particular mold that has been set forth by their scripture. People of Faith see the scripture as rules and laws and develop their idea of what it means to be a woman around these set requirements. Religious women have based their place in this world on the actions of male leadership. Interpretation of Christian and Islamic texts have contributed factors in what determines the woman's role in society. It will delve into the issue of women versus male leadership and how the long-standing interpretation of male power has influenced women’s place in religion. It will evaluate how women are taking scripture and empowering it to mean more than just what is at face value. It will also look into the many women of the Bible and the Quran who have stood as positive role models for the religious Feminists movement.

The representatives within the study will be primarily American, but due to the ability to draw a connection between women as the whole, it will focus not focus on specific American issues. It is the interpretation of texts that have lead to the foundation of gender roles within religion. It will focus on complementary and egalitarian ideals. Part One will cover the historical foundations of Feminism and Feminists Theology and the theories that come into consideration discussing gender within research. It will discuss gender and the methods that have been negotiated within society to develop roles within gender. Part Two will discuss how gender roles were developed. I will examine
the ideologies of complementarianism and egalitarianism and the role they play in defining and maintaining gender roles within society. It will focus on specific versus within Christianity and Islam texts that have been the basis that gender roles have been based upon. Part Three will cover the negotiation of Feminism with religion and how through religious Feminists activism, women are changing the world’s perception of what it means to be a woman of Faith.

The goal of this research will be to prove that Faith and Feminism can coexist within the constructs of the subculture of the religion by re-evaluating their places within sacred texts. It will attempt to demonstrate that the texts may not have been interpreted the way they were intended to. It will question how gender roles were developed and how women have negotiated their place in society and continue to fight to be treated as equals.
Methods and Sources

This study will be based on the use of primarily sourced materials. I will consult books, podcasts, blogs, journals, magazines and video speeches. From gathering the stories of women within American religion, I will be able to dissect the issues and conflict resolution they foresee and participate in by drawing upon their Faith. This form of study will help to understand the conflicts women of Faith face and how they find prevalence within the patriarchal structures that have been placed before them. Gender Issues are not just an American construct as the stories within the research transcend to a worldwide issue of inequality within gender roles.

Critical Discourse Analysis

To answer and efficiently compare and contrast the research questions proposed, a qualitative approach will be utilized during analysis. It will be done so by using text analysis of scripture as well as the study of stories of active participants within the area of study. A comparative study will be done by analyzing the discourse between the two texts and comparing them to find the commonalities and differences. The analyzing of documents will be broken down into the subareas that are tied to the main subject area. This will help draw a conclusion to the three questions proposed by the researcher. Since the researcher is looking at gender roles, in particular to the power of the patriarchy, it is important to examine the relationship between authority and language and how they are used to convey a thought across through different Biblical and Quranic
translations. Since discourse analysis can not be dwindled down to one method, the approached used in this research paper were draw upon many different aspects of Fairclough and Wodak. Fairclough “constructed a useful framework for the analysis of discourse as a social practice.” (Phillips and Jorgenssen, 2010:64) Since gender relation and religion both fall into a social concept, we can see how language plays a role in the interpretation of roles. It will take into account a range of ideas that he used through his three-dimensional framework, and the focus on power relations as the main principles will be a focus on how power relationships are negotiated and exercised while looking at how language usages have contributed to the transformation of society and culture.(Phillips and Jorgenssen, 2010: 67-70) Another part that will be investigated discourses active role in history as well as how it intervenes in social constructs to draw a connection between a thought to what is presumed by those who are actively engaging in the discourse.

Within the research, reflections upon hermeneutics of sacred texts will be made. These scriptural interpretations about how gender is defined have meshed into the language and the way we talk about a religious experience. Messages about gender roles have been transfused with our language:

Messages about gender are knit into the very language we use to talk about religious experience. Using exclusively masculine language in our discussions about God – and even progressive Churches can struggle with inclusive language-shapes how we understand God and ourselves. If divinity is always referenced as masculine, we convey God is male and, thus, men are more Godlike than women. Using patriarchal language also denies the many feminine biblical metaphors of God, conveying that those metaphors figuring God as female are less significant than the masculine traits. (Irons, Mock, 2015)
This idea does not stop with just biblical translation, it transcends all other religions to where God is assumed to be a male, therefore leading to the patriarchal structures and interpretations we are faced with dissecting today with our cultures.

**Communicative Event**

In order to come to a conclusion about the status of gender roles based on religion in America will come from the review of speeches that have been given on the said subject. From this discourse, the researcher will analyze the creative use of language to determine its cultural impact. It will be a process of defining the signals within the discourse, and determining a relational tie between the keywords and then summarize a conclusion how they have been interpreted by society as whole. (Phillips and Jorgenssen 2010:67-78)

**Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics can best be defined as the art or science of interpretation. (An-Na’im, 2011) It is a philosophy that is used when we attempt to interpret the Bible and Quran. Anthony Thisleton explains it as the way “we read, understand and handle texts, especially those written in another time or a context of life different from our own.” Thisleton focuses on biblical texts, but more correctly it can be applied to all forms of spiritual books and is used to read, understand, implement and respond to texts that were written within religious frameworks. (Thisleton, 2009). Within this text, we will look at the use of hermeneutics to either advance or subside the pursuit of women’s rights. Within hermeneutics, the use of language becomes a variable and is the key to
deciphering the message of the texts. Where scholars and interpreters fall into issues is when the art of language is always changing within a culture to carry different meanings and differing contexts. (Stein, 2002) Due to culture shifts, it is understood that interpretations must also change to fit the current cultural framework. Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na’im states “In view of the inevitability of using human reason and action in understanding and implementing any text, as noted earlier, a hermeneutical process is necessary for understanding the purpose and normative content of a text like the Quran or the Bible.” (An-Na’im, 2011) This is important to women’s issues as they are relatively personal, and the way that women roles within history are defined is through the interpretation of the scriptural texts. Since our cultures are in constant motion, we must reinterpret the texts to fit the current status of women within society.

For many scholars, hermeneutics is seen as an art of interpretation. It relies on primary variables that in themselves depend on a shared understanding. Robert Stein contends that it relies on three main forms with the mode of communication, the author, the text and the reader. Its main focal point is the text as this is what the reader derives from the author's meaning. (Stein,2002) All scholars tend to agree that hermeneutics must confront three aspects of forming its conclusion:

1. The context in which the text was written
2. The grammatical composition of the text
3. The whole text or its worldview (Wadud, 1999)(Duderija,2015)

For religious context, it refers to the interpretation of sacred texts that focus on the areas of theology and law. Scriptural hermeneutics relies upon who determines the meaning and what context their analysis was derived. Adis Duderjia states:
Insights from literary theory tell us that since reading and interpretation is a process whereby a reader derives meaning from a piece of (sacred) text, the outcome of this process, termed “determinacy of meaning,” is governed by (1) the nature of the reader (previous bodies of knowledge—termed schemata -gender, lived experience and personality/character/moral sense/development of the reader, sociocultural norms governing the society in which s/he lives); (2) the (intent of) the author; and (3) the nature of the text (i.e., context and mechanics of language). (2015)

This combined with the use of language, help in the translations of sacred text in today’s cultural constructs. It is outside factors, not the actual texts that support the determinacy of the meaning. Theological hermeneutics focus on the relationship between religion and human rights and how they translate to fit the molds of a globalized, political world.

Duderjia refers to a form of hermeneutics that can apply to all forms of religion and way of life and helps explain how certain interpretations have contributed to establish the patriarchal interpretations that have created the barriers that women are trying to reconstruct to be more gender equal. She describes this form of hermeneutics as “interpreter centered hermeneutics.” This type of hermeneutics the assumption that the meaning of a text is determined by the self-positioning of the reader.(2015) In this role, the interpreter just does not derive its meaning from the text, but they determine its meaning to fit their needs without taking into consideration the impact it may have within society. This can be the seen as the determining factor in current gender roles, as men were the interpreters of the text and they applied these values to women to help establish their dominance over women.

Because each religion and culture are different, there are various forms of interpretation that are facilitated to reach a standard method of what is authoritative and
what norms are of the agreement. The current status of women within culture calls for a reconstruction of past interpretations to fit the current cultural climate. Within the field of hermeneutics, there needs to be a change and a level of commitment established to meet the current cultural needs. Hans Robert Jauss feels that the meanings of texts are not located precisely within the texts but with the relationship between the texts and experiences of the reader. (Beal, 2011) The relationship between texts and readers experience helps negotiate the actual meaning of described from the texts. To understand the relationships, we must look at the signs and cultural context into which they are interpreted. This causes issues within culture because culture is constantly changing therefore the words within the meanings of the text change. There is a matter of the construction of thought; everyone can construct meanings from the text. Texts convey the meaning and come from the reasoning of those who are reading it. (Stein, 2002) With humans being the interpreters they understand the objects within the texts and make sense of them with their social constructs and express them in their terms. (Zimmerman,2015) This issue that falls regarding language, we see a push toward certain texts, while neglecting the texts that could play for those who face oppression matters due to those behind the interpretation.

Biblical Hermeneutics is criticized within Feminists circles for its dependency of the text being the independent authority (Stein, 2002) Within Christian circles the text has been the determining factor and has not been appropriated by time, culture or the reader. Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza has delved deep into the study of biblical hermeneutics and the role and effect it has on women. She states, “…reflecting on the interaction between
the text and community, or text and interpreter. The methodological explorations of form
and redaction criticism have demonstrated how many biblical writings are theological
responses to pastoral-practical situations, while hermeneutical discussions have
elaborated upon the involvement of the scholar in the interpretation of texts.” (Fiorenza,
2002) Males have long dominated the community of Biblical interpreters. There has
been a long conceived notion that the Bible is androcentric, meaning written by men, for
men and interpreted as such. (Thiselton, 2009) As I will define within certain roles of
marriage and leadership, the interpretation of the Bible has long kept women within roles
of submission under the guise of God’s word. Fiorenza feels that the treatment of women
has been long rooted in the history of the Bible and within her retranslation of the text
and calls attention to the stories of women who have long gone invisible under the
interpretation of their male counterparts. Fiorenza has long contended that the Bible has
served its purpose as product of patriarchal culture and history (Thiselton, 2009)

Islamic Hermeneutics relates to the study of interpretation and understanding of
the Quran and the hadith. The interpreter of the text uses the “determinacy of meaning” to
derive meaning from the texts and the factors that it influences (Duderijia, 2015) Like
the Bible, a majority of the interpreters of the Quran and Sunnah were men, hence
creating the patriarchal structures that are in place in Islam. As I will show within a later
part of this paper, the patriarchal structures are evident within the interpretation of verse
4:34. This is a standard verse that has is critiqued by many within the new wave of
hermeneutics that focuses on a more female-inclusive structure. Islamic exponents of
women’s rights such as Amina Wadud are looking for ways within the language of the
Quran to transcend the ideas of gender. Through her form of hermeneutics, she focuses on the language, context, and syntactical structures to derive meaning. By doing so she “is looking for an establishing precedent for continual development towards a just social order.” (Wadud, 1999)

Biblical and Quranic scholars are both in search of a more female-inclusive approach to the interpretation of the sacred texts. For both religions, they are looking at the historical constructs in which their texts are interpreted. As described earlier, all forms of hermeneutics focus on the context, its grammatical composition, and its place in history. Some scholars are pointing out where interpreters have previously lacked by making their interpretations inclusive to females. In the following chapters, I will cover what happens when the derived meaning of words does not translate into current times. We will see how theological Feminists are attempting to derive new meanings to the interpretations that are well established within their culture. Through the use of hermeneutics, women are transforming their religion and the roles they have played within society. They are taking the verses that have made them invisible characters with religion and using them to redefining their position within the social constructs of their patriarchal religious structures. They redefine the roles within marriage, Church leadership through a combination of hermeneutics and social activism. With the goal of female inclusivity in mind, I will show how women are transforming the once controversial verses through the use of hermeneutics to define a more female-friendly religious structure.
Part One - Gender Theory and Feminism

1.1 Gender Schema Theory

Since the focus of this paper is on gender stereotypes within a society and culture, the theory incorporated is considered Gender Schema Theory. Sandra Bem developed Gender Schema Theory in 1981; it is a theory that means people learn what it's like to be a man or woman from the culture they grow up. The method bases itself on a development and social learning theories. (Cherry, 2016) The main issue found within the study of Faith and Feminism is that the gender norms have continued throughout society because the culture has continued to portray stereotypes in certain ways. Women and men are both guilty of this as they tend to manipulate how they act due to the gender norms placed within their culture. This study will look at the way gender norms find their place in religion and how Feminists Theology is working its way to change these norms through culture and social activism.

Though Bem’s theory has three major factors within, this study will mainly focus on the social learning theory. Bem states “social learning emphasizes the rewards and punishments that children receive for sex appropriate and sex-inappropriate behavior, as well as learning that observation and modeling provide. Social learning theory thus locates the source of ‘sex typing’ in the sex-differentiated practices of socializing communities. (Bem, 1981) Through the Faith of one’s culture, they learn different ideas of what it means to be a female, or a male and children begin to define themselves by if they fit these individual molds. As this applies to children, it can be seen within religion
as in adulthood women still struggle with if they fit the particular mold of what it means to be a devout Christian woman and Muslim woman. Through this study, we will see how women are redefining the “sex-typing” (that they have dealt with from the time of birth. (Bem,1981) Women are crossing the gender barriers placed in front of them to be drawn to certain objects that are either feminine or masculine. This can be seen with the reversal of gender specific toys within stores since humans tend to begin identification within gender at a young age.

1.2 Gender as an Issue

In her book Gender Trouble, Judith Butler argues that Feminism is limited in how it describes gender. She felt that it was much more than being defined as either male or female. She felt that gender was a socially constructed by different social and cultural practices that were created through the dynamics of history and politics and with their emergence of these two factors we get Feminism. Butler states:

Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscriptions of meaning upon a pre-given sex(a juridicial conception): gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. ‘As a result, gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which “sexed nature” or “natural sex” is produced and established as “prediscursive” prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts. (Butler, 1990)

There is difficulty in this understanding of gender, as religion is one of the primary structures that gender roles are based. When religion and culture fight for the hegemony within gender, conflict ensues especially amongst Feminists and traditionalists. Julie
Ingersoll states, “This is not to argue that everyone is part of the battle; many people are not. In Evangelicalism internecine fighting, gender is an important convention of conflict and the dividing line that separates one constituency from the other.” (Ingersoll, 2003) The issue comes to the front of the debate when the traditionalists are those who are upholding the values of the predisposition of how gender norms should be in place. This leads to a redefinition of tradition and a reworking of the language at which it had been perceived. Through the study of religions within a culture, we can understand the impact it has on gender roles, and women see these issues as a way of redefining the language that has created a barrier for women’s equality. Women are doing so through the understanding of scripture which leads to the defining factors of gender roles within religion. Also, this is through the complex systems of understanding what gender is and how it fits within ethical frameworks. Religion and gender are “mere constructs” that act in very powerful ways in the world, shaping our experience and our thought. (Butler, 1990) This development of gender within religion has played a role in creating a culture where women are lesser to men. It’s these religious traditions that have stayed alive that need to be reworked and adapted to new cultural challenges they face. Through the study of gender norms within marriage and leadership, we can see how women are transforming stereotypes and redefining the gender roles that have been part of history for years.

1.3 Feminism

Before the analysis of scripture and analysis of gender norms, I will break down
the meanings of different genres of Feminism to help describe the roots of Feminists Theology and how it is influential in culture. To justify the study of gender roles within religion, we must first look at the impact that Feminism has played the role and the social relationship that it creates when it is attached to genres within religion. This chapter will investigate what Feminists Theology is and how the word “Feminism” can be taken into different context and be generated into a different meaning by different approaches to the use of discourse. Feminism takes on different meanings dependent upon the adjective placed before it. It will also compare and contrast the difference and similarities with Feminists Theology, and within the genres how the discourse of its intended meaning changes.

Sandra states that Feminism is a “postmodern enterprise” She argues that throughout history, men have determined women place in this world as support systems. She calls this the “male master story.” (Schneiders 1991, 2004: X-XI) Men have used their interpretation of scripture as a mean of suppression. They view themselves as the stronger sex and build this understanding of God being a male. This connection between the gender of God has been a long thought process that men have manipulated to keep power over women.

To fully understand what Feminism means, Schneiders feels that it can be encapsulated by the three terms that mostly share a similar meaning but due to how they were applied take on different meanings in Schneiders view. (1991, 2004:31-37) The terms she focuses on are women’s movement, women’s emancipation, and women’s
liberation. For the purpose of this paper, I will concentrate on the women’s liberation movement. Through Feminists hermeneutic dialogue, women have the intention of liberating themselves from the patriarchal constraints that have been placed before them. In particular, the focus will be on how gender equality has fit within religious texts.

Women’s liberation can be seen as a movement with the women’s movement as it held on to the idea of feminine consciousness. As part of women’s liberation, women were speaking out against marginalization, oppression, and violence through self-determination, self-affirmation, and self-definition. (Schneiders, 1991, 2004:9) With the focus on the self, women would redefine their strive to redefine their position in this world as equals to men. Within these three terms used, this is the one that pushed most for equality and rights. Women’s liberation focuses on pushing women in a direction where they are fighting the oppressive structures that have been placed upon them by the patriarchy, power, and politics.

All forms of Feminism acknowledge that the patriarchy is to be blamed for the oppression of women. Schneider proposes that it is a “comprehensive ideology which is rooted in in women’s experiences of sexual abuse, engages in the critique of patriarchy as fundamentally dysfunctional system, embraces an alternative vision for humanity and earth and actively seeks to bring a vision to realization.” (Schneiders, 1991, 2004:15) All three terms she used essential derive from the same meaning within discourse, but they changed through how she interpreted their space within Feminism. Mostly one could take Schneiders’ word usage and create a definition of what Feminism is an Emancipation Movement for Women’s Liberation. Within the movement, women are
demanding the restructuring of society and culture. They are evaluating how the structures were developed and reclaiming authority within texts that used to be limiting.

Feminism has begun to take many forms within recent years, especially in the United States. The self-proclaimed and labeled “man-hating” Feminism of the 1990’s is slowly disappearing. There is a movement within Feminism that focuses on the idea that anyone can be a Feminists, and what defines a woman is her ability to have a choice. Feminists Theologians are taking back the idea that women have long been marginalized by men and redefining the long term thoughts that a woman’s body should be a carrier of traditional religious values set forth by the reinterpretation of texts. Through clearly defining their goals, they are communicating and finding ways to implement their concerns. They are taking the focus away from the woman’s body and changing the image of religious leadership. Women leaders are promoting dialogue to improve gender equality.

1.4 What is Feminists Theology?

It is assumed that women have long lived under the dependency of their male counterparts. The determinacy on this statement is based on the idea that women came second in the creation story therefore establishing them as the weaker sex. How was the idea that there were seen as only a counterpart to males rather than an equal? How was this theory translated and how did it come to being? To answer this, we must look at the development of Feminists theology and how it was established within Western culture, mainly how it came to terms in American culture. One may argue that it is the roots of
religion that were established by the patriarchy that has subjugated women to the
oppression of men and Feminists Theology is a movement that pushes us to reconsider
the practices, scriptures, and traditions of the patriarchal structure of religion. Rita Gross
states, “Religion may be the only arena in which exclusive truth claims about the
superiority of one's own group over all other kinds of human beings are still routinely
circulated and acted upon, even by people who would not support racial, gender, or class
prejudice, or homophobia.” (Gross, 2000) Traditional Feminists critique theology and
tradition through the idea has all interpretations of religious texts have been dependent on
the assumptions of the interpreter and historians, they feel that for far too long the those
who have studied religion have done it from a patriarchal perspective that eludes to male
dominance. They believe that in order change the traditions women must rewrite the
stories that have traditionally gravitated towards men to be superior to women, to a more
general tradition for both genders. There is a push for inclusivity rather than exclusivity.
This structure is found within Islam and Christianity, but in several other forms of
religion as well. Religion has laid the foundation for the patriarchy, but it is its adherents
who are responsible for carrying on the tradition is the reason why religious Feminism
exist. The religious Feminist’s purpose is to rewrite the traditions and reclaim the stories.
Through reinterpretation, they are finding equality within the texts. With conflicting
interpretations, the religious Feminists must also find a way to adapt their thoughts to the
times and current cultural climate.

Gloria Steinem states that women’s spirituality is the and will continue to be the
“wellspring of Feminism.” (Hunt, 2004:XV-XVI) For the purpose of this research
project, we will look at two forms of Feminists Theology, Islamic Feminism, and Christian Feminism. We will see how some women feel that they are equal under the patriarchal structures and that you can’t blame a few misinterpretations for society as a whole. While others feel that it’s the oppression of women is the fault of the patriarchy. Can Faith and Feminism be compatible? Feminism and Faith both share one principle that every person is valuable and need to receive the same amount of consideration as the other. There is no better time than now to encourage Faith and Feminism to combine forces because through their compatibility; they can collaborate to show that Faith can work alongside Feminism to help promote social change. (Hunt, 2004:5-7) Religion and Feminism are both social aspects of culture, but can they work for hand and hand to establish an equal basis amongst men and women. Hunt states that the focal point of Feminism is to challenge and change social institutions, while religion is to change through a relationship with God with the intuition that it will trickle down into social systems. (2004:12) Both Feminism and religion have the abilities to transform on a personal as well as social level. They are both hindered by stereotypes that show themselves through religious male structural oppression. The next section will cover how Faith and Feminism have found ways to work together though faced with many obstacles. The stories covered later within this essay will show the negotiation between religion and Feminism and how reinterpretation is leading to results of change.

1.4.1 Christian Feminism

To understand Christian Feminism in America, one must look at the historical
development of the patriarchal structure of Christianity in American history. The idea of being a Christian, as well as a Feminists, has created controversy both from inside and outside sources. The main debate has been where or not you can be a Feminists as well as a Christian. Outside of the Church, Feminists feel that Christianity and Feminism are too contradictory to each other and Christians who try to merge the two are teaming up with the enemy. There are those who believe you can combine Faith and Feminism. Julie Ingersoll states that, “Calling themselves Christian Feminists, biblical Feminists or Evangelical Feminists, they advocate women’s equality in marriage, women’s ordination, complete equality in all Christian ministry and the use of gender-inclusive language in liturgy, hymnody, theology, and even biblical translation.” (Ingersoll 2004:100) Christian Feminists believe that God does not discriminate by gender or race. They also ground their belief that God created Adam and Eve as equal. Christian Feminists do not online look at alternative views within traditions, and they seem to seek how the traditions can be modified to present and current culture. By doing so they denounce the traditional thoughts of women's subordination. By reinterpreting the text to be more favorable to women, they are putting the biblical gender hierarchy behind them.

In Christianity, women have been long celebrated for motherhood and defined by their relationship to men. Later I will go into how scripture has been translated within Christianity as men wrote it and explained for men. Biblical teachings may coerce them from adopting certain Feminists positions. It’s these times of attitudes that influence religious attributes on social and secular atmospheres. (Wilcox, 1989) Christian Feminists
find themselves fighting for marriage equality, women ordination, and reproductive rights. With the recent rise of female leadership within the Christian Church, women find themselves at odds with each other as to whether or not their voices are to be heard in the Church due to the previous interpretations of the religious texts. They do not only have to fight for equality in the secular world, within the Church they are trying to restructure the thought process that has been in place due to traditional interpretations that have not adapted themselves to current times.

### 1.4.2 Islamic Feminism

Defining Islamic Feminism isn’t as easy of a task as defining Christian Feminism. Fatima Seedat argues against the convergence of Islam and Feminism, and the western constructs of Feminism that impose certain ideologies that pose an issue to the religion of Islam. Though many Feminists feel they need to fix Islam to make it more equal for women and lift them out of oppression. Seedat feels that the Western construct of Feminism is problematic to Islam, while Islamic Feminism has also evolved in opposition to stereotypes that have categorized Muslim women as oppressed. (Seedat, 2013) Margot Badran defines Islamic Feminism as such:

Islamic Feminism gleaned from the writings and work of Muslim protagonists as a Feminists discourse and practice that derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur'an, seeking rights and justice within the framework of gender equality for women and men in the totality of their existence. Islamic Feminism explicated the idea of gender equality as part and parcel of the Quranic notion of equality of all insan (human beings) and calls for the implementation of gender equality in the state, civil institutions, and everyday life. It rejects the notion of a public/private dichotomy (by the way, absent in early Islamic jurisprudence, or fiqh) conceptualizing a holistic umma in which Quranic ideals are operative in all space. (Badran, 2002)
Like other Feminists Theologies, Islamic Feminism embraces the religious texts to show that there is equality meant for all humans, male and female and that texts are there as a set of rules to live by. Due to its reliance on text, Islamic Feminism allows itself to be open to many different kinds of interpretation. One of the biggest issues that those who say they are fighting for Muslim women focus on the veil as part of fighting for gender equality of Muslim women. Muslim women are approached with an array of issues that they must tackle, and find themselves not only having to fight for their equality within religion but also within their respective cultures. Islamic Feminism focuses on the roles within genders in the public and private sphere. It neglects the complementary ideas that are portrayed within private life and fights for the equality between men and women in all walks of life. (Badran, 2002) In the United States, they find themselves fighting to prove their equal values. Islamic Feminists rather than straying from their religious foundations tend to find themselves drawn closer to the Quranic traditions to avoid violating the code of Islam. (Fawcett, 2013)

Islamic Feminism often finds itself falling short, and it tries to counteract the influence of American culture. Traditional American belief is that Islam is a religion of women oppression, while many Quranic scholars focus on the idea that the scripture of the Quran defines men and women as being equal. Margot's Badran states, “Islamic Feminism assists people in negotiating the multiple identities that we all possess, even within the context of a single culture.” (2002) As seen in the United States, Muslim women are adapting and assimilating to the culture. Muslim women migrating to the
United States come from multiple backgrounds and cultures. They come with a “historical consciousness is one that reflects not only on the impact of Western incursion of itself or concomitant stereotyping but also the defensive mechanism have built up over two centuries of most intimate culture.” (Badran, 2002) Muslim women find themselves continually facing stereotypes and trying to define their place in a culture that views them as oppressed.

It is a common misconception that women in Islam are inferior to their male counterparts. There is a constant politicization that Muslims need saving. Post 9/11 has brought the proclaimed issue of Muslim women’s submission and oppression to the forefront. The question many have asked is if Muslim women are in need of saving, and others have made themselves out to be saviors of Muslim women. The war on terrorism has also turned into a fight for women’s right. Laura Bush in a speech post 9/11 stated, “The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women.” (Bush, 2011) Though she was speaking about the Taliban, her discourse was translated and interpreted to be for all Muslims. Yvonne Yazbeck-Haddad states that Mrs. Bush invoked a theme that echoed the Western characterization of Islam and its females. It identified the oppression of women as intimately linked to what is often portrayed as violent nature of the religion and affirmed that the cause of liberating Muslim women from their bondage as part of the American mission to the Islamic world.”( 2006:5-7) This funnels down into the perception of Muslim traditions, and it also puts Muslim at odds with each other. Positions on the veil vary, and the stereotypes are perceived while not offering validity.
Though it holds true that women in Muslim countries have faced persecution and are under constant scrutiny of their male counterparts, this is not a view shared across all forms of Muslims. So do Muslim women need to be saved, or do people need to educate themselves on the foundations of Islam. How do Islamic women redefine the image that has been purveyed and show that there is gender equality within Islam? Many are drawing themselves closer to Quran to redefine the traditions and to give a new meaning and insight to the religion. Others are holding on to traditions but accommodating them to current times. Muslim Feminists are working to dismantle the misogynist belief system of their religion that rules their religious framework while also protecting their community from Islamophobia.

1.5 Comparing Christian Feminism and Islamic Feminism

To compare and contrast the Feminists theologies of Christianity and Islamic Feminism, we have to understand what they are trying to achieve. Feminism can take many forms, and it can be very personal. Feminism to a Christian woman may mean something different to an atheist or a Jewish Woman. Sarah Bessey clarifies this best when she states “The family of God is big and diverse, beautiful and global. So is Feminism. So these dogmatic labels, while sometimes useful for discussion in books and classes aren’t always the right boundaries for life or relationship”(Bessey, 2013) With Feminism, specifically religious Feminism, there is no set rules on what being a Feminists is anymore. Feminism has evolved in a way to where it becomes interpersonal. What it dwindles down to is a shared want or need to have equal rights for both men and women and for women to be seen on a similar level as men.
Another commonality is that Christians and Muslim Feminists are both going back to the text for their validity of these issues. Through the books, they are working to redefine the roles that were set forth by the patriarchy. Understanding the commonalities comes from an analysis of primary gender roles and issues within both Christianity and Islam. Attempting to understanding the commonalities within these few traditions will be done through a process of dissecting them down by scripture to see how they’ve been interpreted and how they are being changed within American culture. Through the reinterpretation of texts women of Christian and Islamic Faiths are liberating themselves from the constraint of male dominant interpretations. The traditions this paper will approach are marriage, religious leadership, wardrobe, motherhood and the body. Within these select traditions, we can better draw a connection between the two religions to show that they may have more in common than they do differently.

The differences and similarities between Christian Feminism and Muslim Feminism can be seen in so many different ways, yet one of the main differences is that women within Islam are not just dealing with inequality within their religion, they deal with Islamophobia and fear due to lack of understanding. So how do we fix this issues that women of religion and women as a whole face due to the influence of religion on culture? A good place to start is by reclaiming religion for females. We can break down the basic scriptures that are focused on gender roles and dissected the down to be inclusive rather than exclusive. We find ourselves in a position today, where women’s bodies, minds, and lives are all interconnected and are the focus of debate and discussion.
The damage to the minds of both men and females has been done through the misinterpretation of scripture throughout history. Because it has been instilled in our culture, the stereotypes laid before us often go unnoticed or unrecognized until attention is brought onto them. As I will explain when going into the roles in detail, many of these issues start within the home. We are raised from a young age to understand certain rules and norms. The basic ideas as to what color women should wear, down to what sports they can play and what toys they can play with set us up for failure. This control is unknowingly placed upon us at a young age leads to the continuation of men in control of women’s destinies. It’s a struggle for power and oversight, and the unseen alliances between men carry on through everything. The basics that we learn at a young age at home tend to move into the workplace and other power structures.

Since men have long dominated religious institutions, we find ourselves constantly dealing with how they have interpreted our lives to be. But is there a religiously defined text that states that women should be of lesser class? Our basic foundation of life is broken by this idea that women are subordinate to men, that they should be obedient, submissive, and not have a voice. Until we can give out this power structure, women will find themselves in a battle for power. The only way to break down these barriers is to reclaim religion as equal and fair to all humanity as the texts have stated. The message will need to be changed to promote the equality and rights of women. That is the major commonality is that both Muslim and Christian women and men are both working for a common goal of women being treated equally to men.
Part Two - The Development of Gender Roles

2.1 Complementarianism vs. Egalitarianism

To further understand how gender roles are determined and read between both religions we must look at the ideas of complementarianism and egalitarianism. Both play a part in determining the existence of gender roles, as well as the how outside factors play a role in the deciding of these functions. They also provide different sets of values to the evaluation of Feminism within the religious context and help provide insight into why certain gender norms are considered to be biological while other are designed from their religious laws set forth by both the Quran and the Bible.

Complementarianism is a theological view within both Christianity and Islam that designates the idea that men and women play roles that hold complementary functions to each other. (Trujillo, 2014) Though most of these functions apply to the familial and Church units, they are consistent with the definition of gender norms within society. This belief is based on the idea that God had intended men and women to collaborate on to create harmony within society. Within complementarianism, roles of leadership are delegated to males, while women are to be in roles of support. According to Kenneth Ortiz, women can assist men in the decision-making process the ultimate authority needs to be given to the male. To better understand this view, Ortiz breaks it down by sports teams, which all players on the field play a role, and the team cannot function without them, but in the end, the team captain is in full charge of the decisions that need to be made for the team. Other players are there to support and give advice. Just like the
players the field of a sports complementarianism helps define the different roles that men and women play within a society. (Ortiz, 2016) Through complementarianism, the world submissive takes a new form within marriage and Church life to meaning that women agree to the rules that their decision maker has made for them. Complementarians draw their ideas from scripture, mainly within Genesis, Corinthians, and 1st Timothy. They tend to pick out the verses that stand for men and women to be two separate values. They tend to explain it as puzzle pieces that work side by side with each other to connect on issues and come to a resolution.

Egalitarianism is the view that all people are created equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities. Egalitarianism is more philosophical in nature than complementarianism and is more common within the secular constructs of human dissection. Egalitarianism feels that within gender, everyone holds an equal value and role, and men and women are not divided by their gender but by their individual set of skills. (Haddad, 2006) Within religion, it is a view that both men and women should be granted the same opportunities within the Church and roles should not be based on gender but based on skill set. It does not take notice of biological differences but focuses on the idea that God created both man and women to be equal. Egalitarianism is not just limited to the roles of gender within the society; it applies to all social constructs such as race, and class lines.

There is a thin line drawn between the fight for equal rights and the struggle for equal rights within religion. Men and women both speak in forms of an adversary as well as advocacy against complementarianism and egalitarianism. A complementarian sees
the egalitarian being influenced by outside sources within the secular world such as Feminism. (Haddad, 2006) They don’t feel that gender is equal but is equitable, with each gender bringing different skills to the table, and some are capable of individual skills while others are not. While Egalitarians, deriving from a revision of scripture and thought, the challenge to take down the patriarchal structures as they feel everyone is equal and should have equal opportunities as long as they both hold the same skill set.

With Christianity, some women feel that complementarianism is the way life should be as portrayed by the Bible. They don’t believe that oppressed by its presence as it is the word of God and how God intended women and man to be. Though many egalitarians continue to look at Genesis to define that man and women were both created as image bearers, many conservative Evangelicals feel that gender egalitarianism undermines the teachings of the Bible. For many in opposition of egalitarianism, the focus is not on the rights of women, but the understanding of hermeneutical teachings that the bible stands for hierarchy as a basis of stability within marriage. Courtney Reissig feels that distinct roles of headship and submission are found within the home and the Church. She seems that men and women work alongside each other to properly make sure that the home runs smoothly. (Reisseg, 2015) Men and women are unique and represent different things within the world. For complementarianism, the design of gender was intended by God to establish ourselves as individual men and females. Complementarianism defined by God was to help man and women work alongside each other, and due to their differences, they are allowed to present different viewpoints on various matters. By rejecting the idea that we are different and do play different roles
within society, complementarians feel that egalitarians are denying divine order, and this would explain chaos. (Gallagher, 2004) Complementarians and Egalitarians both are in search of finding a solution to what they feel is a problem within the Church and find themselves in a seemingly never-ending battle to prove whether one is wrong when it is a case of hermeneutics that can be interchanged within the context of which side the opposing teams are on. Egalitarianisms advocates argue that the complementarianism has strayed from the intentions of God to make man and women equal. Gallagher states “Seeing Feminists as a logical extension of their Faith rather than its compromise, egalitarian Evangelicals insisted that they were motivated by biblical themes of justice and the creation of a new kind of community rather than simply adopting the issues of the women's movement as their own.” (Gallagher, 2003) Yet complementarians and conservative Christians continue to feel that they are misinterpreting the true intentions of the Bible and are losing its true meaning. This between discord between Christian complementarians and egalitarians can dwindle down to a hermeneutic fight of who has chosen the right verse within the Biblical Texts.

One key concept that complementarians and egalitarians share differing opinions on within the Church is the idea of who can be called into ministry. Complementarians feel that only men should be in these authority roles within the Church, yet there are roles of leadership within the Church for women, these roles are to be in support of the men leaders. Women should not preach within the Church, as that is a role delineated for men by the Bible, While Egalitarians, believe that all people can be called into roles of ministry regardless of gender, class and race. Within complementarianism, men and
women are to work side by side rather than together. While within Egalitarianism, there can be an overlapping of roles between male and female. Complementarianism astutes a hierarchy of man over women as the deciding factor in all negotiations, while egalitarians establishes an equal consensus where man and women both contribute and are both equally capable of working within the same capacity. It is extremely restrictive to females in the way that it places certain rules on men and women that objectify women to fit a certain mold and if they do adhere to the rules of the mold, they receive criticism within their communities.

Depending on interpretation the Quran’s place of women within the role can be seen as both egalitarian and complementary, Muslim women understand that the Quran states that they are to be seen as equal, yet verse 4:34 suggests that men are the “maintainers.” Though women within Islam do not have to provide for the family financially. The men are the sole financial providers for the family, while the women get to keep any money they earn. Unlike Christianity where the man and female work together to provide yet the male is the key decision maker. Islam has a set of complementary rules that don’t necessarily always favor the men. In their book, Who Speaks for Islam?, John Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, interpret this law as opening up the opportunity for females. (2007) Since they have no obligation to the family to provide financially, they are not obligated to work. They argue that if Islam were to be egalitarian, the idea that men and women have equal rights would take away from some of the rules set within Islamic tradition that has been favorable to females. This is a case to where reinterpreting the text could hinder the equality that can be found within the
Quran and shows that everything is based up on interpretation. Within in Islam, its much
harder to dissect the opposing views of complementarianism and egalitarianism within its
religious construct. Though both do exist, the Quran states that both men and women are
equal, but like the Bible, the Quran also says that men are the maintainers of women,
which is covered later from the study of verse 4:34 in the Quran. The verse can be seen
as a complementary verse as it defines the role of man and women within the confines of
marriage. It does not define the roles of man and women within society. (Esposito,
Mogahed, 2007) Unlike Christianity that does not have a set of defined laws, and
Complementarianism can be found with the Sharia law which outlines the define roles of
women and man.

Within the different roles, we can see how religion has either subjugated women
to different complementary or egalitarian rules. Complementarians have continued to
feel that women and men are two separate values, and are meant to work side by side
with one another but women still fall behind the man as she was developed from him to
work alongside him. Egalitarian views are slowly infiltrating Church ideas to challenge
the patriarchal structures that have been in place for the last hundreds of years.
2.2 Verses of Controversy

To think about where the idea of women being inferior to men stems from, drawing upon two verses one within the Bible and the other within the Quran that stage the controversial matters of women’s place in this world. Both 1 Corinthians 14:34 and the Quran 4:34, speak of women’s submissiveness, obedience, and silence. It is these two verses that have been interpreted to lead to the oppression and dismissiveness of women within many cultural societies of the world. It has been the way that they’ve been interpreted that needs to be revisited and reworked to go back to the founding verses to where women and men were created from an equal space. These texts are both being looked at by men and women to come to a better understanding of the roles women play in society. Women who are stepping into leadership roles within religion are helping to redefine the restrictions that were placed upon them.

Since the Bible and Quran are not limited to one society and their place in this world they must be reinterpreted to fit within the confines of their community at their place and time. Biblical and Quranic interpretations were generated by their culture, present conditions of women during the time and outside philosophies. These were the factors that lead to the Bible being interpreted to exemplify the inequality of women and to instill these factors into the traditions and teachings of the religion. Many argue a case for Faith stating that its not the religions who were to blame but the followers of the Faith. Amina Wadud says “It’s not the text or its principles that change, but the capacity
and particularity of the understanding and reflection of the principles of the text within a community of people.” (Wadud, 1999) Wadud continues to explain that it is not the text that has defined the roles of male and female, but society as a whole has set the preconditioned determinates for a division of labor. With this distribution of labor, women’s positions tend to focus more on domesticated roles. There are not places in the Bible or the Quran that delineate appropriate roles to the man or a woman. It has been the society that puts these roles. In this situations, it’s mainly elementary to place the blame on religion, rather than to look at the variable within a cultural setting that has prequalified these positions within out looking at their seats within history and comprehending where they originated. We are in a culture now that doesn’t limit women the way it did before, so texts need to be taken and reanalyzed for current times.

The creation story can be seen as a basis for the beginning of the patriarchy but does this view cross gender boundaries. It is also the beginning point of development for complementarianism and egalitarian views. Eve is often characterized as the villain within the story by tempting Adam. Adam is just the unassuming male who had the inability to decode the message that God had sent to not just Eve, but him as well. (Irons, 2015) It is from the creation stories that these viewpoints have been developed by an analysis of the patterns and rules that were defined during the establishment of Adam and Eve. The creation narrative can give us a sound basis of how the interpretation of texts places men above women. The first verse investigated will be from the Bible regarding the creation of Adam and Eve, then we will look at the similar verse in the Quran regarding creation. Comparing and contrasting the similarities will show if gender roles
have been determined by the start of creation or if it was led to factors of interpretation of the text by others. Dissecting the scripture will permit the ability to draw conclusions as to how they were interpreted by followers of the said religion. Women tend to be portrayed in the scripture as regarding their relationship to men.

Women have long had to struggle with the identities of women within the Bible and have long had to negotiate stories which have created them to be invisible characters. Throughout the Bible, stories neglect to focus on the existence of women. When the stories involve women, they tend to be exposed as having as being inferior to men. They are left out of the Church, treated violently and live in a world where men are the primary figures in the stories. This has lead to hermeneutical positions that women were to be inferior to men. They were to be treated as a lesser being, yet these interpretations fail to take into account the context of history and time. They neglect to realize that these stories fit into the historical background where men were the only leaders. However, in recent history with the changing of culture women are now in roles of leadership and can hold equal and status to their male counterparts. This cultural shift demands a refocusing on the texts and their place in history. Since the field has been long dominated by a patriarchal structure, it calls for the reworking and negotiation of women to find the stories within the texts that show women within roles that are favorable to their treatment and place in society. They must evaluate these stories to construct their form of theology and self understanding (Schmidt, 1996)
2.2.1 Christian Verses of Controversy

Women have long had to struggle with the identities of women within the Bible and have long had to negotiate stories which have created them to be invisible characters. Throughout the Bible, stories neglect to focus on the existence of women. When the stories involve women, they tend to be exposed as having as being inferior to men. They are left out of the Church, treated violently and live in a world where men are the primary figures in the stories. This has lead to hermeneutical positions that women were to be inferior to men. They were to be treated as a lesser being, yet these interpretations fail to take into account the context of history and time. They neglect to realize that these stories fit into the historical background where men were the only leaders. However, in recent history with the changing of culture women are now in roles of leadership and can hold equal and status to their male counterparts. This cultural shift demands a refocusing on the texts and their place in history. Since the field has been long dominated by a patriarchal structure, it calls for the reworking and negotiation of women to find the stories within the texts that show women within roles that are favorable to their treatment and place in society. They must evaluate these stories to construct their own form of theology and self-understanding (Schmidt, 1996)

Within mainstream interpretation Genesis at the time of creation, man is put before woman. It has been a long-standing Christian view to making Eve the scapegoat. She was to blame for all that is wrong that exists in the world. This idea of Eve being the originator of sin is a long-standing believe that negates God’s true intentions to create
man and women as his image bearers both holding equal value within the world.

Christian traditions embrace the idea of original sin yet they negate the idea that this was not his true intention.  (Irons, Mock 2015) This can be seen in the verse below, where God speaks of the creation of humans and places them on an equal pedestal. In Genesis 1:26-30, it states:

> And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. 27 And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”

This verse sets the stage of interpretation for man to be the image of God had created them in his own. In Genesis 2:21, God goes on to create woman from man setting her up to be indebted to man from the start:

> And Jehovah God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof: 22 and the rib, which Jehovah God had taken from the man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And the man said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

The interpretation of this text has led to men feeling superior over the woman. The woman was set up from Man. From the start she was created to be a companion to Adam, to “help” him. Many Christian men place themselves above the woman, and set the woman as a lesser or second to them, as Eve was second to Adam and created from him. Though previously man and woman were to be set up in the image of God. The woman was set up from Man. Within the Church, the fact that Eve stemmed from the rib of Adam holds an official ideology that she was created to work alongside him as she
came from his rib, the side portion of his body. Many Evangelicals believe that God felt that Adam needed help, so he created the animals and created Eve to give support to Adam. The fact that God created animals even before he created Eve to help Adam can be perceived as Eve or woman being the secondary sex. (Irons, Mock 2015) This is the foundation of the patriarchal culture that Christian women now find themselves in.

Added to the pressures that women face in redeeming themselves, Feminists feel that this Biblical interpretation has led to the creation of women as a characteristic feature. Genesis 3:16 makes women into property, “I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception: in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children: and they desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” This possessive use of the word control subjects women to an idealized interpretation that they are meant to be property.

In a review of Biblical texts, there is a very common use of the word submissive, and obedient in regards to women due to the order of creation. To make an assumption of what is meant by the utilization of these terms within the Bible, we must understand the context and which they were used, we also must realize that these verses were being written during a place and time and were based on historical events and women’s place in the culture. Due to the changes within history, do these verses in their full context still apply to today’s times. By reinterpreting text, women can look at the flexibility in translations, and how has it been adapted within the Church to be applicable within today’s social constructs. Paul states in his letter to the first letter to the Corinthians 14:33b:

The women are to keep silent in the Churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says.
Was Paul stating that this is how it should be within the Church forever or was he making a statement regarding the current issues that were at hand during the time of his writings? Women of today are going with the latter idea. They feel that Paul was not making a blanket statement, as this would have been too limiting and Paul was about the equality of all humankind. Due to contradictory statements, the context of Paul’s message was lost and misinterpreted and is pushed into Church thought by Church leadership today. It is through reinterpretation of the text that women today are finding themselves taking on more leadership type roles within the Church. The contradictory remarks within the Bible are what lead to the confusion as they are not consumed as a whole, but picked out verse by verse to be interpreted in a way that makes it applicable to certain groups to undermine the actual teachings of the Bible. Some scholars argue the exact nature and context of the word speak within the text and what it was truly meant by staying silent within the Church. There comes a question as to whether this meant just to speak unwarrantedly, or if it intended to prohibit them from the actual event of talking within the Church. It is quite difficult to fully understand what Paul meant within this verses as it could have been.

Multiple verses can be cross-referenced with 1 Corinthians 14:34 to either reinforce this view or to undermine it. Women have been providing contributions to the Church that have long gone without recognition. They are calling on other texts within the Bible to help assist in the reinterpretation of the texts to prove their equality within the Church. In Galatians 3:28, the Bible states “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” This can
be interpreted in ways to mean that men and women are open to equal opportunities, yet some interpret it only to mean that men and women are equal when it comes to their forms of worship. The sexual differentiation between man and woman was not created by God to draw a line in the sand of creating specifics as to what men and females can do. After all, in the creation narrative before the actual creation, God placed man and woman on an equal playing field as image bearers. (Custis James, 2010) Biblical scholars who can be considered pro equal rights tend to lean towards the idea that God had intended for women and men to be on an equal playing field, and the norms that are within the subculture that are creating the different issues. Men and women within the Church are finding themselves in a state of advocacy for women leaders within the Church. David Scholer contends:

Modern debates over the ordination of women often miss the crucial and fundamental issues of the holistic concept of the ministry of the Church reflected in the New Testament. Of course, no person should be ordained or given any responsibilities of ministry within the Church because of gender or for the sake of a “point.” On the other hand, we have affirmed in the Church that no person, called and gifted by God, should be denied any role in ministry or leadership in the Church because of one’s gender.”

Scholer bases his ideas on a reinterpretation of the text to make the Church more inclusive rather than exclusive. (Scholer, 1983,1984) It is through the reevaluation of texts that people within the Church are reevaluating the texts to be more adaptive to the current cultural and social atmosphere. The limiting barriers that were once in place are being broken down by revisiting of the texts and understanding them in the context of the historical times they were written in and adapted them to modern culture necessities.
2.2.2 Quranic Verses of Controversy

Within the Quran, there is a particular verse that is controversial and holds critical importance to be interpreted within an individual construct of time, place, and culture. In a search to understand the verses actual meaning, Muslims are often faced with the fact that in many different translations the verse has been interpreted and adapted to hold a different meaning. Many scholars argue that when dissecting the meaning of certain verses in the Quran, interpreters are not approaching in the correct manner and are ignoring the various themes that are at play.

The controversial verse of the Quran speaks of man’s possession over women. From many translations, the terms of ownership change depending on the translation of the Quran one is reading. From verse 4:34, it is often incurred that men are to be the guardians of women and to some extent are above women in nature. The verse is interpreted in the Yusuf Ali version of the Quran as such:

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, great (above you all). (Yusuf Ali Translation)

For purpose of discourse, the translation by Sahih International translates the verse as such:

Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance - [first] advise
them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted and Grand.

While in the Ali version, he maintains that men are the protectors of women due to having more strength, the Sahih translation uses the word “charge” in place of maintaining and protect. Due to the different usage of words, one can see that the meaning changes within the scripture. (Barlas, 2002) Through its paternal nature in character, this verse causes much distress amongst the Muslim community and is quite frequently used to establish anti-Muslim sentiment it claims that a man is allowed to beat his wife. (Wadud, 1999) The controversial verse is constantly dissected and portrayed with different meanings to clarify what the verse indeed intended.

Amina Wadud is known for her breakdown of this verse by breaking down the particular words that may have been lost within translations. She argues that even though the interpretations have varied many men look at the passage as “an unconditional indication of the preference of men over women. Her focus is on the word qawwamuna and the actual intention of it’s meaning. Qawwamuna has traditionally said ‘those who provide a means of support or livelihood. (Barlas, 2002) Wadud feels the use of this verse does not place men as superior to females but draws on a responsibility that the man has to a woman with social order. Though this verse was possibly defining the roles, men have over women, like the bible it is extremely contradictory to the other passages that proclaim equality for both men and women. Wadud argues that the only way to resolve the issues within this verse is to review it using a mutual responsibility of man and woman to each other to create a balanced society. The final part of the verse that Wadud
justifies regarding women, has been long used by many to quantify the abuse of women with Islam. Wadud argues that the verse is not meant to signify that it’s okay for a man to beat his wife, but is working towards of means of finding harmony. While many translations use the word obedient to describe women in this part of the version, Wadud states that it should be translated as “good” women. She argues that the verse is pushing not just the woman but also the man to live in a cooperative nature with each other. Wadud relies on the use of words that take feminine and masculine plurality to justify her claim that this is not a verse stating that a woman must be obedient to her husband. She states the verse is simply offering up a solution to the marital discord that should be easily solved through cooperation with each other, which is a virtue that the Quran pushes.

Many scholars proclaim that the texts were written within a social context, and have no validity at the time. Another way to interpret the books is that they are open to current interpretation alongside a deeper examination and are contradictory in nature. Hence we must focus on the verses that create equality between male and females. Scholars such as Wadud feel that words have been lost in translation and God has not meant what has been socially brought down within the terms of culture. They other way women are transforming their position by focusing on the texts that inhibit women from being teachers and leaders within the Church. The only way to overcome these obstacles is to reevaluate their translations and to make them their own.

Based on an interpretation of the texts, men have been placed in superior roles over women. Asma Barlas feels that this thought is derived from “temporalization” or the
timing in which men and women were created. (Barlas, 2002) Feminists today argue that the hierarchy in the order of creation constitutes for women being the lesser of the sexes. This Biblical view is limiting but is the basis of social contract, while in the Quran both man and women are developed from a single self at the same time. The woman did not come to a man; she was not derived from being the second. She was born at the same time. This difference is voided when patriarchal interpretations and cultural influences infiltrate religion. Though the Quran does not create man and women unequally, it does not blame women for the fall; society still perceives women to be the lesser of the sexes. It also does not blame women for the Fall, but through a series of interpretations, it has been considered that menstruation and childbirth are the women’s punishments for the Fall. (Barlas, 2002) It is these ideas that lead to the misogynistic views that women are inferior to men, rarely do we hear any blame placed on Adam for the Fall, when it could be justified that he is equally responsible for not casting the serpent out of the Garden. Since punishments rather than blame were placed upon women, it gives authority to men to treat them in a way where they are lesser than they are.

With the Quran being the basis of beliefs, we must look to it for evidence of gender equality within its texts. According to the Quran, there is no difference between man and woman and the rewards that they seek for being obedient followers of God. The idea’s of inequality do not stem from the Quran but derive from the outside interpretations and perspectives within their place and time. To prove that this divide does not exist Islamic Feminists are drawing themselves closer to Islam rather than pulling away to redefine their gender equality, there is a need to search within the texts to
see where this balance lies. The Quran not only calls for the equality of women, but it also places men and women on an equal basis:

The submitting men, the submitting women, the believing men, the believing women, the obedient men, the obedient women, the truthful men, the truthful women, the steadfast men, the steadfast women, the reverent men, the reverent women, the charitable men, the charitable women, the fasting men, the fasting women, the chaste men, the chaste women, and the men who commemorate GOD frequently, and the commemorating women; GOD has prepared for them forgiveness and a great recompense. *(Quran 33:35)*

The scriptures place verbs in front of two meaningful words within this scripture, men, and women. Each word put in front of men and women is a defining word to how followers of the Quran must behave to receive compensation from God. It makes one wonder if gender equality issues can be ascribed to the religion or if we need to look elsewhere to the foundations of gender inequality, as for social structure. This scripture places men and women on an equal level.

If the stories portrayed are the basis of gender structure should be determined. Eve committed the wrongdoing, and Adam was just an innocent bystander in the whole scheme of reality. For many complementarians, this qualifies as enough to justify that man must be in charge of all the decision making, that when women are put in a place where a decision is to be made, they either make the wrong choice which as in Eve’s case lead to the demise.

### 2.3 Marriage

The following sections will focus on the definitive gender roles that complementarians and egalitarians fell should remain the same or be changed. The first part will look at marriage and how functions are defined within Christianity and Islam
and how they are changing with the influence of Feminism. The section will deal with Church leadership and how women are defying the established rules and are becoming leaders within the Church.

Christianity and Islam both define roles of both men and women within Marriage; the interpretation of scripture defines these roles. Sabeeha Rehman recalls being raised to be a housewife; she came to the United States with the idea of wanting to be a homemaker. After a few years, she yearned for more, she wanted a life outside the home and did not want to be defined by her religion (2016) Muslim and Christian woman alike both identify with the struggle of marriage and home life. As young girls, they are subjected to the idea of being a lesser being to their male counterparts. Their foundations are built on getting married and bearing children. They looked upon as lesser beings when they don’t pursue this type of life. If they can’t bear children, they are seen as even lesser being to those women who do go on to be child bearers. Not only do they have to face the opposition of men, but they also deal with other women when they want to put aside a home life and develop a career.

2.3.1 American Women: Changing the Rules of Marriage

In a blog post on the website, Focus on the Family, Jim Daly the President of the group relayed his idea of what the ten commandments of marriage are. The final commandment states, “Don’t try to boss him around. Let him think he wears the pants.” (Daly, 2017) Some may consider this to be funny and that the uses of the word “think” negates the aspect of women being inferior. The first sentence reinforces that men should be in charge of women, and therefore the reinforcement is what is most likely to be heard
by the interpreter and miscommunicates that women are to be held in an equal position as men. His blog continues to place women in rules that make her inferior to her husband, and focus on not adding to her husband’s burdens, while the husband focus on surface area views of women as “beautiful objects” This reinforcement within religious media of complementarian views and submission of women is a continuous reestablishment of rules that Evangelical Feminists are working against.

Letha Scanzoni states, “The men and women who have the strongest opinions and see the most eager to express them are those who have rigid traditional ideas which restrict women and they are quick to cite scripture to back them up.” (Lee 2016) This in the past has caused women to be ashamed to stand up for the traditional values of the Church, but this has recently changed amongst the younger set of Evangelicals, who are working across college campuses to fight for equality and to have women presented with the same rights as men. Women often find opposition within their Faith, which does not allow for the movement forward but keeps them in the traditional mode. Christian women consistently find themselves in battle with the myth that one is truly not complete until they fulfill the obligation of marriage. (Lee 2016) Christian women are well are that they have fallen into the trap of submission to men, but they are actively calling on both men and women to fall into a mutual submission. Christian Feminists are actively pursuing the use of more gender inclusive language and steering away from the male dominated use of language. They push for a more gender inclusive use of language as well as an equal marriage, meaning that men and women have equal rights within marriage as well as the same opportunities.
The new interpretation that an egalitarian marriage should exist falls in line with the scripture, Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24, NRSV) The use of one flesh ties into the idea that marriages should be equal. It is fair to say that due to preexisting conditions that were pre-biblical times the traditions carried over into Christianity where male dominance was asserted. Patriarchy continues and exists today due to the misinterpretation of scripture or by choice of the women to be obedient to her husbands through her negotiations with the text. Deborah Jian Lee tells the story of a woman Jennifer who grew up in Birmingham, Alabama. During the 1980’s Jennifer grew up in a traditional Christian home, where “gender norms” were placed on her. Due to the factors of her upbringing, once Jennifer hit the age of puberty she was thrown full throttle into the traditional ways that had been engulfed into her life. Like many Christian women, she was held up to the same expectations of being a wife and a mother. In the Church, all roles of leadership were occupied by men, and women assumed the roles of wife and mother. (Lee, 1999) This idea is commonly argued due to the misinterpretation that all roles of leadership were delegated to the apostles and Jesus. Schussler Fiorenza makes an argument with her interpretation that Mary Magdalene was in fact an “apostle to the Apostles” and was held in high esteem of the Church. She concludes upon this theory from her investigation into to resurrection story, as Magdalene is the first to have announced the resurrection of Christ. (Thielson, 2009) The female youth of the Church believed this was their fate based on the issue of Eve I have mentioned earlier.

Within the Church, it was assumed and not questioned that men were to be
authority and women were designed as the help. As the help, they assumed roles that were delegated by what men before them had set. Within home life, men rule over the women, they are the decision makers and the women willingly allowed themselves to be ruled by their husbands. Jennifer stated, “The man was always the most important person. You didn’t do anything to mess up what the men wanted to have going on.” (Crumpton, This fear of stirring the pot applies to many women within the Church and has to increase stopped women from fulfilling their full potential not to upset the men within their lives. This becomes an issue when it is not only applied to women within the Church but is also applied to those who are outside the Church as these men go on to live and work in day to day lives. They take the mentality that they have learned within the Church and apply it to other women within their life. It maybe is a mental effort on the males, and it has been long ingrained into their being, but what women are finding is that it is complicated and you can not change someone’s thought process if they feel that this is how it’s always been and is no need of changing. This also becomes an issue when men do not value women who have careers and feel that they are intellectually inferior to them. Women who grow up within certain denominations, in Jennifer’s case it was Fundamental Baptist, they are taught not to pursue a career and just to follow the lead of the men.

Luckily for Jennifer and women of current times, we have grown up in the world where Feminism exists. Because of the presence of Feminism women are now able to pursue the same careers as men and have a home life as well as for as a career. Evangelical Feminists are changing the face of not only the Church and Faith but they are
infusing their ways into mainstream Western Feminism. It has been within the last fifty to forty years that Faith and Feminism have been able to merge. And though these roles of gender have been clearly defined by religion women are willing to embrace the idea that the norms do not have to be the standard.

2.3.2 Muslim Women: Adapting to American Rules of Marriage

The wave of Evangelical Feminism has paved the way for Islamic Feminism within the United States. (Yazbeck-Haddad, 2006:127) Ideals of Evangelical Feminism have found their ways to fuse themselves within American culture, often accepting that fact that if a woman wants to be a mother, she can be a mother, but if you want to have a career as well you can do so. Muslims in the United States have seemingly come to terms with the fact that their family life must work in unison with traditional Western values. Muslim women are increasingly active in the lives of other Muslim females and push for the increase of independence rather than the dependency on the male counterparts. Like Christianity, Muslim women fight with the idea that men are the decision makers. This is thought that is solely based on traditional values. Muslim families when evaluating the lives of Western households, realize that the issues faced and the concerns of the home are similar but worry that if they fall under the too much Western influence, they will lose or lessen the values of Islam.(Yazbek-Haddad, 2006:27)

Many Muslims find themselves at odd within the culture of the United States where it’s difficult for the women just to stay home. Previously in their countries, staying home to manage the home was of necessity and was a role that women were comfortable in taking. By staying in a home, there were fulfilling the need to take care of
their family. In the United States, they are faced with the necessity of having to work to provide for their families directly. Staying at home is simply a luxury that not all Muslim families can afford. So their values shift, and the seeking of employment becomes necessary to take care of their family.

Another reality women within America must face is the decision on who to marry. In the United States, they have the choice to marry whomever they please, yet to go against the family can cause many issues for American religious women. They are faced with opposition when confronted with the idea of interFaith marriages, which in a pluralist world is becoming more and more popular amongst the population. Women must choose whether or not to abandon their Faith and be ostracized by the family they were raised within. Women are accepting that it is okay to marry outside their Faith and also teaching the younger generation to step outside of their comfort zone to embrace the new cultures that they are living within. There is some discrepancy when it comes to whether or not this is okay. Ranya Tabari Idliby (2004) classifies marriage as the “ultimate identity question.” She states that straying from your cultural and religious traditions make circumstances more difficult. Many Muslims and Christians are letting go of tradition and stepping into relationships and marriages where they are of different Faiths. This can be seen as a new wave of the American culture; it can also be seen as a unifying factor.

American Muslim women have new opportunities when they come to the United States that aren’t easily attainable in their home countries. Many Muslim women forgo their degrees and stay at home. They prioritize their families over their pursuits.
Within Muslim communities and Christian communities alike, men’s interpretation of women’s issues dwarfs their abilities to be educated working women. Women often struggle with internal conflict when dealing with the idea of starting a family but having the financial independence of their own. When women see their mothers in these situations, they define their religious views as this being God’s intention. Being a mother and a caretaker of the family by being submissive puts them in conflict with their religious identity. These learned values stem from the follower's cultural perceptions of religion. Though it is not their intention, it is this warped view that continues the problem. This misconception of the role of women within marriage creates and keeps the inequality amount sexes.

Marriage is one of the key gender roles that is defined by complementarian and egalitarian views. In most religious marriages, women are bound by the rules that were developed by their husbands and male Church leaders that place them in insubordination. Many leaders within the Church, like Jim Daly, reinforce this view that men are the superior sex in the marriage. They strengthen the belief that men should be the breadwinners, they are the ones in charge of finances, while women are left to tend to the home. Women are there make sure the children are properly educated, but all within the parameters that their voice is not equal to that of the husband and all decisions must be finalized by the spouse. Men have the final authority, and women are just there to help them along the way within their decisions. If a woman is disobedient to these ideas, she is subject to ridicule by not only male counterparts but other women within their religious
subculture. It can often become difficult to negotiate their Feminists ideals with the ideals of their religion.

2.4 Leadership

Within this section, the discussion will revolve around the place of women within the spiritual leadership. The roles that women take as leaders with Christian leadership are entirely different than the roles that Muslim women take. Christian Feminists are fighting for their equal place in the Church to serve as mentors and pastors. They want to be able to teach and spread God’s word but are easily dismissed by their male counterparts who feel that they should not be placed in leadership roles. Muslim women’s approach to leadership is entirely different as they are commanding roles within the public space to realign their values with the mainstream culture. This is not to say that Christian woman is not doing the same, but the focus of their measure lies within the redefining the Church, while for Muslim women are faced with disapproving the believe that they live a life of seclusion and oppression.

2.4.1 Changes within Protestant Church Leadership

Within religion, women have not been regarded as leaders with the Church until recently. They can assist with the day-today duties and the decision-making. Women’s place in a Church is not to serve in a leadership role but to act as complements to the men who have already taken their seats as teachers of Gods words. Within recent years women leadership within Protestant Christian Church has risen. (Ingersoll, 2003) There is a paradoxical nature to whether or not this should permit and how it should be carried
out. Women are finding themselves in growing within individual roles of the Church, but some are still subjugated to ridicule and oppression within the constraints of the previous patriarchal Church development. The question stems from whether or not women should or should not be permitted to be leaders within the Church and the changing environment within the Church that has allowed this to change. Today, the debate continues within the Church as to whether or not women should hold leadership positions, but with advocacy on both sides, Christian women can claim success with the rise of women within the ministry.

As in all focal points for discussion regarding gender norms, women are faced with many issues they must conquer or forego to establish themselves within an equal partnership with their male counterparts. In some instances, there are still men who feel that they should never be in a subordinate position to women. This can be seen within Churches where women with the equal amount of religious training, and equal amounts of qualifications are places in areas of the Church that are lesser to men. For example, women can attend seminary at the same time as her male counterpart, graduate with the same level of grades yet when they go to work in the same Church, he is placed as head pastor, while she is positioned in charge of Sunday School. In some Churches, this job would never be available to her, only the jobs suitable for women that fit the gender norms within the patriarchal structure of the said Church. One male pastored when interviewed stated that “Most people don’t want a woman as a senior pastor” (Ingersoll, 2003) But how is this decided? Most people are not accustomed to seeing women in the role of head pastor. Therefore it can be assumed that the reason they do not want this is
because of the preconceived notion whether on a subconscious or conscious level that women should not be pastors.

Julie Ingersoll often found that in Churches where women were serving as pastors, they were usually part of a husband-wife team. By being part of this team, the male still made more money, had his own office, preached in all the main services and ran the business meetings. While the women were held responsible for the women’s discipleship groups, Sunday School and creating the Church bulletins. When Ingersoll questioned her, she felt that she and her husband had shared the same view of biblical equality. Though there was plenty of disparity within the roles each took. (Ingersoll 2004) The roles women are assuming within Church leadership are roles that accentuate gender norms. They focus on the development of children and other women. Though there is progress within the Church by allowing women to take on roles that were not open to them before, it shows that women pastors are not fully accepted as leaders in the Church by colleagues and congregation members.

2.4.2 Muslim Women: Leadership through Public Activism

For Muslim women within America, the stage is different from claiming their space within the leadership. They are not necessarily doing so through religion but are asserting themselves into the public space through means of protest and demonstration. They are taking on roles within the community to revision the face of Islam to help provide understanding to the secular world. Through their roles in the community, they are redefining what it means to be an American Muslim. As well as defining their roles within the structures of Islam, Muslim women are becoming leaders in journalism,
education, and politics to help draw a clearer consensus on American Islam. (Yazbeck-Haddad, 2006:140)

The process of redefining Islam is coming out through women activity within certain Muslim organizations who have struggled with the adaptation of American culture. These important positions can be seen by women who are now becoming the presidents of organizations within Islam. Women like Ingrid Mattson, who became president of the Islamic Society of North American in 2001, are organized their actions on a persistence that women need to get educated in Islam, with the focus on the interpretation of scripture and law so they can advocate for other roles of women within the leadership. Mattson feels this is essential to “an Islamic paradigm for legitimate social change.” (Yazbeck-Haddad, 2006:123-124) Women within leadership roles in Islam, not only have to fight against the preconceived notion of their oppression, but also the culture stigma that comes with being the outsiders in American culture.

One close resemblance to women within the Christian sphere is that Muslim women continue to work under male directives to pursue their endeavors with Muslim society. The majority of Muslim organizations are still controlled by male figures. Women in Islam have to take on the key roles of educating the youth. Though men also serve as educators, it is the woman’s function to make sure that children are properly educated and aware of the sanctions within the Quran and the Sunnah. Like their Christian counterparts, they are serving as heads of education within mosques. Also within these organizations that they are working to promote interFaith dialogue. Women feel that if they build on interfaith relationships, they can help improve
understanding to their cause. It’s not only through education of the other but through education of the youth that women are taking leadership positions. In the United States, there has been the recent collaboration with Christian organizations that share the same ideas on the negativities with public schooling. There is an understanding amongst these groups that they need to work together to preserve the rights of educating their children in the way they feel is appropriate. (Yazbeck-Haddad, 2006:90)

Outside of the mosque, women are taking roles as chaplains to serve in Churches, prisons, and other public spheres. This is a way to avoid the idea that women can not act as imams, but when women feel the need to educate others on Islam, they assume these types of roles within the public sphere. (Yazbeck-Haddad, 2006:20) Like Christian women, they face the lack of support from the community due to the preconceived thoughts that religion should be taught by men. Despite the opposition, women are finding ways to become leaders and spread education of Islam in the United States.

While most Muslim women take roles of leadership outside the Church to make a difference, they share the same sort of opposition that women in Christianity find. In the United States, it’s becoming easier for women to assume these roles within leadership, but they also have to face the setbacks and are often put in roles that are traditionally gender specific. With a focus on the family and youth organizations, women are hoping to change the faces of their religion.

**Part Three - Negotiating Feminism and Religion**

In this section, we will discuss how women are changing the rules set by gender
roles, as I previously mentioned they had targeted their roles in marriage and within Church leadership, but there is another way that they are establishing themselves and redefining the rules that have been placed upon them for years. Since they have already tackled some issues of gender, they are learning to merge their Faith with Feminism through means of activism and renegotiation.

Many women who believe in certain things in their secular life, they let them go in their religious life. This is due to growing up in a world of keeping rules set up by religion. Women all over the world allow themselves to be treated in a way that they allow men to continue the patriarchy. This is beginning to change, through the use of activism and advocacy. This is done throughout the United States, such as attending male only meetings, dressing in garb that was not usually accepted, they have begun podcasting, blogging and writing articles to show the ways that women are unequal. Though attacked by the press and social media, these women still continue to work because they believe that they believe by doing so it is bettering their communities and speaking for those who feel they don’t have a choice. In this section, we will discuss how women are changing the rules set by gender roles, as I previously mentioned they have targeted their roles in marriage and within Church leadership, but there is another way that they are establishing themselves and redefining the rules that have been placed upon them for years. Since they have already tackled some issues of gender, they are learning to merge their Faith with Feminism through means of activism and renegotiation. This section will present the stories of women who are working within their Faith to either negotiate Feminism and Faith or separating their religious views and
fighting within the public sphere for women worldwide. A Christian Woman and Muslim women who are transforming the way Christian and Muslim women are viewed within society. Both have gone on to have an active online presence to show that the status of women within religion is changing through a negotiation of Feminism and Religion. They are groundbreakers for a new wave of Feminists Theologist using technology and art to negotiate their Faith with Feminism.

Women are so much more than their marriage, their fashion, their careers. Through activism and work within the community, religious women are fighting unconscious bias to rework the system that has been continually pushed upon us. By identify that an unconscious bias exists, women are working to reorganize the structures that place boundaries and roadblocks in front of them. Complex Multilateralism is a term used by Robert O'Brien uses to describe a process that works together to shape the global affairs of today. (Smith 2008) Women of Muslim and Christian Faith are joining forces with secular groups to find the gender norms that have been placed upon them. A perfect example could be seen this year via the Women’s March which spread throughout the entire world. One of the head chairs of the committee was a Muslim Woman named Linda Sarsour. Sarsour is an American-born Palestinian-American Muslim who not only is fighting for gender rights but the civil liberties of Muslims throughout the country. She joined on the stage with secular Feminists. Sarsour stood on the podium declaring herself “unapologetically” Muslim, she vocalized her disdain for the presidency. She stated, “Sisters and brothers if you have come here today as your first time at a March, I welcome you, and I ask you to stand and continue to keep your voice loud for Black
women, for native women, for undocumented women, for LGBTQ communities, for people with disabilities.” (Sarsour, 2017) Though she has many adversaries, the Christian, her outspoken, courageous spirit, Sarsour is redefining the stereotypes of what Muslims women are perceived to be. Her advocacy not only stops with Muslim women as she defined herself as the real Feminists. When interviewed for a magazine she just stated, “You either stand up for the rights of all women, including Palestinians, or none.” (Meyerson, 2017) It’s women like Sarsour who are redefining the stereotypes of what it means to be a woman, a Feminists, a Christian and a Muslim. It’s through social movements such as the Women’s March that are organizing groups that focus on the idea of change. It was a movement that transcended the American culture and took place all over to the world as a way to show that women are in opposition of the stereotypes placed upon them and will fight to regain the power that has long been taken away from them.

Earlier I spoke about the creation narrative and how it has influenced the perception of women within a culture and has defined the roles that they play. Some Christian Feminists are now looking at the creation narrative again to see if they can reinterpret the past perceptions of how women were delineated as the derivative to men. Is it possible to reclaim their equality to men or are women simply at the mercy of the culture and society they are in? Carolyn James feels that now is no better time than ever to reclaim the scripture as a tool for the empowerment of women. Though in the United States, women have found themselves dealing with the secular and religious worlds. But James feels that women can combine the two by looking at Genesis and envisioning it to
be appropriate for current times. (Custis James, 2010) Her process of redefining the roles relies on the first presence of women within the Bible. Genesis 1:26-2 states, “Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. So God human beings in his image, in the image of God he created them: male and female he created them.” It’s the first verse that references the division of sexes as equal. Is lesser the verse that gains notice. By reinvestigating the creation narrative, James feels the Bible “shatters every negative value statement the world has ever made about women” (Custis James, 2010) Christian Feminists should take this verse and claim it as their own as the Bible in its very first mention of sexes creates men and women on an equal playing field. If this was the first mention of the sexes, it is this verse that we should base all interpretation of women’s presence upon.

Women within the Christian Church are reinvesting their time by looking into the stories that have been portrayed to that have set women as submissive and obedient characters. Rather than looking at these stories in the way that they have been told to them over the years they are redefining the structures of the Church by giving the stories a new meaning and a new twist. I spoke with Jennifer Crumpton earlier, who had abandoned her Southern Baptist lifestyle to take on a new lifestyle that involved a career outside of the Church that was not dominated by the patriarchal structures that had been previously placed before. Jennifer Crumpton has reclaimed the story of Esther. (Jian Lee, 2015:205-207) Esther was an orphan who was sent to be a concubine of the king, but when the King saw her, he fell in love with her and made her his wife. She remained obedient to her husband while concealing her true religious identity as a Jew until she
discovered a plot of the King to kill her people. Within the story, Esther makes a plea to
the King and ends up saving the Jewish people from their demise. (Crawford, 1998) This
story has appealed to the Christian community and has served as a basis for the obedience
of women and how God has used women to do his will. It has served the basis for
women to be taught to obey your husband, submit and to stay obedient even if it means to
forego your real identity. What Christians have failed to do within this story is look at
how women were treated as objects, Esther was a concubine first, not just a women.
They dismiss this part of Esther’s story where she exploited and focus on her obedience.
(Jian Lee, 2016:205-206) The reinforcements of women’s place in this world show how
the structure of interpretation has lead to the inferiority of women with society. Women
like Jennifer have learned that these stories have been told them in a way that dismisses a
women’s right to equality. Women are seen in roles that are subservient to men, by
placing women in these roles it has been long translated into our culture that God blessed
these women due to their obedient nature, neglecting to notice the view of a woman’s
status within the culture.

Crumpton has gone on to coin the term “FemmEvangelical” She coins this term
as a new way of thinking about Faith and empowerment. After attending Union
Seminary, Crumpton went on to start a blog that later turned into a book after her token
phrase “FemmEvangelical” Her book is titled “FemmEvangelical: The Modern Girls
Guide to Good news.” Rather than leaving the Church and abandoning her Faith, she
gives women a way to renegotiate the gender biases that have been placed upon them
through Church history. She feels that religious values are still articulated in ways that do
not translate to today. (Crumpton, 2015) By reclaiming the stories and traditions of the Bible, they can hold on to their Feminists values and their Faith. Women like Jennifer Crumpton and Sarah Bessey are redefining the negativity that surrounds being a Feminists by reclaiming it for the Church. (Bessey, 2013) It is these types of movements that are helping reconcile the idea that women are equal, as God intended them. Women are adapting the stories to fit the current cultural climate. While some biblical scholars hold tight onto the verses that oppress women, it’s the women like Bessey and Crumpton who are transforming and reevaluating these verses to give them a new meaning. From reevaluation, they are finding that historical context plays a huge part in the transmission of gender roles and their place in society. These movements base their system of restructuring all on scripture. The social construction of the Church has long been dismissive to the authority of women, but by recapturing and pushing forward and not letting these structures stand in their way, women with the Church can find their place.

Samina Ali is a Muslim American author who co-founded the American Muslim Feminists organization Daughters of Hajar and curator of Muslima, an art installation that focuses on the voices and art of Muslim women is working on presenting a new generation with a looking into the lives of Muslim women that is not portrayed within media today. Through Muslima, Ali is working with collaborators to support the efforts of Muslim women who are working towards more inclusive and equal rights. Ali has stated, “All too often, Muslim women are seen as weak, powerless, subjugated. And there are many misinterpretations about the veil and what it means to individual Muslim women to wear, or not wear, the veil.” (Ali, 2013) Through her collaboration with Muslim
women around the world, Ali is helping reinvent the portrayal of what it means to be a Muslim woman. Samina is working hard to reinterpret the text from their pre-establish patriarchal structures to get them back to what she feels was their original intention of equality and justice for all. Many Muslim women activist like Ali feels that their religion has been misinterpreted in the US to be a religion of hate and oppression when in all actuality it is a religion of peace, justice, and equality.

Through her work with Muslima, Samina is giving a new voice to the women of Islam. Samina feels that for far too long, our culture has been satisfied with the media’s portrayal of Muslim women as weak and powerless. Media has long portrayed them as victims of oppression in need of saving. But that is not always the case, especially with the women featured with Muslima. Her goal is as follow, “My hope is that this exhibition will begin a new discussion about the realities of what it means to be a Muslim woman today. And perhaps, in the process, it might even redefine what it means to be courageous.” (Ali, 2013) She highlights the stories of women who are strong activists who have had choices and have called upon a negotiation with their religion to define Islam as religion that holds women in high esteem. It through Ali’s sharing of courageous characters with Islam that she shows how Muslim women can be the voice that saves us in a time where extremism wagers high.

With the use of technology and media, women like Crumpton and Ali are redefining what it means to be a Religious Feminists. They are using a form of media to reset the meaning of what it means to be a Feminists and be religious. By sharing the stories of other women within their Faith, they are helping show that the current
perceptions are not what their religions are about. Ali and Crumpton are taking negative opinions and showing that women can merge their Faith with their Feminists nature. They can have an authority and be leaders through re-visioning a future to where they can leave parallel lives alongside their counterparts.

**Analysis and Conclusion**

When beginning this paper, most of the problems approached were taken on the surface of what it mean to be a religious Feminists with America. But throughout the research, the standard connection was that this issue was just not found within America but was found with cultures all around the world. The focus was on stories of American women, but from research and connecting the pieces of the underlying themes, the issues are worldwide. Women having to cross the gender boundaries is not just an American issue; it’s a worldwide problem. Feminism has long been characterized as being the evil that has caused women to stray from their religious foundations, yet it is through the rise of Feminism that women are assuming authoritative roles and redefining what gender means. To go back to the main research question of how gender roles are influenced by religion, we can see throughout this paper that the roles that have been defined have been structured primarily on the hermeneutics of religious texts.

Women have been set to be placed in a position where they forced into submission by the standards that were put on them through religious textual interpretations. The key word within this brings forth the question of whether it is the religions fault or the fault of the interpreters. Through a reanalysis of the text, one can
notice that women were placed within an equal measure of men. Both the Bible and the Quran can place women to be in a position of equality. The structures that have been in place well before these texts came into the picture have set them to be put in a lesser position than their male counterparts. The patriarchal structures have been long in place throughout history and predate both the Quran and New Testament Bible in which both gender role interpretations have been based upon. With a reinterpretation through hermeneutics, women can rewrite the laws and structures that have been placed upon them. As we have seen with the role of Esther, women can redefine the stories of the sacred text to have positive outcomes.

As I have tried to portray, gender roles go beyond the boundaries of one culture. It is quite difficult to limit the influence of culture on a portrayal as historically, women have been left in the shadows of their male counterparts. Where American women are making a difference is through their activism for women’s rights. They are standing up for the equality of women as a whole. In my research, I found that progress within the Evangelical movement has been moved along at a constant pace as to where Muslim women are slowly coming into their own. This can be because based on media portrayal more attention has been brought to the issues they face within their religious subculture.

Though the religious text was the basis in deciphering how gender roles are portrayed within society, it takes a back seat to a larger issue that is at hand. Equality has its place in the texts, but due to the societal factors, it is easily dismissed and continually interpreted to place women at a second hand with men. This is not a fault of the patriarchy alone, as women themselves fall into these roles and subjugate those who are
trying to redefine their positions to ridicule. As long as there is the continued view that women and men are to be complementary to each other, equality will always be an arm's length away.

Unfortunately, time has shown that many humans have been conditioned to think a certain way and are not willing to reevaluate their current positions in life. They don’t find the errors within their culture and are content with the way that things are. It is these people that activists are trying to reach to show that they do not have to follow the ways that have been placed in front of them. Feminism was founded based on a group of women who noticed that the way of life they were leading was not one of equality or preference. The world that we are living in is not one of nature; it has been defined by the roles we have been placed in due to the way that people operate within the realm of our creation. As long as extremism and fundamentalism exist, there will be conflict within our existence. It’s these groups that organize themselves in the way of sharing a common reality of their making. This is why subcultures exist within culture, and why many “ism” are created to either fight the structures in place or to reinforce them through hermeneutics.

In conclusion, though the stories used within this research were primary the stories of American women. Their stories have proven that this transcends their culture and is a worldwide epidemic. As long as the patriarchal structure and misogynistic thought processes exist with the realm of religion politics and power, progress will happen but will constantly be in a battle to change the way and thought patterns of others. It is through activism and engaging the youth that women and men will be able to break
down barriers and realize that we are all intended to be equal. A continued observation of women reworking and negotiating within the realms of Feminism and Faith will help to draw further conclusions. Through technology and education, people are becoming more aware and more observant of the hindrances and oppression that has long gone unnoticed.
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