

THROUGH THE BACK DOOR

**A Critical Analysis of Gender
Segregation in the Islamic Prayer
Halls**

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One's Own*, 1929

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A Critical Analysis of Gender Segregation in the Islamic Prayer Halls

By: Marcus Allgood -May 1, 2010,

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All this pitting of sex against sex, of quality against quality; all this claiming of superiority and imputing of inferiority belong to the private-school stage of human existence where there are sides, and it is necessary for one side to beat another side. ~Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 1929

O mankind! Reverence your Guardian-Lord, who created you from a single person, created, of like nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women;- reverence Allah, through whom ye demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (That bore you): for Allah ever watches over you." Quran 4:1

INTRODUCTION:

The Debate Begins

¹WAMU 88.5 AMERICAN UNIVERSITY RADIO on April 24 broadcast portion of a panel discussion between “Traditional Muslims” and “Progressive Muslims”² regarding where a Muslima (A Muslim Woman) should pray in the Masjid (Mosque - Muslim place of worship.) What I define as traditional Muslims would be Orthodox Sunni Muslims that adhere to the Quran and Sunnah (Actions of Prophet Muhammad). The Sunnah is largely derived from narrations called Hadith which are the supposed sayings and actions of the prophets recorded his companions. But even among the “Traditional Muslims” they can range from moderate Muslims to extremist like Al Qaeda or the Taliban. They even think of themselves as “progressive” in terms of the adherence to these Islamic traditions.

What I define as “Progressive Muslims” according to the group called “Muslims of Progressive Values” or MPV; they believe in religious pluralism, support a form of Muslim feminism thus are concern with women’s rights, and the enjoin the separation of Church and state - which is not always the position of Sunni Orthodoxies. Even in this group I find people from the a variety backgrounds from Traditional Sunni Islam, Shia, Baha’i, Quran Only Groups, Gays, Feminist, Secularist, Rationalist - all of which are united together by the idea of that the existence of different groups with different ethnic, religious, or political backgrounds can come together and share ideals in a peaceful and cohesive manner and show one another decency and respect for each other. But many of the Traditional Muslims view the Progressive Muslims as a group that is adopting Western Values

and disguising it as Islamic. But according the Progressive Muslims they are following the traditions as laid down by the Prophet Muhammad himself (Peace and Blessings be upon him) and the religious orthodoxy has gotten away from his original message and intent, which is a message of tolerance and pluralism.

This may be interesting to some because even the Orthodox Jews and Christians are confronted with the issue of the proper place of women. A debate is raging right now in the Catholic Church about whether or not women can serve as church leaders, and Orthodox Jews have a flat prohibition against men and women mixing in temple. Thus Muslims are not exempt from gender issues. Therefore in a rented hall inside a Washington DC Library the discussion ignites. Here is an excerpt from the broadcast...

A group of local Muslim activists gathered at a library in Northeast D.C. to debate whether men and women should worship in the same prayer hall.

Marcus Allgood is at a town hall on gender relations in the mosque. Allgood wears a black prayer cap and explains during the Prophet Muhammad's time men and women prayed in the same physical space. He's disappointed with the current layout in many mosques.

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"They have women in a separate room, somewhere off partitioned in the back. It reminds me of segregation, the separate and unequal type thing," says Allgood.

But one person's segregation is another person's privacy. Raabia Ahmed prefers praying in a separate room.

"I like to have that freedom to be in my own spot with the Muslim women where we can chat," says Ahmed. "There's women who wear niqab - face veil. They don't want to be in a place where a man can directly walk in and see their face. That's their personal preference."

The town hall did little to change individual opinion. The question of how to make everyone feel welcome is still up for debate.

A. The Sociological problem with Gender Segregation:

My comments at this meeting were from a sociological standpoint. I had likened the separation of Gender in the prayer hall to racial Segregation. Segregation is the social processes which result in certain individuals or social groups being kept apart with little or no interaction between them. The tendency for people with a common culture, nationality, race, language, occupation, religion, income level, or other common interests to group together in social or geographical space produces varying

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degrees of natural, voluntary, *de facto* segregation in patterns of private residence, business districts, educational institutions, clubs, leisure, and other activities. However, racial segregation was intended to show that Whites were superior to Blacks thus unworthy of full participation within the “greater” society politically, socially, religiously, and economically. Thus Blacks had to sit in the back of the bus while Whites sat at the front indicating that the SPACE at the front was regarded as more significant. Also Blacks had to go to separate entrances from Whites, often relegated to entrances at the back or side of the building.

If one is being honest one cannot ignore the similarities between racial segregation and gender segregation. Instead of the SPACE in the BACK of the bus women are relegated to the BACK of the masjid (Muslim prayer hall) or to a separate partitioned off room. And often women have separate entrances, similar to Jim Crow South, in their house of worship or even sometimes discouraged from coming to the masjid at all. Space is a vital resource like time, water, and food. And how Space is allocated and controlled speaks to how that society, culture, or religion values the people or things that occupy this precious commodity, thus it plays a very important role in social equality. Space (as it relates to segregation of men and women) and its relationship to sociology is that individuals act as social agents (and constitute spaces in the process), but that their action depends on economic, legal, social, cultural, and, finally, spatial structures³. Spaces are hence the outcome of action. At the same time, spaces structure action, that is to say spaces can both constrain and enable action.⁴ Although Muslims insist that there is gender equality in Islam, but from sociological view, women are of a lesser position or value from men and thus minimize feminine participation in the religious experience thus constraining their action or movement to the back (less valued space in

relationship to the Qibla⁵) or to another room altogether. What is the value of the space in the front of the Masjid verses the back, or another room altogether; most Islamic scholars come up empty when asking this question from a sociological perspective.

1) **Possible Sociological Justification:**

The justification for the segregation of gender in the Masjid is via the traditions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad Ibn Abdullah (PBUH⁶), called hadith or ahadith, & the one that is used to justify why women should pray behind men is as follows....

Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said,

“The best rows for men are the first rows, and the worst ones the last ones, and the best rows for women are the last ones and the worst ones for them are the first ones⁷.”

The above mentioned hadith is in Book # 4 of Sahih Muslim called “*The Book of Prayers (Kitab Al-Salat)*” and the narrator is Abu Hurairah. The context was related by Abu Sa’id al-Khudri⁸ where he reported

“The Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) saw (a tendency) among his Companions to go to the back, so he said to them: Come forward and follow my lead, and let those who come after you follow your lead. People will continue to keep back till Allah will put them at the back.”

The beloved Prophet (PBUH) said the front rows were better so much so they would gamble over it if they knew its importance⁹. Why were the first rows so coveted? Within the same book, Sahih Muslm, a suggestion is made in (Book #005, Hadith #2309):

*“Anas b. Malik reported: We conquered Mecca and then we went on an expedition to Hunain. The polytheists came, forming themselves into the **best rows** that I have seen. They first formed the rows of cavalry, then those of infantry, and then those of women behind them. Then there were formed the rows of sheep and goats and then of other animals. We were also people large in number, and our (number) had reached six thousand. And on one side Khalid b. Walid was in charge of the cavalry. And our horses at once turned back from our rear. And we could hardly hold our own when our horses were exposed, and the Bedouins and the people whom we knew took to their heels. (Seeing this) the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) called thus: O refugees, O refugees. He then. said: O Ansar, O Ansar. (Anas said: This hadith is transmitted by a group of eminent persons.) We said: At thy beck and call are we, Messenger of Allah. The Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) then advanced and he (Anas) said: By Allah, we had not yet reached them when Allah defeated them. and we took possession of the wealth and we then marched towards Ta'if, and we besieged them for forty nights. and then came back to Mecca and encamped (at a place), and the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) began to bestow a hundred camels upon each individual. The rest of the hadith is the same.”*

This answers a previous question I posed: “What is the value of the space in the front of the Masjid verses the back, or another

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room altogether?” The forming of ranks of salat is likened to the forming of military ranks, and the cavalry (soldiers on horseback) take precedence in the front row over the other rank and file. Being that men are regarded as the protectors and providers of women¹⁰ in Islam, then this military ranking makes sense, and fighting for the cause of Allah takes precedence over those that stay at home.¹¹ Therefore, because their sacrifice is greater therefore they receive imminence spiritually and the front rows of the Masjid symbolizes this spiritual nearness to Allah. Surely Allah loves those that fight in his cause in ranks as if a solid-cemented structure¹². The forming of ranks in prayer is likened to forming ranks in battle, it is a show of strength physically and spiritually. And that is why martyrdom¹³ grants you instant access to paradise.

a.) The Sexual Attraction Argument & Its Implication:

On the other hand, this organization of men in the front and women in the back, if defense is the main objective, makes sense in a military strategy - however, the spiritual objective of mirroring this arrangement in the Masjid (prayer hall) is elusive. If the spiritual Jihad (battle, struggle, or war) is sexual in nature, women praying behind men may minimize men's arousal but the sexual arousal in women are not minimized, because they are sexual creatures with desires also. If true equity is the goal spiritually, then women being segregated in a side-by-side scenario with a partition between the genders would be preferable. This would minimize the sexual attraction between the genders because they would not be in view of each other but would have the same & equal access to the space and supply any necessary privacy a woman may need, including breast feeding.

However, what would prevent Muslims from extending this segregation into the greater society? For if the issue of gender

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segregation in the Mosque Prayer Hall (Masjid) is that of sexual attraction between the sexes, this would also be true in the market place, or in schools, or during Hajj - thus, if logically followed, gender segregation should be extended into every walks of life because the sexual attraction doesn't end once one leaves the mosque prayer hall. Thus the gender segregation in any form, [howbeit in the back of mosque, side-by-side segregation, or in another room], except for privacy - (i.e. attending to children, bathroom usage, showers and baths, breast feeding, changing of clothing, and sexual intimacy)], is detrimental & harmful to the liberty, freedom, and rights of women. Sexual attraction in or outside of the mosque should not be an issue for Muslim men & women due to the guidelines of modesty and the prescription of the lowering of the gazes between the sexes in the Quran.¹⁴ This includes the metonymical sense of "restraining one's sexual urges", i.e., restricting them to what is lawful¹⁵, namely, marital intercourse. The "lowering of one's gaze", too, relates both to physical and to emotional modesty (Imam Razi).¹⁶ Gender segregation in mosque, via the side-by-side separation, is the best possible scenario in relation to spatial equity, it also allows for privacy, and is the best possible compromise between the traditional point-of-view and the modern progressive perspective. But I must caution you - that any gender segregation may and could be extended to all walks of life based on the justification of sexual attraction argument that is used within the mosque.

B. Quranic considerations:

In his paper¹⁷, Sheikh¹⁸ Zaid Shakir, offers Quranic¹⁹ evidence for the support that women should be segregated in the mosque. He states:

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“This arrangement of the men in front of the women in the congregational prayer led by the Prophet, peace and blessings of God upon him, is affirmed by the Qur’an, as this incident was the occasion for the revelation of the verse, We know those of you who hasten forward [to the front prayer rows], and we know those who lag behind. [Al-Qur’an 15:24] ²⁰”

This opinion is not fair without including commentaries from other scholars on this verse. On the contrary, the late Scholar Abdullah Yusuf Ali in his commentary of Surah 15:24²¹ states:

“Cf. 9:100, where the sabiqun may perhaps correspond to Mustaqdimin²² here. In that case the two classes are those who are the first to accept Faith and do deeds of righteousness and those who come later, but still are numbered with the righteous. A second alternative meaning may be: “Those who preceded you in point of time and those who come after you in point of time: they are all known to Allah, and He will gather them all together on the Day of Judgment.”

Muhammad Asad in his commentary offers a similar meaning in his tafsir on 15:24²³ states:

²⁴ “Or: “those of you who hasten forward [towards Us], and those who lag behind”. Both these interpretations are considered equally legitimate by the early commentators.”

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These tafsirs²⁵ fits the context much better in verses (15:23 & 25) ²⁶ where it states:

15:23- “And verily, it is We Who give life, and Who give Death: It is We Who remain Inheritors (after all else passes away.)”

15:25 - “Assuredly it is thy Lord Who will gather them together: for He is perfect in Wisdom and Knowledge.”

Thus there are no CLEAR Surahs (Chapters) in the Quran that states that WOMEN should be in the back of the Mosque prayer hall and the men in the front rows.

C. Hadith Justification:

As a result of this dialogue²⁷ I began to investigate this issue further. Again , the justification for the segregation of gender in the Masjid is via the traditions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad Ibn Abdullah (PBUH), called hadith or ahadith, & the one that is used to justify why women should pray behind men is as follows.....

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1) Hadith caution:

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The above hadith is mentioned in three hadith collections, Sahih (authentic) Muslim, Abu Dawud, and Al-Tirmithi.

Before we examine this hadith critically we need to understand the methodology of authentication by these three great scholars.

- Imam Muslim: a student of Bukhari and Ahmad ibn Hanbal, traveled widely to gather his collection of ahadith, including to Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Egypt. Out of 300,000 ahadith which he evaluated, only 4,000 approximately were extracted for inclusion into his collection based on stringent acceptance criteria. It is important to realize, however, that **Imam Muslim never claimed to collect all authentic traditions**. He tried to collect only traditions that all Muslims **should** agree on its accuracy.²⁹ But I would like to further caution you, according to Al-Nawawi³⁰, in his book called “Kitab al-Tatabbu” he mentions that Sahih Muslim has over 100 weak hadiths based on their isnad (chain of narrations) and matn (wording) criticism.
- Imam Abu Dawud Sulayman ibn Ash`ath al-Azadi al-Sijistani³¹, commonly known as Abu Dawud, was a noted Khurassian collector of prophetic hadith, and wrote the third of the six canonical hadith collections recognized by Sunni Muslims, *Sunan Abu Dawud*. He was primarily interested in jurisprudence, and as a result the collection by him focuses largely on legal hadith. Out of about 50,000 hadith, he chose 4,800 for inclusion in his work. Some of his hadith are not *sahih (authentic)*, but he claimed that all hadith listed were *sahih (authentic)* unless specifically indicated otherwise; this has been controversial among Islamic scholars, since some, such as

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Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani believe some of the unmarked ones to be *da'if* (weak) as well.

- Imam Abū 'Īsá Muḥammad ibn 'Īsá ibn Sawrah ibn Mūsá ibn al Ḍaḥḥāk al-Sulamī al-Sulamī al-Tirmidhī. He wrote *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, popularly called *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, has been categorized as fifth amongst the six most authentic books of hadith. According to the most preferred opinion, Bukhari enjoys the highest status, followed by Muslim, Abu Dawood, Nasai, Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah respectively. Haji Khalifa in *al-Kashf al-Dhunoos* has categorised Tirmidhi in third position. Al-Dhahabi has written that Tirmidhi in actual fact should be holding the third position, but due to him bringing weak narrators like Kalbi and Masloob its status has dropped. However, looking at the manner in which he set out his book it seems that Haji Khalifa's opinion is best.

Because these hadiths may contain possible weak narrations we have to be cautious of accepting ANY traditions from them unquestionably. Since Sahih Muslim is regarded as the most authentic of the three collections I would like focus most of my attention on citation from this particular book. Now back to the hadith in question:

“The best rows for men are the first rows, and the worst ones the last ones, and the best rows for women are the last ones and the worst ones for them are the first ones”³².”

2) Problems with the hadith:

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My sociological analysis/justification mentioned previously seems most plausible regarding the above hadith with one exception; it³³ was narrated by Abu Hurairah.

- **Sunni sources cite concern about Abu Hurairah's hadiths:**

One of the most prominent and highly regarded people to quote the prophet was Abu Hurairah, according to the Sunni tradition, who was recorded as stating that he feared to begin phrases with "God's Messenger spoke thus..." lest Omar would strike him^{34 35}. Other notable companions of the prophet, including Ali³⁶ and Aisha³⁷, accused Abu Hurairah of fabricating false Hadith³⁸. One example held up about the "untrustworthiness" of some Hadith, is that Ibn Umar accused Abu Hurairah of adding a clause exempting those with "cultivated land" from needing to kill all dogs, for his own personal benefit, to a saying of Muhammad.

In Volume 4 of Sahih Muslim, Nadwee says...

"Imam Abu Haneefah said, *'The Companions of the Prophet ﷺ were generally pious and just. I accept every hadith narrated by them, but I do not accept the ahadith whose source is Abu Hurairah, Anas ibn Maalik, or Samrah ibn Jundab.'*"

There was some further concern regarding Abu Hurairah hadiths based on fiqh by the Hanafee schools of jurisprudence. According to Usul al-Fiqh among the Hanafee scholars that those narrations of Abu Hurairah which are in agreement with analogy (al-qiyaas) area were adopted, and what is in disagreement with analogy, one sees if the hadith has been accepted by the ummah, only then it is adopted; otherwise analogy is adopted in

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preference to hadith.³⁹ The source of this principle is the Kufan scholar of the tabi'een, Ibraaheem an-Nakha'ee, who would not adopt all the hadith of Abu Hurairah. Al-Dhahabi in his Mizaan al-l'tidaal (Vol. 1, p. 35) reports that an-Nakha'ee explained his motivations by arguing that Abu Hurairah was not a scholar of fiqh (faqeeh).

There are even further concerns because most of Abu Hurairah's narrated hadiths are called the "Ahad" hadiths⁴⁰, which are hadiths only witnessed by one person (i.e. it is not corroborated by enough people to exclude the possibility of error) and this one person was Abu Hurairah himself. (The Quranic rule of two witnesses⁴¹ to confirm accuracy & genuineness should've been applied to these traditions and sayings of the prophet but have been largely disregarded for the sake of Abu Hurairah). Some may argue that if the single narrator is "just" then we can accept his narrations, although this undermines the Quranic principle of authenticity via two witnesses, but even the character of Abu Hurairah has been brought into question by the prophet's (PBUH) companions. Even if we exclude the Shia objections to Abu Hurairah, there is sufficient grounds in Sunni sources that question his ahadiths, maybe even outright reject hadiths narrated by him.

- **The Shia Dispute with Abu Hurairah:**

The Shia have even more critical view of Abu Hurairah⁴², seldom accepting only when there are similar hadith narrated by Sahabah (companions) and family of the Prophet who are considered reliable by Shi'a. ⁴³*One major difference between the Shia and the Sunnis is that Sunnis accept any tradition from any companions no matter if these companions fought each other, abused each other, rebelled against their righteous*

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Caliph, and or innovate new things in to the religion. The Shia, however, believe that all the narrators in the chain of a document should have been JUST. If they have done any injustice in the history their narrations are void for (them) unless the same tradition has been narrated with another chain of narrators who all of them are proven to be trustworthy."

The Shia considers Abu Hurairah an enemy of Imam Ali, Imam Hassan and Imam Hussain due to having been in favor with Mu'awiya, and thus holds him in low regard. Abu Hurairah once entered the Kufa mosque and saw a huge gathering of people who had come to welcome Mu'awiya, where he held a speech. When Mu'awiya learned of this, he sent for him, gave him a reward, and made him the governor of Medina⁴⁴. Shia's believe Mu'awiya to have killed the Holy Prophets Cousin and Grandson, who the Holy Prophet loved and cared for. Shia's further believe that Abu Hurairah defended and cherished Mu'awiya. Shia's also believe Mu'awiya killed the 4th Caliph, Aisha's Brother and most of the original Companions of the Prophet.

Imam Ali was the leader of the Muslims at that time and Shia's believe that Mu'awiya wanted to usurp this for his own power. In a battle between Ali & Mu'awiya, according to Shia reports, Mu'awiya had his troops to tear up Qurans and put it on the end of his armies' swords⁴⁵ and killed 70,000⁴⁶ Muslims. Mu'awiya then installed his son Yazid who was half Pagan and half Christian (Mu'awiya's Christian wife's son).

Yazid used to focus on Pagan and Christian methods. Yazid massacred the rest of the Holy Prophets family and killing many people who were being Islamic. Shia's believe that Abu Hurairah takes the side of the people who rip the Quran up and then put

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it on the end of Spears to kill the Prophets family and 70,000 Muslims⁴⁷.

Historical texts indicate Abu Hurairah appeared in and around the Islamic camp around the end of the Battle of Khyber after the Muslim victory. Shia's claim he was able to include himself in the Muslim elite of that time, having done the same previously with the Jewish rulers who were defeated in Khyber.

The Shia believe that Abu Hurairah was convicted of lying, whipped and instructed to not make hadiths by Umar Khattab. It's documented in Sunni texts that when a person is convicted of lying all their hadiths become void. Shia's claim that many of Abu Hurairah's hadiths were based on events that took place⁴⁸ when he was not even present or in the vicinity, for example, he would be hundreds of miles away from an event that he narrates like he is there⁴⁹. They also accuse him of adding his own ideas to hadiths that are often quoted as if directly from Muhammad⁵⁰.

One historian illustrates the undiscerning view of Sunnis in regard to Abu Hurairah's hadiths:

One hadith narrated by Abu Hurayra was once mentioned in the presence of Haroun al-Rasheed. It said, "Moses met Adam once whereupon he asked him, 'Are you the one who had us dismissed from Paradise?'" A man from Quraysh who was present then asked, "When did Adam meet Moses?!" Al-Rasheed became very angry and said, "Saying too much and the sword go hand in hand; kill this atheist who doubts the hadith of the Messenger of Allah."⁵¹

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Which confirms the Shia view, *that Sunnis accept any tradition from any companions no matter if these companions fought each other, abused each other, rebelled against their righteous Caliph, and or innovate new things in to the religion.*

3) Other Hadith considerations:

Being that the hadith previously quoted that states that the back rows are better for women has been seriously questioned due to Abu Hurairah being the narrator. We have to consider other Hadith, with a different narrator to collaborate Abu Hurairah's report. One such example by Imam al-Bukhari relates in his authenticated collection of tradition, from Anas b. Malik,

"I prayed along with an orphan boy behind the Prophet, peace and blessings of God upon him, in my house. My mother, Umm Sulaym, [prayed] behind us."

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However, as stated before, Imam Abu Haneefah⁵³ seriously questioned hadiths by *Abu Hurairah, Anas ibn Malik, or Samrah ibn Jundab*. Thus this hadith doesn't go unquestioned because it is cited within Sahih Al-Bukhari or any other hadith for that matter. If we can get further corroboration on this hadith, maybe from Umm Sulaym or the orphan boy, it may substantiate Anas's statement. Without such, we have to reject this hadith.

Another tradition relates that there was an extremely beautiful woman who used to pray in the congregation behind the Prophet (PBUH). Some of the men would hasten to the front row of men in order not to be distracted by her. Others would procrastinate in order to be in the last row of men to look behind themselves at her when they bowed during the prayer⁵⁴. There are no corroborating hadiths (none within the 5 authentic collections) besides that of Imam al-Bayhaqi, who comprehensively compiled

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the textual evidence of the Shafi'i school including their collections of hadith. This doesn't preclude it as evidence, but one should be cautious in accepting hadiths not within the 5 "authentic" collections. Partly because we do not know his methodology of compilation of his hadiths, and two, we are not properly trained in the science of hadith to have an opinion on this hadith therefore without the corroboration from the more trusted 5 collections our confidence in this hadith from Imam al-Bayhaqi should be even less of value to Muslims.

Even further, the hadith cited by Imam al-Bayhaqi shows, women in the back of men during prayer could not prevent men from glaring lustfully at the woman. Thus the supposed command to relegate women there (in back) is mute if the men in the last row still can ***"look behind themselves at her when they bowed during the prayer."*** This is the main point for gender segregation in the Mosque in the first place. They argue, *"We need to segregate women to minimize the lustful leering at Women."* This Hadith undermines this whole notion.

Sheikh Zaid Shakir ⁵⁵ cites Imams al-Bukhari ⁵⁶ and Muslim ⁵⁷ that mention a tradition relating that the Prophet (PBUH), used to address the women separately on the day of 'Eid. One of Imam al-Bukhari's versions is particularly instructive as it mentions, "...then he [the Prophet] advanced, splitting them [the rows of men] until he came to the women." ⁵⁸ He would then address them and exhort them to give charity.

Zaid states: *"The point here is that if the men and women were not segregated, as is the custom in our congregational prayers until today, why would the Prophet, peace and blessings of God upon him, have to wade through the men to reach the women? If the women were mixed in with the men He would have had to first gather the women together. Hence, any claim that there*

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was no gender segregation during the prophetic epoch is baseless. We could bring many more examples to prove this point, but what we have mentioned should suffice."

In consideration of these hadiths we need to know the context; we need to know - who, what, when, why, and where? The traditions cited by Zaid, fails to mention which Eid⁵⁹. We don't even know how many attended; if this was a large, medium, or small gathering. We don't know if this gathering was outside or inside? Why there is no other mentioning of this action by the prophet at other gatherings? Like Eid ul-Fitr, Eid al-Adha begins with a short prayer followed by a sermon (khutba). Thus something occurred at this gathering that may have been unique. With that considered, then if the prophet during Eid addressed men and women separately, it stands to reason that his address is related to something specific to women and not for the men. Otherwise the prophet could've addressed both sexes in the same gathering at the same time, - but the address was specific to women necessitating them being segregated. Therefore, none of the proofs brought forward are evidence enough to emphatically say women are supposed to pray in the back of men in the Mosque or any other gathering.

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Conclusion:

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The first impression when I first walked in a mosque was: - “wow - where are the women”, and when I saw them entering the back or side entrances to segregated locations either in a separate room or to the back of the prayer hall, the images of Jim Crow South came to mind. There are problems with gender segregation in the prayer hall on a sociological level if compared to racial segregation, and the similarities cannot be denied. With Racial segregation it was about power and control of one class or race over another. The implication is that Gender segregation has the same motive. If you consider all the material from hadith, and Sharia law, that indicate that women should not even come to the mosque and that their place is in the home or where women are treated unequally in regards to rape, fornication, and adultery. And that they have no place in

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leadership outside of the home. All of which suggests that women are of lesser value spiritually in Islam (if the front holds the highest value) by placing her in the back or in another segregated room all together.

It was suggested by a Muslim sister that there is power in the back for women, and there is power in the front for men. But that I fail to see where the POWER OR AUTHORITY is in the back of the masjid versus the front. POWER implies some sort of influence, control, or clout in the Masjid and women are SEPARATED from that today. If it is spiritual power, what is gained spiritually by women being segregated except the notion that God may give a reward for being in the back, in another room, or at home - which finds NO support in the Quran and the hadiths on the matter are questionable.

Even if sociology is not a consideration in your evaluation (even though the science of sociology originated in Islam), the most authentic collection of hadiths that report gender segregation (Sahih Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, and Al-Tirmithi) is not without error, and many narrators like - *Abu Hurairah, Anas ibn Malik, or Samrah ibn Jundab*, are not unquestionable narrators, and some like Abu Hurairah have even been accused of fabricating hadith (by both the Sunni & Shia sources) as a result call into question if we should accept these hadith narrations regarding gender segregation at all.

Surah Al Barqara 2:177 tells us what spiritual piety is - and nowhere does it equate righteousness to the back of the mosque. With no definitive Quranic references, and questionable hadiths, therefore the arguments for women to be relegated to the back

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or some other room are weak. We cannot romanticize about Islam and gender equality because there is body of literature that speaks to the contrary. Therefore we have to sift through all the source material and assess what is correct and what is wrong. Although for me it is tolerable abiding with the general consensus of the majority in the community to support gender segregation (or the contrary)if that is what the consensus dictates, however - I am NOT sure that gender segregation is authentically Islamic, that is too far reaching. All that we can really say that there are some alleged sayings that the prophet enjoined gender segregation, however this still cannot be definitively be verified.

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⁵ Muslim orientation of prayer, towards their most Holy shrine in Mecca called the Kaba.

⁶ "Peace & Blessings Be Upon Him", a phrase of respect for the prophets of God.

⁷ [Sahih Muslim (Book #004, Hadith #0881), Abu Dawud (no. 678), Al-Tirmithi (no. 224). Al-Tirmithi declared it authentic].

⁸ Sahih Muslim , Book 004, Number 0879:

⁹ Sahih Muslim , Book 004, Number 0877

¹⁰ The Quran, An-Nisa, Chapter #4, Verse #34

¹¹ The Quran, An-Nisa, Chapter #4, Verse #95

¹² The Quran, As-Saff, Chapter #61, Verse #4

¹³ The Quran, An-Nisa, Chapter #4, Verse #69, & Al-Hadid, Chapter #57, Verse #19

¹⁴ The Quran, An-Nur, Chapter #24, Verses 30-31

¹⁵ Muhammad Asad's commentary #36 of Surah 24:30

¹⁶ (cf. The Quran, Surah Mu'Minun, 23:5-6).

¹⁷ Female Prayer Leadership (Revisited), Zaid Shakir, 22 April 2008 -

http://www.newislamicdirections.com/nid/articles/female_prayer_leadership_revisited/

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¹⁸ **Sheikh**, also rendered as **Sheik**, **Shaykh**, **Shaikh**, **Sheyh**, **Šeih**, **Šejh**, **Şeyh** and other variants (**Arabic**: شيخ, *shaykh*; **pl.** شيوخ *shuyūkh*), is a word in the Arabic language that literally means "elder." It is commonly used to designate an elder of a tribe, a revered wise man, or an Islamic scholar. Although the title generally refers to a male, a very small number of female sheikhs have also existed in history. (source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheikh>).

¹⁹ The **Qur'an** (pronounced [qur'an]; **Arabic**: القرآن *al-qur'ān*, literally "the recitation") is the central religious verbal text of Islam, also sometimes transliterated as **Quran**, **Qur'ān**, **Koran**, **Al-Coran** or **Al-Qur'ān**. Muslims believe the Qur'an to be the verbal book of divine guidance and direction for mankind, and consider the original Arabic verbal text to be the final revelation of God. (source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quran>)

²⁰ Al-Qur'an 15:24. For an explanation of the circumstance surrounding the revelation of this verse see Imam Jalal ad-Din as-Suyuti, *Lubab an-Nuqul fi Asbab an-Nuzul* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1997/1418), p. 172. This tradition is also related by at-Tirmidhi, an-Nasa'i, al-Hakim, and others.

²¹ The Meaning of the Holy Quran, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Surah 15:24 note:1965, pg 624

²² Al Mustaqdimin – means "Those who are foremost in accepting truth" according to Maulana Muhammad Ali – The Holy Quran , pg 527, Surah 15:24, note # 25a

²³ The Message of The Qur'an, by Muhammad Asad, not#23, page # 385, Surah 15:24

²⁴ Surah15:24 (**Muhammad Asad's translation**): "And well do We know [the hearts and deeds of all human beings - both] those who lived before you and those who will come after you;"

²⁵ Quranic commentary

²⁶ The Meaning of the Holy Quran, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Surah 15:23, & verse 25 pg 624

²⁷ <http://wamu.org/news/10/04/26.php>

²⁸ [Sahih Muslim (Book #004, Hadith #0881), Abu Dawud (no. 678), Al-Tirmithi (no. 224). Al-Tirmithi declared it authentic].

²⁹ Al-Imam Muhyee ad-Din Abi Zakariyya Yahya bin Sharaf al-Nawawi, Sahih Muslim Bi Sharh al-Imam al-Nawawi, Volume I, 1994/1414, Dar al-Khair, p. 1.

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³³ [Sahih Muslim Book #004, Hadith #0881]

³⁴ Muslim, Sahih Muslim, Abu Hurayra said: "We could not utter 'God's Messenger spoke thus', before Omar died."

³⁵ Az Zahabi – Tazkiratul-Huffaz, "If I transmitted these hadiths during the lifetime of Omar, he would surely strike me," said Abu Hurayra.

³⁶ Ibn Abul Hadid, Sherhu Nahjul Belagha, Ali said: "The person who ascribed the greatest number of lies to God's Messenger is Abu Hurayra."

³⁷ In Volume 2 of Sahih Muslim, he quotes 'Aisha, "Abu Hurairah is a great liar who fabricates ahadith and attributes them to the holy Prophet"

³⁸ Zahabi, Siyeru Alemin Nubela, When Aisha said to Abu Hurayra "You are reporting false hadiths you never heard from the Prophet," he had retorted impudently: "I see that mirror and kohl have kept you aloof from the Prophet."

³⁹ (See Usool al-Sarkhasee, Vol. 1, p. 341)

⁴⁰ <http://submission.org/abu-Hurayra.htm>

⁴¹ The issue of two witnesses is the principle laid down in the Quran to confirm the accuracy and authenticity of contracts (See Surah 5:106-107, 28:28, and 65:1-3 deals with the marriage contract)

⁴² <http://www.al-islam.org/peshawar/5.3.html>.... "ABU HURAIRA'S COLLUSION WITH BUSR IBN ARTAT IN THE MASSACRE OF MUSLIMS" & CONDEMNATION OF ABU HURAIRA AND UMAR'S BEATING HIM.

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⁵⁰ A Shi'ite Encyclopedia

⁵¹ Tarikh Baghdad, Vol. 14, p. 7

⁵² Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari*, 275, no. 727.

⁵³ In Volume 4 of Sahih Muslim, Nadwee says. "Imam Abu Haneefah said, *'The Companions of the Prophet ﷺ were generally pious and just. I accept every hadith narrated by them, but I do not accept the ahadith whose source is Abu Hurairah, Anas ibn Maalik, or Samrah ibn Jundab.'*"

⁵⁴ This narration is produced by Imam al-Bayhaqi in his collection. Al-Bayhaqi, 3:139, nos. 5169, and 5170.

⁵⁵ Female Prayer Leadership (Revisited), Zaid Shakir, 22 April 2008 - http://www.newislamicdirections.com/nid/articles/female_prayer_leadership_revisited/

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⁵⁷ An-Nawawi, *al-Minhaj*, 3:420-421, no. 2054.

⁵⁸ Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari*, 2:601, no. 978-979.

⁵⁹ (**Eid al-Fitr** - celebrated after the end of the Islamic month of Ramadan, on the first day of Shawwal. Or **Eid ul-Adha** that lasts three days following the Hajj and is casually referred to as the "Greater Eid")