

## Fundamentalism and the Modern American Woman

The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the United States Constitution, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, (“Major Features of the Civil Rights Act of 1964”) as well as subsequent legal cases, requires civil institutions to provide racial and gender equality. Yet, these same guarantees are not required by religions when handing down laws of the church. Certain faiths dictate that women are to be subservient to either their husbands and/or the men of the church. To some “Post-Feminist” movement women, the idea of being submissive to a man is abhorrent. However, there are some women who actively seek a religion where they hold a lower position. In many cases, religions that note that women are inferior to men fall within the definition of fundamentalism.

As a woman who actively left a religion that taught me from infancy that I am to be in submission to my male counterparts; I wonder why any women would want to be treated as a second class citizen. This paper will consider the different theories regarding women who actively stay in or join a fundamentalist Christian religion. As part of the review process, I will examine my personal experience as a young woman in a fundamentalist religion and the motivational drive to leave the religion of my parents and grandparents. Lastly, I will address my own bias and theories regarding the negative impact that fundamentalist Christian religions have on women. On October 18, 2013, *Time* published an online article regarding the UN campaign highlighting gender inequality across the world (Roy). The UN campaign focused on the most common Google search terms involving women. The Google searches contained negative phrases involving women including “women need to be put in their place”, women need to know their place”, “women need to be controlled”, “women need to be disciplined”, and

“women cannot speak in church” (Roy). The results were so astonishing that many *Time* readers questioned whether the search terms were real, the degree to which the terms were used, as well as the location of the searcher. The readers’ questions indicate that people, both male and female, do not believe that bias against women is as prevalent as Google’s searches indicate. This disbelief shows a lack of understanding of how the modern world truly views women, particularly in regards to women and religion. For example, in fundamentalist religions women play the role of care-giver and helper but are never allowed to hold a position of authority. The diminished roles held by women in fundamentalist religions reinforce the teachings of the church, that women are subservient to men.

As a woman who voluntarily left a fundamentalist religion, I can attest to the fact that certain religions hold the belief that women should acknowledge and be in compliance with their submissive role to males. My decision to leave the religion of my family was not an easy choice nor was it a quick/rash decision. I was routinely frustrated by my lack of voice and constant conflict with men within the religion; I came to understand that the religion of my youth was not the religion of my future.

## I. History of Fundamentalism

The history of fundamentalism in the United States is extensive and has evolved over time. Historian John Buescher writes that American fundamentalism began in the late 1800s/early 1900s with a focus on defending against the growing liberal views in direct opposition to the teachings allegedly found in the Bible. He theorizes that the term “fundamentalism” has evolved currently to mean a literal interpretation of the Bible (Buescher). Authors such as Buescher, Michael Emerson and David Hartman attribute the rise of fundamentalism as a response to the rise in modernity (Emerson 133). During the period that

fundamentalist religions were developing so too were the modern ideas of nation-states, capitalism, secularization and rationalization (“Modernity”). Fundamentalism was growing at the same time as the United States grew to embrace the ideas of modernity. Emerson and Hartman argue that fundamentalism became more prominent in the United States in the 1970s (132). Therefore, it would seem that modernity has a direct link to increases in fundamentalist faiths throughout the United States.

Buescher noted the term fundamentalism can have different meanings to different people. For the purpose of this paper, I will be applying what Emerson and Hartman noted as the nine characteristics of fundamentalist groups (134). Emerson and Hartman utilized the research engaged in by Gabriel Abraham Almond and found in *Fundamentalism Genus and Species*. Emerson and Hartman noted that Almond broke out the nine characteristics into two main groups “Ideology” and “Organizational”. The first group, Ideology, includes the following five characteristics 1) Reactivity to the marginalization of religion; 2) Selectivity; 3) Dualistic worldview; 4) Absolutism and inerrancy; and 5) Millennialism and messianism. The second group, “Organizational” is broken down into the following four characteristics: 1) Elect, chosen membership; 2) Sharp boundaries; 3) Authoritarian organizations; and 4) Behavioral requirements (Emerson 134).

## II History of Feminism

Feminism, as defined by Merriam-Webster, is the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities (“Feminism”). As with fundamentalism, feminism has a long history in the United States. The movement developed in the modern age alongside other “rights” movements such as anti-slavery, labor rights and later civil rights. Throughout history, women have fought to obtain equality and, some would say, the battle is still being fought today.

In an attempt to be brief I am going to default to Wikipedia's summary of the History of Feminism in the United States. There it is noted that feminism evolved over three "waves," with the first stage beginning in the early 1800s ("Feminism"). The first wave focused on a woman's right to education, to work and basic equality. During this time, Wendy McElroy observes that early religious leaders saw any woman who promoted equal rights as a "religious dissenter" (McElroy 29). The second wave began in the early 1960s with the feminist movement pursuing an end to legal inequality between the sexes. Finally, according to Wikipedia, the third wave began in the early 1990s. However, this third wave was not so much a push towards women's rights but rather a reconsideration of the definition of "femaleness," as well as connections and similarities between race and gender issues. This change in course was allegedly a reaction by young women against the singular focus of the experience of modern "white, upper middle class women" ("Feminism").

### III. Discussion

For the first time in history modern women have life choices that stretch beyond marriage and motherhood. In addition women have made significant strides when it comes to advancement in education and in professional careers. One example of the progress women have made can be found in the practice of law. The current President of the Illinois Bar Association, Paula Holderman, noted that women in law have come a long way from when Mayra Bradwell fought to be allowed to practice law in the State of Illinois (Holderman). The American Bar Journal noted that 47 percent of those enrolled in law schools for the year 2009-10 were women (Cassen Weiss). Another article addressing women in academia noted an increase in the number of women attending graduate school from 1966 to 1996 by "between 22 and 411% for Master's degree, Doctorate degree, Medical school, and law school" (Colaner 526-527). The

number of women in law school and practicing law has increased since Ms. Bradwell's successful fight to be allowed to practice law. However, gender equality has still not been accomplished within the legal field. As President Holderman noted "women lawyers make up only 15 percent of equity partners in large law firms and *that number has not changed in 7 years*" (496). Catalyst, a nonprofit organization that promotes opportunities for women in the workplace, noted that in 2013 women represent only 4.2 percent of CEOs of Fortune 500 companies ("Women CEOs of the Fortune 1000").

Despite the increase in women obtaining graduate degrees there appears to be a great disparity between obtaining a degree and career advancement. The question that must be considered is why is there a lack of women at the top? Many theories have been suggested regarding a possible systematic failure to promote women to leadership roles and women's voluntary departure from corporate America to pursue family and other goals. President Holderman opined that a possible cause associated with the loss of female lawyers is due to a disparity in pay. Although I agree in part with Holderman's theory, it is my opinion that more than one hurdle face females in the workplace. A disparity in pay will most certainly cause female attorneys to look elsewhere for a job; however, a lack of proper mentoring or opportunities for growth will also cause female lawyers to leave the profession. Until an environment is created where women feel that they have an active voice and are a valued member of a team, they will likely seek some other avenue that provides them with a sense of self-satisfaction and fulfillment.

The desire to feel fulfilled and accomplished is a very strong motivator for women. Sophia Korb suggests that some women choose to reject the ideas and path of modern women who juggle both career and family since it does not, in fact, bring about true happiness. A lack

of fulfillment and happiness may be what drives some modern women to consider other institutions that they see as welcoming to women. Brenda Brasher found that women who practiced fundamentalist Christianity felt fulfillment and empowered with their organization even though they were subservient to males within the church (Korb 72). One empowering aspect of fundamentalist religions is that motherhood is respected and held in high regard rather than something that might be minimized or seen as a burden (Korb 73).

Fundamentalists teach that women and men have very different skills sets and attributes. To the fundamentalist, differences between men and women explain why women are better caregivers than men (Korb 73). Even some feminists hold the theory that each gender possesses different skills and abilities and each should be recognized and celebrated for their differences. In “Gender and Jury Deliberations: The Contributions of Social Science,” Lucy Fowler supported the idea that men and women possess different reasoning abilities and failure to acknowledge the differences harms both sexes (16). Fowler cites Carol Gilligan’s “Gender and Moral Reasoning” as a basis for promoting the idea of the differences between the sexes (21). Some women experience self-doubt due to having a diminished decision making role in the modern workforce. Conversely, these same women, may feel empowered by the theory that women have greater care giving skills than men and those skills are recognized by the church (Korb 76).

Other possible reasons for female buy-in towards fundamentalist beliefs are that women need to feel a part of community and greater than themselves. George Gallup, Jr., addresses in “Why are Women More Religious?” the theories regarding greater religious participation by female church members than male members. The Gallup data indicated that women are more involved in the raising of their children, which includes religious education; women make

stronger connections with other women within their faith; women are more likely to share their worries and stress; and “women lean toward an empirical rather than rational basis for faith” (Gallup, Jr.) Korb theorized that fundamentalist communities are often very supportive of stay-at-home moms and they create a “strong insular community” (76). Some women struggle with trying to have it all and feeling like they are failing. Korb noted that the feminist movement promoted women in the work place but in the process work also puts additional pressure on women. This created a greater degree of “conflict and guilt” for the average working mom (Kolb 78). As such, if a woman holds a job that is not supportive of the many pressures they are under, they may look to outside forms of support such as religious groups.

When considering the U.S. business model, we are left with a structure that is rigid in its approach to work and life. Wendy McElroy aptly wrote that “women were defined by the institutions surrounding them” (29). The author further theorizes that in order to break from a male oppressive society that women must first change the male influenced/run institutions (30). As noted above, considering that women only hold 4.2 % of the CEO positions in Fortune 500 Companies, any change for women, especially in striking a balance between being an effective caregiver and having a career may be difficult to obtain. Similar to male dominated industries that maintain a male leader, fundamentalist religions apply a male only rule to their leadership positions. Fundamentalists hold that men are the head of the church so it is reasonable to view these religions as a male dominated society also in need of change.

As previously noted, the history of feminism in the U.S. has been focused on women fighting for the same individual freedoms and equality as their male counterparts. However, some of these freedoms appear to be less important to the younger generation of women. In 2008, Colleen Warner Colaner and Steven Giles engaged in a research study and noted their

findings in “The Baby Blanket or the Briefcase: The Impact of Evangelical Gender Role Ideologies on Career and Mothering Aspirations of Female Evangelical College Students”. This first study interviewed Evangelical female college students to determine if conservative views regarding gender roles impacted their academic pursuits and ultimate life goals. Interestingly, the early research indicated that Evangelical gender beliefs did not have an impact on career ambition; however, it did have an impact on whether a female wanted to be a mother. The authors continued, noting that Evangelical female students with greater career ambitions were more likely to rate lower on motherly ambitions (530). Conversely, those Evangelical female students that wanted to be mothers were less likely to exhibit strong career ambitions. The authors theorized that the “participants of this sample of church-going women may not be ‘wanting it all’” (531). The authors questioned if their findings were too premature to conclude whether college aged women knew exactly what they wanted because these desires may change over time due to circumstances (531).

Further studies have analyzed the relationship between career goals and religious affiliation. Alyssa Bryant engaged in a longitudinal and qualitative review of Evangelical college students who were voluntarily part of a religious organization. Bryant interviewed the students and then three years later she re-interviewed them to determine if their views had changed regarding gender, leadership and dating and/or marriage. Bryant noted a similar aspect as other studies regarding the view of men’s roles and women’s roles, namely that men were perceived as the decision makers and women were seen as the care givers.

Bryant’s research indicated that although religious colleges “profess egalitarian values ... [they] reinforce female ‘otherness’” (552). Religious female college students felt conflicted between the prescribed gender role and the pressure to be more modern. The study indicated that



women who believed in egalitarian gender ideology often went on to obtain graduate degrees and had careers where they exhibited leadership. However, women who applied the complementation ideology were less likely to pursue anything greater than a four year degree (552). The subject interviews revealed that although being part of a campus religious organization was an influence and reinforced the complementation ideology, a greater influence was family and churches. Those individuals who did not have family members who were part of a fundamentalist faith were more likely to question defined gender roles (563).

Bryant opined that women face internal struggles when trying to fit into modern society and trying to balance strict religious beliefs regarding gender roles. She noted that women engage in “self-sacrifice in the pursuit of religious fulfillment” (563). My personal experience reinforces Bryant’s theory in that I did not pursue higher education. Instead of getting a degree, I was encouraged to rely on and relay the message that this system of things is ending and the only way to have everlasting life on paradise earth is to be a Jehovah’s Witness. The idea that a woman needs to put aside her wants and desires to please God and the men of the church, is a strong fundamentalist message that is routinely reinforced in spiritual literature and talks.

Charles Peek, George Lowe and Susan Williams researched whether individual beliefs impacted beliefs about gender description and member enrollment in fundamentalist religions. The researchers determined that individuals that took the Bible literally were more likely to oppose gender equality (Peek 1211). Women who questioned the absolute truth of the Bible were more likely to believe in gender equality ( Peek 1213). Men who believed in the Bible as the absolute Word of God were more likely to believe that women have specific roles to fill based on scriptures (Peek 1213-1214). The researchers’ findings also indicated a connection by

women between their personal beliefs and sexism as opposed to their male counterparts and group dynamics (Peek 1214).

The Peek, Lowe and Williams study noted that “personal convictions and not group connections are still linked to female church members’ attitudes about female roles” (1214). The research indicated that women who join their husbands’ religions are not as vested in the beliefs as women who have voluntarily joined a church. The study further implied that group dynamics influenced men’s attitudes towards gender roles. However, the Korb article noted that women looked to form groups in order to have a greater role in their church and to possibly feel empowered. The Korb article also suggests that when women feel like they are seeking something that is not what modern society supports, i.e., stay-at-home mom instead of working mother, they look to form groups within their religious communities to provide personal validation.

The need to feel validated and part of a community is not an unusual desire among women regardless of their national origin. Malgorzata Rajtar researched Jehovah’s Witness women in the former German Democratic Republic. Rajtar was interested in Jehovah’s Witness women because Witnesses across the world hold no allegiance towards any government and are neutral (261). Witnesses stood out in former East Germany because they did not vote, they did not support any specific political agenda, they refused to join the military, they went out in service and they attended numerous weekly religious meetings (216). Witnesses were the subject of political persecution in former East Germany due to their religious beliefs and practices. Despite the persecution under the former German Democratic Republic, many who were raised in the religion remained and over the years there has been an increase in the number of new members. Rajtar’s study focused on why women stayed active members of a religion

were they were directed to be submissive to the men of the religion, whether it was a husband or an elder, faced persecution by the government and were likely to have a lower standard of living due to socioeconomic reasons (266).

Rajtar found that the women were likely to stay in the religion because it gave them a sense of responsibility and duty; being responsible for raising children, taking care of family, and being able to engage in the preaching work gave them a sense of purpose (267). Rajtar's research supports George Gallup, Jr.'s theory regarding women looking for ways in which to organize and socialize with similarly minded women. When taking this into consideration, the idea that some work places make women feel like outsiders may explain why some women seek fundamentalist churches in which to feel accepted. Furthermore, certain industries may have greater barriers for women when attempting to achieve a level of leadership. If women feel that they have no chance of accomplishing career advancement it is understandable that they would begin to look to other sources to find fulfillment.

Colleen Warner Colaner, who researched Evangelical college students, extended her study to the different communication styles of Evangelical communities and more liberal religions. The author stated that the Evangelical churches began reinforcing Biblical ideas that deem men the head of the house in response to the rise of modern movements such as feminism, gay rights, and sex outside of marriage (98). Warner Colaner noted that Evangelical families followed a "conformity-orientation" meaning that they felt it was important to conform to the norms of the church and placed significant importance on "obedience and uniformity in behavior" (99). Families that engaged in conformity-orientation reinforced the idea that failure to conform would result in dire spiritual consequences. However, those families that followed more of a liberal religious ideology were more likely to engage in "conversation-orientation"

meaning that open dialogue was encouraged and debate was not seen as a negative, but rather a way to engage in critical thinking (99). A failure to disagree on a matter was not seen as having any negative spiritual consequence.

Warner Colaner theorized that the different communication styles had its own effects on the children of each family. For example, conformity-oriented communication was linked to low self-esteem and depression in children. Whereas, conversation-oriented communication was linked to “children’s well-being and family cohesion and flexibility” (102). Sarah Braasch’s, a human rights activist who was raised as one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, personal experience of self-loathing and fear of displeasing her father and/or God reinforces the theory that conformity-oriented communication leads to a poor self-image issue and mental anguish (9). Similar to Sarah Braasch’s experience, I was taught to fear the consequence of breaking God’s laws regarding questioning the Bible and the literalist views regarding women being lesser than men.

Although it may seem odd to people, strict religions may, in fact, appear more attractive to some. Laurence Iannaccone speculated that the reason strict religions are strong is because they require much more buy-in by their members. He goes on to claim that since religion is a group effort, when there are members that are not as invested in the beliefs and practices, it waters down the message making it less emotional and motivating (1183-1184). Further, Iannaccone noted that religions that have specific requirements in order to separate out the strong members from the weak ones tend to also weed out those members that are not completely devoted to the faith (1187).

Iannaccone’s study addresses distinctiveness of various religions in the U.S. His study observed the level of attendance of strict religions that were distinct through specific religious requirements related to holidays, sex outside of marriage, views on modesty and views on gender

roles, just to name a few. His report indicated that those religions that rated highly distinctive, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Later Day Saints, Seven Day Adventists, all rated high in attendance in comparison to Unitarian, Episcopalian or Methodist (1191). He further noted that individuals that were members of strict religions had greater numbers of "strong" members over members that belonged to non-conservative religions (1195). As noted above, women enjoy the company of others and it brings them joy to engage in communal activities. Religions that require regular attendance may be attractive to women who are feeling isolated in other areas of their lives.

Iannaccone further argues that female members that stay insulated within strict churches are those who have "the least to lose" since their family members also belong to strict churches and are more likely to remain active members because of these ties (1200). However, those who had "social ties to friends and family outside the sect" were less likely to remain within the church (1200). He suggests that strict churches discourage their members from making ties with people that are outside their faith. He aptly notes, "to remain strong, a group must maintain a certain distance or tension between itself and society" (1203). Interestingly, separateness is one of the nine characteristics identified by The Fundamentalist Project. The ability to create fear of outsiders, as well as keep members isolated allows a church to control the message and potential detractors.

In order to gain power over women, fundamentalist religions assert that the Bible is the authority over all members. Morny Joy uses Judith Butler's theory that religion identifies gender as "invariable and nonnegotiable" in order to set rules regarding the two genders (61). Joy noted that American fundamentalists have often pitted the ideas of morality against the views of feminism (57). Using the theory that religion is the rule maker allows for fundamentalists to

argue that their actions are not in violation of women's rights but rather, in compliance with God's laws (58). As noted by The Fundamentalist Project, a member must agree in the absolutes taught by their fundamentalist faith otherwise they risk the threat of being removed from the ranks of active members. This all-encompassing ideology makes it easier for women to embrace the absolute truth that their place is in the home. As opposed to the modern workforce where they might not feel they have a place or feel they have to fight to find a place.

As noted by Sarah Braasch, the fight for women's rights shares a similar path to the fight for racial freedom. In both cases the Bible has been used to justify the suppression of each. For women, some religions use scripture to diminish their rights rather than seeing them as a full human being entitled to the same freedoms and responsibilities as men. Joy noted that women should not have to "choose between freedom and religion" (68). Just as with the issue of slavery and the ultimate abolition of the same, feminists argue that it is possible for religion to grant freedom to its female participants.

Like other strict conservative religions, Jehovah's Witnesses believe in the literal interpretation of the Bible. As such, they hold to a very strict definition of men being the head of the house and women playing a supportive role. Iannaccone noted in his research that Witnesses were some of the least educated people. The lack of education would also support Iannaccone's theory that education and socioeconomic reasons play a part in people staying in or gravitating to a strict religion. However, there are educated women that remain in or join strict churches.

I believe that those same individuals who use scripture to justify the subjection of women would likely be of the same mindset as those individuals who justified acts of slavery. In order to reach fundamentalists we must first understand whatever reasoning they use to justify gender discrimination. We know some of the reasoning behind the strict definition of gender roles.

However, we do not understand the deeper meaning behind the need for some strict religions to subjugate women. Joy noted that greater understanding of fundamentalist structures must be known in order to begin the process of changing the views towards women. Joy, like Elroy, suggests that is necessary for researchers and religious leaders to work together so as to create a dialogue between the two groups that are at times diametrically opposed (66).

Emerson and Hartman noted that a more in-depth study of religion needs to be engaged in so as to understand what attracts people to the beliefs and practices of a strict religion. Until such time as numerous ethnographic studies are done to fill the gaps in research, theorists will continue to debate, not only, the term fundamentalist but also people who are attracted to fundamentalist religions (142). The authors quote Laurence Iannaccone in suggesting that a study of sectarianism would serve society a greater benefit because it would provide a greater understanding of the thought process behind those who join churches. They further opine that Iannaccone suggests that there has always been an ebb and flow to the increase/decrease in the religiousness of the nation (141). As such, any current increase in attendance in fundamentalist religions may simply be a temporary gain with no real reason or motivation behind the increase. I, however, do see reactions to modernity and feminism as viable reason for why people choose fundamentalist religions.

#### IV. Personal Perspective of Fundamentalism and Feminism

Jehovah's Witnesses believe in the literal interpretation of the Bible. As such, they believe all wives should exhibit the attributes of the "capable wife" as found at Proverbs 31:10-31. A capable wife would be submissive to her husband and Jehovah's Witnesses believe that men should be the head-of-house ("Insights on the Scriptures"). They note that women are to play a supporting role. Men are commonly compared to ship captains with emphasis on the idea

that there can be only one captain otherwise there would be chaos. Jehovah Witness women are taught that they must be respectful to the religion's male leaders. Women are not allowed to stand before the congregation and teach. However, they are encouraged to engage in public speaking, but only in a seated position and they should be speaking to another woman who is also seated. This posturing gives the appearance of women having a dialogue that others can learn from rather than being a teacher or leader.

When considering my religious training as a young girl, I was told that women were to be subservient to men and it was reinforced by the actions of the female role models of the congregation. An activity that Witnesses are known for is their preaching work. During my youth, I saw few males go out in service during the week due to work commitments. Instead the activities are overseen by the women of the congregation. These same women who preach are required to cover their head with a scarf or a hat and be in a seated position when they say a prayer. Again, this approach highlights the fact that women are never to be mistaken as placing themselves in a position of authority because that is reserved for males.

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, the headquarters for Jehovah's Witnesses, describe women as being created by God to be a helper for man. Jehovah's Witnesses preach that just as Christ is submissive to his father, Jehovah God, so too should women be subservient to men ("Women, Why Submit to Headship"). Witnesses teach that a woman who fearfully respects God will conform to proper headship and display the proper respect for the man, bringing God's favor and blessing upon their family ("Women, Why Submit to Headship").

The Watchtower study is one that requires group participation, meaning that questions would be asked and the audience would raise their hands and be called on to give answers. Since Jehovah's Witnesses do not separate their old from their young, young girls would be sitting in



these meetings hearing their role models or peers explain how God expects them to be obedient to not only Him but also to all males. Witness women are routinely admonished to adhere to proper headship, even for a woman who is not married, she is required to be respectful to the elders of the congregation should they decide to make decisions on her behalf because they are shepherds of God.

In addition to being required to be in submission to males, another burden faced by Jehovah's Witness females is the outright discouragement of higher education. Jehovah's Witnesses place a higher emphasis on pursuing spiritual rather than academic goals. The most recent *Watchtower* noted that academia promotes ideas that are empty and shallow steering Christians away from teaching of the Bible ("Slave for Jehovah"). In addition to claiming that higher education is useless, the article goes on to encourage single males or married couples to join Witness sponsored schools where they can focus on God's word and the preaching activity. This same article remains silent regarding resources available to single women who choose to refrain from secular school and go into the fulltime ministry. A lack of education and a fear of an outside world almost guarantees a woman will remain an active Witness. As a woman, if you lack an education and you have been taught that a man should be the one in charge, your life choices are significantly limited.

To leave a strict family religion, and potentially everyone behind, is frightening and overwhelming. Sarah Braasch shared her experience of leaving the religion of her youth, Jehovah's Witnesses, and seeking something more. She noted that even though she knew she wanted more than what she was told she was entitled to (i.e., as a woman nothing more than serving God or a male), it was not an easy road. Braasch admitted that at times she considered suicide because it seemed an easier way (19). Although I can identify with Braasch's struggles, I

never considered suicide; however, there were times when I considered just going back to the religion of my youth because it was something that was familiar and comfortable. Further, isolation from family and childhood friends is lonely and stressful. In order to overcome the challenges of leaving a fundamentalist religion, a woman must be persistent and persevere otherwise the struggle to be fulfilled in a world that has been portrayed as evil and destructive will seem an impossible task.

### Conclusion

Women have fought long and hard to have the same rights as their male counterparts. However, the fight has not been completely won as evidenced by the lack of equal showing of women in political and civil leadership positions. American businesses have not made it easy for women to progress to becoming leaders. There are some indications that women long to be considered part of a team and have a deciding voice. In some cases, the lack of inclusiveness may drive females to look elsewhere to feel fulfilled. Further, a young woman who has been told her entire life that her main goal should be to serve God may struggle with the ability to find her place in corporate America. To add to the challenge, when corporate America does not welcome the female voice; this same young girl may find more comfort in the religion that places her in a subservient position but one that she understands how to navigate. If we are truly to bring about equality for women, granting them equal rights and opportunities as men, as a society we must remove the roadblocks that are currently in place preventing women from advancing in all areas of life. It is essential that we understand what attracts educated women to fundamentalist religions. In the end, I do not believe that fundamentalism and feminism will ever find a true common ground that will allow them to work together. The best we can hope for is that we continue to educate our women and empower them so they can make decisions that

will be of the most benefit to them. Until such time as there is true equality for women, I feel it is my responsibility to respect a women's choice and that includes if she decides to be part of a fundamentalist religion. Although I may not agree with a fundamentalist woman's choice, it is my responsibility to create a safe, respectful environment for all women. Creating a safe and respectful environment will allow a place of refuge for any woman who chooses to leave a strict religion.

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