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## Research Of Oppression Of Women In All Major Religions

Though there are notable differences that make all major religions unique, most of these religions run on a general framework. In recent years, a growing group of women who are a part of these religions have begun to recognize and call for a change of the systematic oppression of women and other minority groups by leaders of the church and government officials who use the basis of religion as a veil. Women throughout the different major religions who are unhappy with way that leaders manipulate religion to satisfy their misogynistic agenda have introduced feminist theology.

Marissa Sotos, a writer for Queer Grace writes, "Feminist theology is the study of how women relate to the divine and the world around them as equal creations in the image of God." This way of thinking has become a popular topic of discussion for both women and men in Christian dominations, but women in other major organized religions, such as Islam, have been dabbling in feminist theology for centuries. Many women struggle with both the negative and positive tasks that feminist theology seeks to accomplish. In chapter 8, Burn writes that the negative aspects of this movement is "the critique of and struggle against the oppression of women whereas the positive task one of reform and reconstruction" (Burns 191). Though a significant number of women are calling for reform of organized religion that better addresses the feminist agenda, more conservative women prefer the traditional role they are cast into by their religion. Recently, there has been a large focus on the oppression of Muslim women in the media, but that's not to say that other major religions; Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism don't also use their religion to push their oppressive and conservative narrative on women. Burns states it should be known that "small indigenous religions often give women a greater role than do the world's major religions" (Burns 191). There are many major differences between the beliefs of major religions, but "the common presentation of God as a male, traditions of male leadership, the exclusion of women from major religious rituals, and religious texts that leave out the female experience and legitimize men's authority over women, all legitimize and reinforce patriarchy" (Burns 193). I find that the focus in Burns writing is not the differences between women's role in major religion, but the similarities in the way men have systematically used religious narratives to control and oppress women.

Overall, I agree with the feminist perspective on these major religions. I believe that men, especially men in positions of power, have used religious narratives to control women and the choices they make in their lives. This control has found its way into the decisions that our government makes regarding women, especially when it comes to health care and the rights women have over their own bodies. To me it seems there is no actual separation of church and state, but rather, a permeable line that becomes hardened only when certain situations face it,

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none of which involve the religious basis for the control of a woman's bodily autonomy. I also believe that people in power use organized religion to guilt women into accepting traditional roles and values, so that the choices that these women make aren't seen as "wrong" or "unholy". I also think there is something to be said for women who happily accept traditional or conservative roles and ways of life based on their religious beliefs, especially women in religions that we are not a part of or familiar with. For some women, practices like wearing a veil or taking on traditional roles in the home is based on their interpretation of religious writings and "rules". While some of us forming opinions on these women who happily accept their conservative narratives may find these practices oppressive, women living under these circumstances often find it liberating, and believe that by accepting these roles, they are pleasing their god/gods/goddesses.

In some cases, women have no choice in the narrative they are given at the hands of men in power. In *Solider of Faith*, Caryle Murphy tells the story of Shareda Hosein, who found her calling in religion during a two-week training with the U.S. Army Reserve in Kuwait. Hosein felt that her current career path within the U.S. Army wasn't heading in a positive direction, and was looking for a change of career path when life sent her a sign. Murphy documents the encounter that sparked Hosein's dream, "Inside the chapel, a male Muslim soldier was trying, with some difficulty, to teach a female soldier the precise moves of the obligatory pre-prayer washing of feet, hands and face... The two women went to the ladies room, where, at the sink, Shareda performed the ritual performed by Muslims for more than 1,300 years. Suddenly, it hit her. Here was God's whispered blessing for the unusual goal she had set for herself: to become the first female Muslim chaplain in the U.S. military" (Murphy 1). Hosein's request to become the first Muslim Army Chaplain was denied, with the Army referring to "Islam's general prohibition against women leading prayers in the presence of men" (Murphy 2) as their reasoning for blocking her request. Some time after the Army denied Hosein's transfer request, she got married, divorced and in 1983 gave birth to a daughter named Farhana. Hosein got a BA in business and marketing at the University of Massachusetts in Boston and shortly thereafter got a real estate license and started selling property.

The turning point in Hosein's faith came in 1986, where she took time off school to attend the Army's Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia. She speaks of how being in the military affected the way she thought about her faith, "the military ethos -- to lead by example, not just orders -- also influenced Shareda. "I had to do my own self-examination," she says, and that meant a reckoning with the Islamic head scarf, or hijab. She asked herself why she had no problem complying with the military's rules -- keeping her hair above the bottom edge of the collar when in uniform -- but ignored her religion's injunctions. "Am I more afraid of man's laws than God's laws or God's requests?" she wondered. "And that was, like, the shift for me . . . The next day I decided to wear it." She was 35" (Murphy 5) Throughout Hosein's journey, her role in the military further connected her with her faith, which she had previously left out of this part

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of her life. Shareda used her years in the military to become, in her mind, a better, more strict Muslim. She continued to pursue her faith while becoming the first woman to become a graduate of an intensive program to train Muslim chaplains.

There is no one type of feminism, but rather, a spectrum of more different types of feminism where the focus of that movement is specific to certain types of gender inequality. The two types of feminist movements that Kirk focuses on in her perspective on micro-meso and macro systems are liberal feminism and radical feminism. Abigail Adams and Mary Wollstonecraft have been big fixtures in the liberal feminist movement since the beginning of its creation. Liberal feminism is considered “a variety of feminism that works within the structure of mainstream society to integrate women into that structure”, and “its roots stretch back to the social contract theory of government instituted by the American Revolution” (Kinds of Feminism). Radical feminism is considered the basis for all movements that sit on the spectrum of feminism and is known as “the breeding ground for many of the ideas arising from feminism; ideas which get shaped and pounded out in various ways by other (but not all) branches of feminism” (Kinds of Feminism). Liberal feminism is known to “slog along inside the system, getting little done amongst the compromises until some radical movement shows up and pulls those compromises left of center” (Kinds of Feminism). Based on Kirk’s comparisons between micro, meso and macro systems, I would say that liberal feminism would speculate more at a micro, personal level based on the way liberal feminism functions. Radical feminism would speculate more on the meso and macro scale, operating in a way that forms movements, and as the affect of movements, change, on a larger more global scale.

The textbook definition of religious fundamentalism is “the belief of an individual or a group of individuals in the absolute authority of a sacred religious text or teachings of a particular religious leader, prophet and/or God” (What Is Religious Fundamentalism?). In most major religions, religious texts and teachings are translated, interpreted and read by strictly men. Most religions have leaders that are men, and believe that their higher powers, prophets or gods are men. McCarthy-Brown describes religious fundamentalism as “the religion of the stressed and disoriented, of those for whom the world is overwhelming. I believe that religious fundamentalism crosses into almost all major religions, with some exceptions such as in the sub-Saharan African religions mentioned by Kirk in the first reading. I don’t believe fundamentalism is required for religion to function, but rather, fundamentalism is needed by men and religious people of power to keep women oppressed. Men desperately need women to believe that they are the only ones who can understand religious texts, because they were created by a man. When it comes to the Christian interpretation of Adam and Eve, translators of religious texts have made it abundantly clear that it was Eve who ate the forbidden fruit, thereby casting women the role of being the first sinners. In most major religions, women are portrayed as immoral, sinful and unclean. This narrative that has been passed down through men’s interpretation of religious texts for centuries has been used until this day to guilt women into

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believing that they must do more to make up for the fact that they are, simply put, women, and to accept the fact that they were predestined to be lesser creatures than men. Men desperately need religious fundamentalism to keep women confined in their oppressive chains.

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