AL-GHAZALI ON THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN:

AN INVESTIGATION IN TERMS OF CONFLICT THEORY,

FUNCTIONAL THEORY, AND INSTITUTION THEORY

By

Latefah Alkanderi

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<u>Introduction</u>

In order to understand Al-Ghazali's (1058-1111 CE) perceptions and teachings about women's education, we need to consider them in the context of the era in which he wrote. By examining these concepts and comparing them to the sacred texts on which he relied for inspiration, we will gain a greater understanding of women's status in his day, and can extend our findings to the present day.

Muslims regard the age of the Prophet as a golden epoch in the history of Islam. Women were visible in the realms of education and philanthropy (Ahmed 1992; Amal, 2000; Roded, 1999). Roded (1994) notes that 41% of the endowments in Ottoman Aleppo were documented as having been established by women, suggesting that Muslim women – particularly affluent ones – were committed to scholarship. These were not insignificant contributions; Roded (1999) mentions buildings and highways in several places in the Middle East named for the women who financed their construction. In contrast, Mazrui (2001, p. 67) notes that British women "however were granted the right to own property independent of their husbands only in 1870." Thus, Muslim women were exercising their rights to own and distribute property more than 12 centuries before British women.

Both Muslim and even some non-Muslim researchers (Iqbal, 1996; Esposito 1982; Spring, 2000; Coulson, 1964; Armstrong, 2000) agree that Islamic law (i.e., the *Holy Qur'an* and Prophetic sayings) is broad enough to support modern legal structures concerning women's equality, and that it meets the needs of modern life, especially in terms of family law. In one of the *ahadith*, the Prophet Muhammad said, "Women and men are equal halves" (el-Sayed, 1993, p. 308). The Prophet did not teach or consider that women were inferior to or less entitled than men.

El Saadawi (1980) writes from the perspective of conflict theory. She maintains that there are positive aspects in Islamic culture which must be sought and emphasized, and negative aspects that should be exposed to bring about further change. She points out that "women in the time of the Prophet obtained rights, which today, are denied in most Arab countries" (El Saadawi, p. 212). Because women today are being deprived of opportunities that the Prophet had conferred upon them, something apparently shifted. As an example, Al-Dhahabi (1994, Vol. 12, p. 493) was a medieval Islamic thinker born after Al-Ghazali's era. In his book, he describes a book written by Al-Muzani that summarized Al-Shafi'i's *fiqh* (law). Al-Dhahabi noted that Al-Muzani's book was readily accessible in the Middle Ages, and that many families would give their daughters a copy when they married, in order that she know what she could reasonably expect and be responsible for in her new life. These young women brought this book as part of the goods their families would send with them for establishing her household, to refer to and consult if they had any questions. If one examines this book, copies of which are still available today, the first thing one would notice is that it is written in the formal language of the well educated. If women were not knowledgeable in those days, what would be the point of sending this book along as a reference if she could not read it? It is also interesting that this book (or something comparable) is seldom included in a young

bride's belongings today, suggesting that perhaps many Islamic families today are placing a higher priority on the material value of what they send with their daughters when they get married than on the ongoing spiritual and moral support they could offer with such a book.

There have been some Islamic thinkers over the last 14 centuries (e.g., Al-Qurtubi, 1966; Al-Qabisi, 2000) who have espoused positions conflicting with the guidelines established by the Prophet. They assert they are protecting women by denying them literacy and an education, which now requires leaving the home and attending an institution of learning, exposing them to the outside world.   These maverick opinions have many times been accepted and implemented as if they were official Islamic law, when in fact they are merely traditions established by humans.[1] Thus, researchers are looking back to the *Holy Qur'an* and *ahadith* to determine what is true and what is innovation in order to ascertain the official positions with regard to the rights and responsibilities of women.

Aisha Bewley (1999) tackles this issue in her book, *Islam: The Empowering of Women.* She offers historical sources demonstrating that women were indeed active in all areas of life throughout Islamic history – until 300 years ago. When we consider that Islam has been a recognized religion and way of life for over 14 centuries and that only in the last 300 years have women's rights been curtailed, her investigation into how women's roles as scholars, politicians, and spiritual leaders were lost is very relevant. Why indeed did women of Islam lose their rights and respect from men, when they had proven over and over their value in the home and in the public arena?

Bewley points to colonialism as the downfall of women's rights in Islam. She offers examples such as how, at the end of the Mamluk period in the 14th century CE, it was hard to find a

woman without a teaching license, and even before this period there were large numbers of such women, such as Fatima Al-Samarqandiyah, who not only had an *ijazah* (license) for teaching, but also had the capacity to authorize *fatwas* (legal opinions). Fatima read law with her father, and her husband used to consult her (Roded, 1994). Bewley's book contains several pages of names of women who, like Fatima, taught both the *Qur'an* and *ahadith*, were *muhtasibah* (market inspectors), exercised *faqihat* (jurisprudence), and were also active in politics and war.

In the preface of her book, Bewley enumerates the factors believes contributed to the loss of women's rights earned in early Islamic history, which led to women's disempowerment and subsequent loss of educational opportunities and public activity. Her reasons include a re-assertion of pre-Islamic concepts of patriarchy; converted Muslims maintaining non-Islamic practices that furthered patriarchy; the influence of Western ideas (which also, until recently, asserted that women were inferior); and the legacy of modern colonialism, which asserted that Islam was barbaric and that only Western ideas were civilized. This last concept was further reinforced by the Islamic ruling elite, who inherited this legacy of colonial power and imposed it upon the Muslim world, which "de-throned" women from their place of importance in every aspect of Islamic life: education, politics, and religion.

These ideas merit further study, and may be the key to reopening the door for women in Islam to regain the privileges lost in the last 300 years. Roded (1994) notes that what was proposed in the ideal and what occurred in reality may have been different, and that there were social factors which impacted women's freedoms outside the home. Roded also explains that it is difficult to determine the exact manner of women's seclusion because it is possible that the historical

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[1] From the Middle Ages, some Muslim men interpreted education for their wives (or daughters) as a method which would allow her to write to other men and thus cause problems in the home. This idea was adopted and women were

biographers didn't provide certain details because it was common knowledge at that time, but notes that women were, in fact, meeting with men for business and academic purposes without compromising their modesty.

Al-Ghazali's Philosophies Concerning Women's Education

In medieval Muslim society – and in other cultures during the same time period – the majority of the literature concerning raising children refers to males as authority figures. Gil'adi (1992) reports that there was explicit discrimination against females. Al-Ghazali's concept of knowledge and ideas on methods of teaching, like those of many Western philosophers in the 18th century (e.g., Rousseau), was concerned more with boys' education than with girls' education. Even though the Islamic religion encourages females to educate themselves, Al-Ghazali proposed that education for women be very limited, maintaining that females should be educated only by their parents or husbands. Interestingly, while Al-Ghazali (1997) acknowledged that teaching and learning is the highest level of worship, he asserted that women need only religious education.

To understand this in the context of his era, Al-Ghazali perceived that women needed to learn only the fundamentals of religion in order to fulfill their duties as wives and mothers. In *Ihya'*, Al-Ghazali (in Holland, 1998) reports his opinion that women should not endeavor to acquire any loftier forms of knowledge other than religious education. Al-Ghazali noted that the woman's father – and her husband, after she marries – are responsible for educating her about the rules of ritual prayer.

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denied education, even into the 20th century (Eleanor Douymato, 1989).

A man who is getting married should learn about menstruation and its rules, so as to observe the necessary restraints. He should teach his wife the rules of ritual prayer, and about when prayers must or need not be made up by women after menstruation. For he is commanded to preserve her from the Fire, in the words of Allah (Exalted is He): Guard yourselves and your families against the Fire…(66:6).

He should instruct her in the beliefs of those who follow the Prophetic model, and should remove from her heart any innovation she may have heard of. He should instill the fear of Allah in her if she is lax in the matter of religion.

He should teach her all that is necessary of the rules of menstruation and irregular bleeding, although the latter is a lengthy subject. The essential knowledge a woman must be given about menstruation concerns the prayers that are to be repeated.

When her bleeding stops just before the sunset prayer, if only by the time it would take to perform one prayer-cycle, she must make up the midday and afternoon prayers; if she stops by the same length of time before the morning prayer, then she must make up the [preceding] sunset and late evening prayers. This is the minimum that women observe.

If the husband is seeing to her instruction, she may not go out to consult the scholars. If the husband's own knowledge is inadequate, but he consults the Mufti [scholar] on her behalf and conveys the reply back to her, again she may not go out. Otherwise, she does not merely have the right to go out for consultation, but is duty-bound to do so, and it is a sin for the husband to stop her. Once she has learned her religious obligations, she may not go out for a session of divine remembrance [*dhikr*] nor for extra studies, unless she has her husband's consent.

Whenever the wife neglects one of the rules governing menstruation and irregular bleeding, and the husband does not tell her about it, he is equally at fault and becomes her partner in sin (Al-Ghazali, in Holland, 1998, pp. 92-93).

In her anthropological study, Dahl (1997) found that some of Al-Ghazali's arguments concerning women's duties and rights have been, in many circumstances, taken quite literally to this very day (pp. 157, 179). Thus, even though Al-Ghazali proposed that only males be well educated – which was not unusual in his era – it is not a foundation of Islam that women have fewer educational opportunities. Safi (2001, p. 34) emphasizes that "while Islamic sources differentiate men's and women's responsibilities within the family, all limitations imposed by classical scholars

on women's rights in the public sphere were based on faulty interpretation of Islamic texts, or practical limitations associated with the social and political structures of historical society." This supports the re-examination of Islamic texts to ensure that today's interpretation is both accurate and applicable to contemporary societal needs.

Trends in Modern Islamic Women's Education

Some Muslim social thinkers (e.g., Nasr, 2000; Al-Bashier, 1981; Ghadbian, 1995; and others) have tried to organize the Muslim thoughts about women's issue in two trends: Traditionalism, of which there are two sub-types: conservative tradition and modern tradition, and Secularism. Rahman (2000, p. 8) notes that the two trends "are, for the most part, brutally juxtaposed, and produce two types of people who can hardly communicate with each other."

Conservative traditionalists assert that change, if needed, will be gradual. If the system has worked for this long as it is, then there is little if any need to change it. This functionalist approach notes that there are places where changes could be made, but there may not necessarily be any commitment to making them. Modern traditionalists, on the other hand, have noted inconsistencies between the way things are and the way they're supposed to be. For example, the *Qur'an* advocates that everyone seek knowledge. But in some cases, women have been denied that option. Their inclination is to return to the official guidelines for the faith and determine what the original intent was. This is a new functionalism.

The secular approach corresponds to conflict theory and the perception that the problem is sourced in unequal distribution of resources – in this case, we will use the example of differing

educational opportunities for men and women. These adherents advocate letting one do what one will, without the perceived "constraints" imposed upon them by religious guidelines. This brings to mind a question: Can feminist educational theorists re-apply Al-Ghazali's philosophies on education for women without resorting to a secular approach?

Theoretical Analyses

Functional Theory

Parsons and other functionalists relate the operation of a society to the human body. Every part has its own function and responsibilities, and that the system will seek a natural state of equilibrium. Al-Ghazali's thoughts correspond to this concept when he distinguished between male and female roles in a society, because the society needs both roles to be filled in order to function as a whole. Al-Ghazali proposed that the women's functions were to be mothers and housekeepers, and that the men's functions were to support the family (i.e., usually to be employed in some capacity outside the home) and to teach their wives and children. After all, if everyone worked outside the home, who would take care of the children?

Al-Ghazali (1997) and other conservatives have proposed limiting women's education. Muslims advocate educating males and females separately. In order for today's young women to be educated, however, there have to be women trained as teachers. Thus, women will need to be educated without limitation. In this case, functionalism would seem to dictate that women need to be educated, because in order for that part of the "body" to function – that is, for young girls to

attend schools with female teachers – then education beyond that offered in the home must be acceptable.

Other medieval Islamic thinkers have documented their observations and interpretations of life in the Middle Ages (e.g., Ibn Al-Jawzi and others). Ibn Al-Jawzi (d. 1201 CE) noted that Islamic women in the 11th century (CE) were mostly illiterate, although it is worth noting that women were still making significant contributions to society, regardless of literacy. Evidence of this is included in Ibn Al-Jawzi's collection of biographies of his contemporaries, in which 240 women (23% of the total number of people mentioned in his writings) were mentioned as having made notable achievements (in Roded, 1994, p. iv).
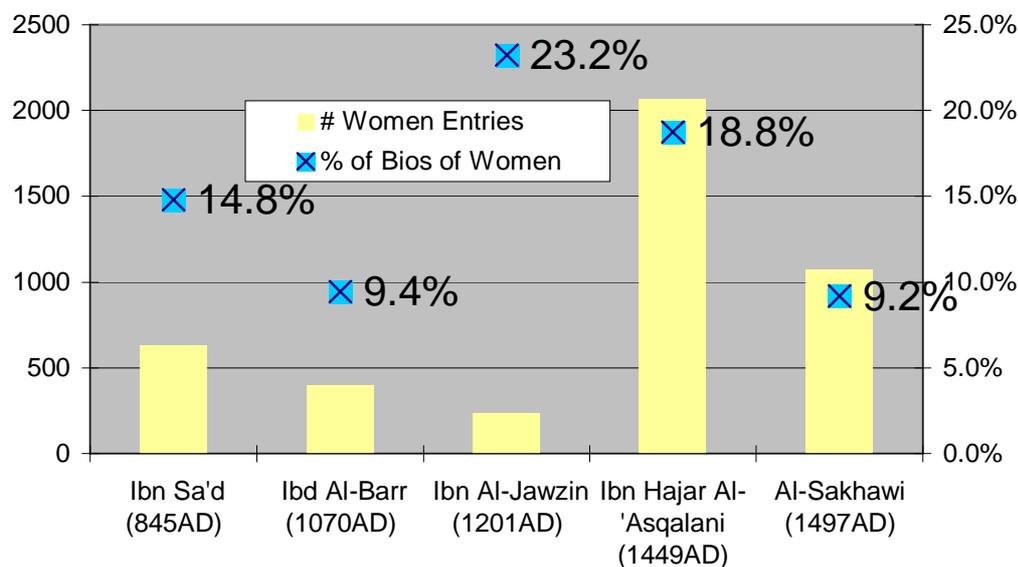

Figure 1. Biographies of Muslim Women (Roded , 1994).

It is important to note that these women's biographies do not include every significant female in medieval Islamic history. It is also impossible to compare these figures to equivalent information about noteworthy women in Western history because European history makes comparatively few references to the contributions of women and, of course, there is no information to report about women in North America, and the US in particular, prior to the early 17th century. Roded (1994, p. viii), however, notes the "plethora of source materials" concerning women in Islamic history. Tritton (1957) mentions several examples of learned Muslim women from the Middle Ages, and that some of these women had students of both genders. Although some of these women were wives of scholars, these Muslim women were not necessarily from rich or elite families. Some of the women Tritton mentions were actually slaves, citing a *hadith* that "praise is due to one who educates his slave girl, frees her, and marries her" (p. 140), because in Islam education is for all people and no one is inherently better than another. Tritton also notes that women were not only trained to read and write, they were actually employed to do both, giving as an example a woman named Fatima bint Al-Hasan who received 1000 dinars from Khalifa Al-Kunderi for writing a treaty. This is especially significant when one realizes that they did not have conventional printing methods at the time. All 'printed' matter was copied, one document from another, so accuracy and penmanship were critical skills.

Might one conclude, therefore, that as Al-Ghazali looked around the society he lived in, he would expand his recommendations concerning women's education? It would be understandable that he would still limit female education to some extent, perhaps not offering as much as males would be taught, and he might still want to ensure that women did not lose the family traditions and the basic education first learned at home with fathers and husbands. He does stress the importance

of religious education and mentions several guidelines for teaching this material to boys and men, but he does not specifically mention what or how to teach unmarried girls. Al-Ghazali's writings give us the impression that boys are entitled to more education than girls, even though he denounced showing preference to males. Because he is not here today for us to inquire, it is a complex task to determine what he intended.

Since functionalism attributes the characteristics of consensus, cooperation, stability, persistence, and reciprocity to societies that strive for equilibrium (Eitzen, 1985; Andersen, 2000), it would seem that Al-Ghazali and some conservative traditionalists (i.e., those who believe that education for women should be limited to what they need to know to be better wives and mothers) would lean towards this theory. In addition, this theory often suggests that changes are gradual and incremental, reforming, and corrective, without conflict. Strandbakken's (2000, p. 253) article *Conflict Theory* notes that while changes may be gradual, a change in "one part necessarily leads to changes in other parts, so that the totality of change can be said to occur inside an overreaching order."

Functionalists do not question Al-Ghazali's philosophies rather than present it as it is. Modern traditional conflict theorists might raise a question for these conservatives: If you limit women's education and restrict them to the realm of household management, then who will teach our daughters how to socialize outside the home, to go shopping, and to participate in public festivities? Furthermore, if women are not well educated, it will affect their children's academic performance.

Conflict Theory

There are several researchers (Rafiqul-Haqq & Newton, 2000; El Saadawi, 1981; Mubarak, 1924; Ibn Waraq, 1995, 2001) who have adapted Marxist analytical social theories and applied these theories to their understanding. In their zeal to critique Al-Ghazali's philosophies, they note that Al-Ghazali's "misogynous" writings not only classify females as secondary sources of power, but also as slaves and/or toys for the husband. These Marxists assert that Al-Ghazali fostered male domination in society, and conferred upon women an inferior domestic status. Realistically, men in the Middle Ages usually worked. It was also common for them to travel extensively to continue their education. Consequently, the women remained at home in order to take care of the children. There also appears to be some concern that it was not safe for women to travel alone. Thus, if she traveled less, her educational opportunities would have been less frequent.

Women did receive training in the *Qur'an* and Prophetic sayings within their homes. Thus, in Al-Ghazali's time, his ideas about education might have been reasonable. In addition, when education for boys was first offered in the mosques, they, too, were given only a religious education. Even concerning male education, he categorized certain subjects as not being important unless there was a specific need. This suggests that were are aspects of education that Al-Ghazali restricted for both girls and boys, within the parameters of what he felt was important to learn.

Unlike Al-Ghazali, the modern traditional trend in Islamic education is to return to the fundamental Islamic sources and their directions concerning equality. The current strategy appears to be that "we need to devote a great deal more time and effort to critiquing various elements of our traditional jurisprudence that are based on domination and suppression. We also need to contribute

to the evaluation of a better Islamic jurisprudence based on Divine logic" (Al-Hibri, 2000, p. 71). These contemporary thinkers seem to be applying conflict theory, because they perceive that the current status accorded to women promotes one group of people (men) over another (women) (see also Eitzen, 1985).

Recently, Muslim women have been working to expose the flaws in the non-Islamic patriarchal culture and customs that have allowed generations of women to be denied their Islamic rights to an education. Some of the contemporary Arab media report on Muslim women who are successful scholars in Islamic law *(fiqh)* and are becoming jurists, demonstrating that women are beginning to recapture the original rights conferred by their Islamic faith. It is important to note that we do not refer here to "false modernity," which promotes the destruction of Islamic society in order that it be rebuilt on a non-religious (secular) foundation. This would mean a total segregation of religion from all other aspects of public life, not just in the schools, which reflects a Marxist model. For our purposes, we use the term "modernity" to indicate the concept of reapplying the original concepts of Islamic Law to contemporary life (Qazim, in Karam, 1998). The trend to "modernize" need not mean giving up one's Islamic faith in order to be "liberated;" in fact, only by embracing the true meaning of the Islamic texts can one be free – perhaps not according to the Western model, but according to the culture that one has embraced, in this case: Islam. The Islamic umbrella can and does empower women, if interpreted correctly.

Ironically, modern traditionalists believe that Islam does confer rights upon women – the same rights that secularists believe are denied by Islam. Thus, while both factions advocate women's education, their paths and motivations are different. Perhaps this discrepancy has more to do with the fact that Western ideology's concept of emancipation does not agree in some parts with

Islamic ideology, and does not draw its strength from Islamic law. The secularists' conflict theory would promote that women study and take jobs outside the home in order for her to have economic opportunities equal to men. However, "women realize that work, as it relates to them, is a created need deliberately built into the economic system so as to 'push' them to it, causing them to work out of deprivation, not to achieve any self-realization" (Arebi, 1991, p. 105).

If Marxist-style conflict theory encourages females to work outside the home in order to achieve equality with men, the question to be raised is: Which kind of work are you asking women to take on? Is it just to fill in the gaps created by men going into the military? Is it to perform menial tasks in factories and offices that do not challenge their minds? Or does this educational encouragement include allowing women to explore their full potential choosing whether to go out in the professional world or choosing to stay home with their families, if that is what they really want?

The secularization approach exposes many topics of importance to women, including those which apply to educational institutions. This trend emphasizes a broad range of women's issues, from education to circumcision of women, and many of their concerns are valid. But secularization is not the only alternative. By reviewing the issues, adherents to tradition have an opportunity to consider these matters in terms of tradition and faith and decide whether or not to institute change on a case-by-case basis.

Among the modern secular and traditional critics of Al-Ghazali's teachings, there has been no mention of the concept that many of the *ahadith* Al-Ghazali relied upon were weak – that is, they had very little foundation in Islamic law. Al-Zabidi (n.d.) and others have reported that Al-Ghazali relied heavily on an earlier book by Al-Makki in developing his *Ihya'*, and that many of the stories Al-Makki used (and attributed to *ahadith*) in fact contradicted Islamic law. Thus, some of the

conclusions reached by Al-Ghazali that might be interpreted as misogynist may have inadvertently been based on false writings. Al-Makki's book includes many contradictory reports and unsubstantiated stories, which Al-Ghazali then used and repeated verbatim. *Ihya'* refers to some 4000 Prophetic sayings, with 900 of them being understood today to be weak reports (i.e., 21.5% of the Prophetic sayings he cites are unauthentic).

Knowing what we know today, we can see the affect that Ghazalian educational traditions have had on modern education and what the ramifications have been. His teachings have been implemented as curricula in several Islamic educational institutions – as is – for many decades. Is this perpetuating a problem?

Institutional Theory

Al-Ghazali discusses several different educational institutions, such as the mosque, the *maktab* (elementary school), and the *kuttab* (higher education) (see Al-Zabidi, nd). Al-Ghazali also describes the family as the first educational institution for children. Thus, he asserted that parents are mandated to be their children's first teachers (Gil'adi, 1983). In medieval times, most Muslim girls received an informal education from their fathers (and then their husbands), either in their own home or in the home of another family in their neighborhood (Rahman, 1982; Shalabi, 1954).

Boys and girls have always been educated separately in Islam, and there were apparently some formal facilities for girls' education because both Al-Qabisi (1983) and Al-Zarnuji (1947) refer to separate areas within some *maktabs* for boys and for girls. Even though some girls did attend a *maktab*, their education was not as inclusive as the boys, although they did learn to read.

Thus, there were provisions for formal education for girls during Islamic history, although parents were not obligated to send their daughters to the *maktab*. This indicates that completely denying females access to formal education is a recent development – instituted during the last 300 years or so – since historically, girls were educated, although in a different manner from boys.

Institutionally, while the end product is roughly equivalent on a global level – that is, that at certain identifiable points in the student's experience, the student should have acquired specific knowledge at certain intervals, and that virtually all institutions produce the same product. But the institutions themselves differ in the route the student takes to get from the entrance to the exit, and the pace at which the student proceeds. But Meyer (in Powell & DiMaggio, 1991), who is termed a 'neo-institutionalist,' asserts that the schools are somewhat responsible for the route the students take, covertly funneling some to this program and some to that program, based on perceived notions related to student socio-economic status, gender, and other factors. He suggests that the schools are establishing charters which create barriers that guide students in certain directions, but that the barriers are created by focusing more on the student's social or cultural background than intellectual capacity, and that the barriers are perpetuating social conditions and limiting achievement, rather than encouraging students to reach their full individual potential.

Al-Ghazali did recommend differing educational institutions (boys in the mosque and girls at home) and proposed the knowledge that each gender was entitled to, extensive for boys and somewhat limited for girls. Education in Islamic countries today is different, with more equivalent facilities and curriculum for girls. Modern Islamic traditionalists maintain that the institutional school setting is appropriate for all children and adults, both males and females, although not coeducationally. Because they are learning the same subjects as boys, girls' educational

experiences extend beyond religious and domestic topics (Bashier, 1980). From an education perspective, there is no contradiction between possessing knowledge beyond the religious and domestic realms and a woman's ability to successfully assume the roles of wife, mother, and Muslim – even if she enters the workforce. The capitalist economic ideal, with its institutional setting of the business environment, encourages a reduction in childbearing in order to "liberate" the woman from the domestic arena so that she can participate more fully in the labor force. Modern Islamic traditionalists do not go this far.

From an institutional analysis, in spite of the Kuwaiti government's 'official' position on supporting education for all, this really isn't the case, particularly among women scholars. While all Kuwaiti women are officially encouraged to pursue higher education, in reality, few of these women are actually able to seek this level of education. Some of the policies that are in place that are intended to facilitate her education actually sabotage the effort. Once her scholarship to attend graduate school has been awarded, these Kuwaiti women have to make some difficult choices. For instance, Muslim women are discouraged from traveling abroad alone. But, if her husband chooses to accompany her, he loses his salary if he takes a leave of absence from his job while she studies. The State of Kuwait also pays families a monthly stipend for each child in the family. But since this stipend is connected to the father's income,[2] if the husband takes an unpaid leave of absence, then the stipend is suspended until the husband resumes working. The alternative is for her to travel and live abroad alone, which conflicts with the high priority Islam places on family cohesiveness. Until recently, even if she did come alone, she would see her family only once every two years,

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[2] In Kuwait and other Islamic countries, the father is the parent primarily responsible for the support of the family. In fact, in many cases, mothers do not work outside of the home. Thus, this stipend is distributed with the fathers' income because, in theory, this money is already being used for the support of the family.

because that was how often the government would pay for a plane ticket home.[3] Thus, in effect, these institutional policies meant that women could not pursue graduate-level studies outside their country without compromising their maternal responsibilities with the family. Thus, if the woman chooses to continue her education abroad, she often has to make a difficult choice between pursuit of knowledge (a practice respected in Islam and likened to a form of worship) and upholding the family as a closely-knit, interdependent unit (which is perceived to be her highest priority).

Furthermore, should a female student be forced by any circumstance to discontinue her studies once she has begun, she is also liable for repayment of the scholarships she was offered. Fear of initiating a course of action that could conceivably create grave financial hardship for her family is a considerable impediment to her continuing education. It would be realistic at this point to consider a complete overhaul of the policies supporting education abroad – from the perspective of the affected students and their families – to determine whether these policies actually benefit the student in the long run.

Al-Ghazali and other conservative scholars did not advocate that women attend educational institutions, which made it difficult to establish such institutions for girls in many Islamic countries for centuries. One example is Al-Azhar University, in Egypt, which was founded in 978 CE. But it was not until the early 1960s that Al-Azhar University opened its doors to women. In 1988, Al-Azhar University opened a limited program to train women as preachers (Reid, 1995).

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[3] The policy of traveling back and forth from the school abroad to Kuwait was amended from once every other year to once a year in the spring of 2001.

Our review of Islamic historical literature confirms that this situation had been fairly common in earlier eras, but that Muslim women have been excluded from these different institutions for the last few centuries. As both a social and an educational institution, the mosque played a significant role for Muslims. It was not only where the community – both men and women – gathered for prayer and instruction, but also as a place for social gatherings. Al-Ghazali maintained that women should be banned from this institution. He justified his position stating that widespread moral deterioration made public spaces unsafe for all but elderly women, and encouraged women not to leave their homes except out of necessity (Hoffman-Ladd, 1995).

In fact, genuine Islamic sources do provide many freedoms for women, such as access to education, the right to choose her mate, the opportunity to work for pay and have discretionary income, and the ability to own property and acquire wealth (Husain, 2001; Al-Mana'i, 2001). At the First World Conference on Muslim Education in 1977, the following was pronounced: "Education should therefore cater to the growth of man[4] in all its aspects: spiritual, intellectual, imaginative, physical, scientific, linguistic" (Haw, 1998, p. 58). Further, Haw notes that denying women access to knowledge is the same as denying females access to the path of righteousness and implies marginalizing them in this life as well as the hereafter. Given that the Islamic faith grants these opportunities to women as their right, does our review confirm that Islamic educational institutions extend these rights to women, or is society ignoring these aspects of Islamic education? Are these institutions enabling women to write about their own issues, since many of these issues – including health and personal matters – have historically been written by men?

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[4] The term 'man' in the *Qur'an* is interpreted as non-gendered, referring to men as well as women when used collectively, as it is in this statement.

By the same token, why do educational institutions for women lack training in handicrafts, which have historically been an important part of women's lives – not only from the creative viewpoint, but also from an economic perspective, since many women contribute to the family finances by selling their handmade items. This is even more troublesome because Kuwaiti girls' schools teach certain functional domestic skills, such as cooking and sewing, but are neglecting the traditional crafts, such as weaving rugs and tent manufacturing. Why not include these creative crafts and skills in the schools? The secularization of education has resulted in a reduction in the number of women accomplished in these crafts and skills that are important to Kuwaiti culture.

Taking this concept to the next level, why not teach crafts that make ecological use of what is available in Kuwait? For example, glass blowing would be a wonderful skill to teach boys and girls, because sand is readily available in Kuwait. What good is woodworking training if we have no trees? Education must reflect the needs of each generation, as well as promote the crafts of prior generations, as a way of maintaining ties with the past while still learning about the future.

Summary

Islamic society considers Al-Ghazali to be one of their greatest thinkers. He has shaped their educational, political, and social life for centuries, and still has an influence on these areas today. Al-Ghazali's approach corresponds primarily with the conservative tradition, as is evident in the limits he imposed on female education and socializing outside the home. But some of his teachings do correspond with more modern traditions; he did maintain that women need some religious education and did not insist that she remain ignorant.

In their book, Powell and DiMaggio (1991) state that, "Institutional theory…is mainly concerned with how the institutional environment, comprised of socially created beliefs and cognitions, widely held in society and reinforced by corporate actors, affects organizations …(modern) societies contain institutionalized rules in the form of rationalized myths, and these beliefs shape organizational forms" (p. 391). If we consider this contemporary statement in terms of Islamic history, we realize that Islam provided a discrete set of values affecting women's roles and responsibilities in society and that these values were accepted for centuries.

Some subsequent Islamic thinkers proposed non-Islamic innovations in social values, which were gradually accepted as norms, and which have since been reinforced by Islamic culture and affected women's education. Some of these thinkers proposed that women did not need to learn to read or write, which expressly contradicts Islamic principles. As these concepts were assimilated into Islam, these rationalized myths caused women to remain uneducated for centuries, the fallacy being that females were not entitled to the same education as males. Although these assertions impacted Islamic society for many centuries, recent Islamic scholars have been challenging these ideas and comparing them to documented Islamic principles. In her article on Muslim women in modern civilization, Al-Mana'i (2001) argues that even in the 20th century some Muslim thinkers still advocated restricting women's education to high school. Others who advocated more extensive education still limited women's professional options to teaching or nursing. This has no foundation in Islamic educational history, however, where women are documented as having been involved in many professions and were active in many aspects of society.

Schimmel (1997, p. 180) notes that "much suffering has fallen to the lot of women because simple *[Qur'anic]* precepts have been interpreted more and more narrowly over the course of time,"

and she attributes this to male domination. Safi (2001) emphasizes that historically, some Islamic texts have been interpreted incorrectly, because Islam as a religion has no barriers to women being educated. Schimmel encourages a hermeneutic re-examination in terms of the original sacred texts, because "there ought to exist no difference between man and woman in the realm of spiritual life" (p. 181).

Regarding the three social theories (functionalism, conflict, and institutionalism), all three have aspects that we cannot ignore when applying them to the three trends in education (conservative and modern traditional and secular) and to Al-Ghazali's theories concerning women's education. While we may not agree with all the theories, nevertheless they are operating in all aspects of our lives, because each of them contains an element of the truth. The gradual change that functionalism recommends, the inevitability of conflict, and the need of societies to create institutions for passing on norms – whether they be the institutions of marriage, education, or religion – surround and influence our daily lives.

The issue of educating Muslim women is a complicated one that cannot be resolved merely by making education compulsory for all. Instead of seeing each of these theories as separate boxes, can we not take the best of each one by stepping outside the boxes and creating a new space to explore women and education within the Muslim model? By returning to the original teachings offered in the *Holy Qur'an* and the *ahadith*, and by looking at what the Prophet Muhammad advocated and practiced in his own life, we are finding that women did have a great deal of educational freedom. This was somehow misinterpreted in later years (after the first three generations of Islamic history), creating a society in which women were not encouraged to seek an education.

Even if the capitalist approach encourages women to work outside the home, must it be a menial job that contributes nothing to the fulfillment of the woman just for the sake of giving her "freedom?" True freedom comes from allowing the woman to choose her path, being aware of any responsibilities she has already assumed with family obligations, and work through these obligations with support from her family in a cooperative environment. Educating women does not have to mean the end of her Muslim faith or her family life. In fact, her education should be a path that strengthens her faith and her family, because her problems and concerns cannot be resolved using only Western standards. Muslim women need to be aware of both context and culture when they adopt Western philosophies, and problems must be resolved within the framework of their cultural and religious beliefs.

From this study we might conclude or suggest the following:

1. Increase publication of Al-Ghazali's works, with re-examination of his ideas on women's education.

2. Establish organizations to support educating Muslim women about their rights within Islamic Law.

3. Develop forums where Muslim women have opportunities to express their ideas about issues that concern them.

4. Encourage women to enroll in different educational institutions.

5. Increase the opportunities for women to become jurists, as well as for them to teach these laws to other Muslim women.

6. Conduct more in-depth research on women's social and educational status, especially concerning their having visible rights since the beginning of Islam

14 centuries ago and investigating the disappearance of these rights about 300 years ago, which Bewley (1999) asserts coincides with colonial/Western influences.

7.　Kuwaiti women who want to continue their education beyond the undergraduate level need to be able to embark on these projects without risking financial or emotional harm to the family in the process. The current system necessitates a major sacrifice on the women's part, which policymakers in the Kuwaiti government have the power to reduce. For instance, the government could continue to extend the subsidy for children, because the children still need to eat and be maintained – no matter where they are and what their parents are doing.

Many educational institutions in Islamic countries have incorporated Al-Ghazali's ideas verbatim as the foundation for their curricula. There are some modern researchers (Khan, 1976; Ashraf, 1985) who interpret Al-Ghazali's philosophies as the last word in established Islamic educational theory, and who hold an absolutist perspective of Islamic education" (see Barazangei, 1995, p. 407). Thus, we need to compare Al-Ghazali's writings to the sacred Islamic texts, removing the inaccuracies and stories in his books that contradict Islamic beliefs and emphasizing the Prophetic sayings, which will allow contemporary Muslim society to grow without sacrificing any of the basic tenets of Islam.

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