Gender division existed at the Alhambra because in the two principle cultures that converged there, Islamic and Christian, there was a clear division of roles according to gender. Both the Koran and the Bible and other sacred texts of Islam and medieval Christianity distinguish between the roles and functions of men and women. The premises found in the sacred texts were interpreted in many different ways in social practice, depending on the geopolitical context, so the situation of women in the caliphal court was not the same as in the Nasrid court, just as it was not the same in the Trastamara court as in the court of Charles V. Similarly, the situation of women who lived in a court, whether Muslim or Christian, was not at all like the situation of women who belonged to the popular classes.

In Al-Andalus architecture marked a separation between men and women, either through different hours, as in the hammam, or through separate naves or with galleries, as in mosques. Some texts say that in the palaces of Al-Andalus, for example, the women did not stay at a reception until they end. Instead, they withdrew to the women's quarters and from there, through lattice screens, they could observe the rest of the event.

Texts and descriptions speak of spaces reserved for women in the palaces of the Alhambra but they provide few details about the specific rooms that women occupied in the Nasrid period. Despite the paucity of data, one thing is beyond doubt: there were spaces reserved for women in the Alhambra, rooms assigned to women and where men outside the family could not enter.

The only doubt and difficulty is discovering exactly where these spaces were. The association between the public sphere and men makes it easy to recognize spaces that were frequently occupied by men, but female space involved an area within the palaces that was reserved for women, at least when persons from outside the family were present. Unfortunately, one of the main features of the
Alhambra, its plasterwork with inscriptions and poems, does not help us discover the eminently female spaces, since the poems only speak of women in abstract terms and the allusions that contribute to our understanding of certain rooms make clear references to the public sphere and to the sultan.

In the Islamic tradition women's rooms look towards the interior, avoiding relationships with public space and the outside, so few openings are used. The courtyard becomes the area that connects the different rooms and allows for movement between them. This could be the case in the Palace of Comares, where the rooms are arranged around a courtyard, with the possibly more private rooms being located on the longer sides. The openings of these four rooms look only towards the courtyard, unlike the Throne Room of Yūsuf I, or the Hall of Comares, which has large openings to the outside. Although it is unknown whether these spaces were exclusively female or not, it is clear that they had a domestic function.

Similarly, the space known as the harem has been interpreted by some to be simply a romantic name that has no basis in reality. However, several points should be noted. The absence of interesting artistic elements, such as the presence of painted zocolos instead of the more striking tiled zocolos, the reuse of pieces such as the serpentine capitals, probably from the 12th century, the existence of certain “oversights” like the combination on one side and as supporting elements of columns and semipilastars instead of attached columns, the different type of alfiz framing the central arch as opposed to the side arches, are all indicative of a domestic space and especially of a space reserved for women, since it is on an upper storey that made it possible to follow the movements in the Palace of the Lions without being seen.

Focusing on Arabic sources such as Al-Lamha al-badriyya by Ibn al-Jatib, it must be noted that this text provides little information about the spaces occupied by women. It offers information related to the different sultans who occupied the throne in the Alhambra, with Ibn al-Jatib alluding to a certain sovereign who held audiences in a hall, and mentioning that the sultans often had a private hall for examining their affairs, that some governors were killed in an oratory, and other information such as mention of a hall where the private council of the sultan Ismail I (who ruled 1314-1325) often met, or how when Yusuf I died in 1354 he was taken to an elevated room above our heads.
There is one piece of information with greater relevance to our topic. When speaking of Muhammad V, whom the author knew very well, he says that the sultan had made his brother Ismail II live at one of his father's palaces that was "close to his"; he also made Ismail II's mother and sisters live there. Later on it mentions that the palace of Muhammad V was located "next to" the Generalife. So the question that arises is "what does the author mean by 'close' or 'next to'?" With such little information it would be risky to put forward a hypothesis; the only thing we can conclude is that women were present within the Alhambra. It is interesting to note that the author described Ismail II as "effeminate and weak as a result of his reclusion and co-habitation with women", which suggests that perhaps it was not normal for a man to live in the same space as women.

In the search for female spaces, it is important to keep in mind the different periods of the Moorish Alhambra, because the spaces we may think were frequently used by women in the times of Yūsuf I (1333-1354) might not be the same as in the times of Muhammad V (1354-1359; 1362-1391).

This is equally true for the Christian era, although from this period there is more documentation about the areas occupied by women. From the standpoint of gender there is no functional correlation in the ensemble's architecture, so the supposed domestic spaces of the Nasrid period do not fully coincide with those of the Christian period. We know from notes made on the map attributed to Pedro de Machuca in the 16th century that the area called Mexuar, which was public while the Nasrids were in power, became private in Christian times and was even turned into a chapel. Also, the Court of Machuca was occupied by Germaine of Foix, the second wife of Ferdinand the Catholic, while the Gold Room was used by Queen Isabella of Portugal.