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THE INSTITUTE FOR MIDDLE EAST STUDIES

IMES CAPSTONE PAPER SERIES

LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX, HABIBI: HOW MODES OF SOCIALIZATION SHAPE  
ARAB MUSLIMS' GENDER IDENTITIES AND GENDER ROLES

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MAY 2011

THE INSTITUTE FOR MIDDLE EAST STUDIES

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The 21-year-old radical feminist advocated for the complete destruction of gender roles. The 23-year-old had been put in Muay Thai as a child to become more assertive. The 41-year-old claimed not to have been socially conditioned about gender roles. At first glance, these people could easily be taken for American females, raised in the height or wake of the feminist movement. And yet, all are Sunni Lebanese men, shaped by their families, friends, communities, Islam, and international cultural influences. How are individual gender identities and concepts of gender roles formed? Which influences are most salient? How significant are differences in methods of socialization? These are the questions I sought to answer in a series of interviews about sexuality and gender with Sunni Muslims in Lebanon in March 2011. I wanted to understand which ideas about the natures and roles of men and women had influenced these people's ideas most strongly, and how different ways of teaching these ideas had affected their identities and opinions today. I was particularly interested in gauging the strength of influence of Islamic ideas about sexuality and sexual behavior on ideas about gender, since the biology and physiology of gender have been discussed little, if at all, in the existing literature on gender in the Arab Muslim world.

The literature on gender in the Arab Muslim world often looks at the ideas Islam espouses about men's and women's sexual and social natures, or at the pre-Islamic cultural ideas still evident in attitudes about gender identity and gender roles. There has been some discussion on the general aspects of socialization – the processes by which people learn the knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, attitudes and dispositions that govern daily life in a given society – but little focus on the specific socialization processes evident in the Arab Muslim world. My research seeks to fill this void, and to more thoroughly examine how Arab Muslims develop their ideas about sexuality and gender. Sex, in the anatomical sense, is one of the first and most

consistent ways we identify and categorize people. Though there is now greater variation in the articulation of sex and gender, the identity that incorporates the anatomical and social expressions of sex, now occurs, and it is possible to morph the physical sex, it remains one of the most unchanging characteristics of any being. As such, understanding the development and expression of this identity is critical to understanding how and why men and woman act and interact as they do in society.

In order to understand how gender identity and concepts of gender roles develop, it is first necessary to understand what gender identity and gender roles are. Gender identity and gender roles must be separated, as gender identity is about the individual's sense of self as identified with a sex, and gender roles are about the social expression of that sex. Why does gender identity matter for the purposes of this paper? Why is it not just about gender roles and the interactions between men and women? Why is individual gender identity important? It matters because how an individual perceives him or herself as existing as a sex-associated being influences how each person and society interact in gendered ways. As we know, gender identity is in part informed by the individual's biological, i.e., reproductive, role in society, and the individual's biological role has a direct impact on the person's expected gender role. Furthermore, sexuality, and specifically the libido, does affect how people interact with one another on a daily basis. Cultures have somewhat different understandings of sexuality and sexual behavior, but the biological roles of men and women in reproduction span cultures. As such, although a set of specific cultural ideas may serve as a lens through which to understand the normative gender identities and gender roles of the given culture, I seek an understanding of how ideas about sexuality and gender affect behavior, and gender identity and gender role formation.

Though I certainly acknowledge that the ideas shaping gender identity and gender roles are multivariate, and span disciplines, this paper examines one area of influence on the construction of gender identity and gender roles – the category of biology, specifically the libido (the sexual drive) and sexual behavior. In the Arab Muslim context in particular, there is extensive literature on what gender roles are as seen through the Islamic lens, and what the Islamic ideas about sexuality are. However, there is little existing literature on how these ideas are utilized in the socialization process to shape acceptable, normative gender identities and gender roles. Furthermore, although the literature outlines what these ideas about sexuality and gender are in detail, there is virtually no discussion about where these ideas come from, and why it is necessary to socially regulate sexual behavior, as many Islamic laws and norms seek to do. These gaps in the literature may be filled in part by my research, which examines how these ideas are evident in socialization processes. Before delving into the interviews I conducted, though, it is necessary to define gender identity and gender roles.

While the term gender identity is used more popularly, and will be used to describe several forms of identity for purposes of brevity here, it is still important to break down the term for purposes of clarity. There are four primary subcategories of identity into which gender identity can be separated and examined. These are: sex identity, gender identity, sexual identity, and sexual orientation. In some ways each of these subcategories can be subsumed under the category of gender identity, but ultimately each of these subcategories can be a distinct identity in any given person, and one subcategory may manifest as a different identity in two people who identify similarly in another subcategory. As it is the subcategory most thoroughly examined here, gender identity will be defined last. All definitions are mine unless otherwise noted.

To clarify, sex identity refers to affiliation with a specific set of genitalia, reproductive functions, and dominant hormones. Sexual identity refers to a set of actions and roles related to sexual behavior (such as being dominant or submissive). Although sexual identity is closely tied to the expression of being a man or a woman for many people, sexual identity will not be explored substantively in this paper, since there is greater variation in expressions of sex, gender, and sexual identities, and to explore this topic in depth would divert the discussion from how biology and physiology shape gender identity. Sexual orientation refers to the categories of sex and/or gender to which an individual is sexually attracted. Because sexual orientation is often conflated with gender identity these sub-identities are important to differentiate.

Gender identity refers to affiliation with a defined range of expressions of sex identity and a defined range of social behaviors and activities; these ranges have broadened in the past 60 years, but remain defined with limits. Money (1991, 1981) says that gender identity is “one’s own categorization of one’s individuality as male, female, or ambivalent as experienced in self-awareness of one’s own mental processes and one’s own actual behavior<sup>i</sup>. According to Stoller (1985) and Person and Ovesey (1983), gender identity may be broken down into core gender identity and gender role identity. Core gender identity is the immutable sense of being a boy or a girl; it is an innate sense of maleness or femaleness. Person and Ovesey further define gender role identity as a gendered sense of the self as masculine or feminine. Meissner defines gender roles as the external expressions of the self as fulfilling a sociologically-determined gender expectation and a set of socially acceptable gender-related functions.<sup>ii</sup> Gender identity, and particularly gender role identity, has both internal and external psychological components; that is, gender identity includes both the individually-developed sense of gendered self and the gendered roles (based on sex identity) a person is expected to fulfill in society.

The definitions of gender identity given above are not exhaustive, but are representative, and indicate an interesting distinction in how scholars understand gender identity, as opposed to more popular understandings of gender. Core gender identity refers to one's sense of self as either male or female, and concerns the conscious identification with a sex. While this seems quite similar to sex identity, the distinction as I understand it is that sex identity refers to biological and physiological sex characteristic categorization, while gender identity refers to self-identification with the category of male or female – this accounts for transgender individuals, whose sex identity is the anatomy with which they were born, although they identify with the gender associated with the sexual organs of the other sex.

The traits that are typically associated with males and females (or, the ways males and females are expected to act based on their sex characteristics), are commonly known as masculine and feminine traits, respectively, and are how gender is often popularly understood. That is, society expects that a male-identified male will conduct himself in masculine ways, as defined by long-existing behavioral norms and concepts of male and female behavior, and a female-identified female will conduct herself in feminine ways. However, it has been long demonstrated that male-identified males (men) and female-identified females (women) may exhibit traits associated with the other sex/gender. As such, masculinity and femininity are insufficient for determining an individual's gender identity, since masculinity and femininity, though perhaps rooted in part in biology and physiology, are varied and not strictly determined by sex.

The complexity of gender identity compels scholars of gender identity development to understand its manifold causes and influences. Gender identity is complex, and will manifest differently even in people raised with similar ideas about how men and women should express

their identities and interact with each other. Through the interviews I conducted, I endeavored to parse out the various influences on the ideas people hold about gender identity and gender roles, so that I could try to understand how these ideas may become more reflective of the true diversity of gender identity and gender role expression. Although there are a vast number of ideas that contribute to each person's gender identity and concepts of gender roles, I decided to examine two salient sets of ideas that influence people in Arab Muslim societies – Islamic ideas about how men and women should interact, and Islamic ideas about sexuality and sexual behavior – as these are factors that have received little attention in prior scholarly attempts to understand where ideas about gender originate.

Islamic ideas about sexuality, and about sexual urges and desires in particular, are addressed in the Islamic literature many times. Behaviors related to the maintenance of modesty and chastity stem directly from these ideas about sexuality. Within Islam, there is the idea that while sexual desire is beneficial, it is also understood to be destructive to society if it is not regulated and restricted in some ways. Imam al-Ghazali, an 11<sup>th</sup>-century scholar, wrote about this topic extensively. Sexual desire exists first to give humans a glimpse into the glory of the afterlife if one lives virtuously on earth, and second, to give humans interest in procreation, which is necessary for the divinely-planned reproduction of the human species. However, left unchecked, sexual thoughts and sexual behavior become consuming, since they are pleasurable, and turn humans' attention away from Allah, to whom their attention should always be directed. Women, as the sexual objects of men's desire, present a constant temptation away from God, and their god-given allure draws men in and stimulates male libido. As Ghazali says, "The desire for women, which is the greatest of all desires, is susceptible to excess, defect, and equilibrium.

Excess obtains when the intellect is overcome, so that a man's concern is distracted towards the enjoyment of women and slavegirls...that he is drawn into obscene activities.”<sup>iii</sup>

It is for this reason that sexuality and sexual behavior must be regulated, according to understandings of Islam. As sexual relations are categorized in large part by the genders of the people involved, regulating people by gender is a natural response to the overwhelming nature of sexuality. This is why understanding about sexuality is crucial to understanding ideas about gender identity and gender roles in Arab Muslim societies. And while there is explicit literature outlining what these ideas about the origins of sexuality are, there is little, if any, questioning about the origins of these ideas about sexuality, and why it is dangerous for society when sexual behavior is unregulated. Though it is difficult to answer this question, it is possible to examine the influence of these ideas about sexuality on ideas about gender. This is what led me to ask questions about sexuality in an attempt to understand the formation of ideas about gender in the interviews I conducted.

In the following sections I will first outline my research methodology. Next, I will provide a summary of the answers interview subjects gave. This is an illustrative summary of responses, though it is not exhaustive. Then I will examine the significance of their answers in terms of how these people were socialized about sexuality and gender, and will advance my theory about the impacts of different forms of socialization. Finally, I will discuss the significance of these findings on our understanding of how people form ideas about sexuality and gender, and will conclude with some recommendations for the future of gender-related education and for future research.

### Methodology

Though examination of these theoretical concepts is critical to understanding how ideas are shaped and expressed, their significance is fully evident when applied to the opinions of actual people. Thus, I conducted interviews in Lebanon in March 2011, in order to better understand how ideas about sexuality actually shape gender identities and gender roles amongst Arab Muslims. All interview subjects were Sunni Muslims, though some identified as practicing more than others. I restricted the sample pool to Sunnis for several reasons: 1) it is the body of literature with which I am most knowledgeable; 2) it is the dominant sect across the Arab Muslim world, and thus I anticipate it being more generalizable; 3) I believe limiting the variables in socialization allows me to draw stronger conclusions, as I assume a smaller range of acceptable ideas in one religious sect than between sects. This was reinforced to me during the interviews, when several people described Shi'a practices related to sexuality, specifically mentioning *mut'a* or temporary marriage, explicitly describing it as something Shi'a do but Sunnis do not. I found my interview subjects through student and faculty contacts at the American University of Beirut and at the American Embassy in Antelias, Lebanon, which is just outside Beirut. All subjects lived in or immediately around Beirut.

As an American female researcher, I anticipated greater openness and willingness to speak with me from women, but I found the opposite to be true. I interviewed 8 men and 3 women during my field research. All three women were under age 25. The men ranged in age from 21 to 66, with the range spanning three generations. Though the women's answers will be included where useful, the analysis below will focus on the men interviewed, as the subject pool is more sufficiently comparative. I explicitly pre-informed subjects that I would not ask any personal questions about their sexual activities, though they could share any information with

me, and some shared certain information about their behaviors. While I would have been interested to ask questions related to people's experiences of their sexual urges and desires, for this research I decided to keep the questions impersonal, so that subjects would feel more comfortable speaking with me.

Topics covered in the interviews included observations about how men and women interact in each subject's community; whether friends/peers discuss sexuality or gender; whether sexuality, gender identity, or gender roles were discussed in the immediate family; other influences on the subject's development of his or her own identity; how significantly Islamic ideas about these topics influenced them; why it may be important to regulate sexual behavior externally/from society and if it is difficult to regulate sexual urges internally; whether *hijab*/modesty reduces sexual desire; whether separation of men and women reduces sexual desire; if women feel sexual desire as strongly as men; and whether Muslims misinterpret what Islam says about sexuality and gender. No one interviewed declined to answer any question.

### On Gender

The interviews I conducted with Sunni Lebanese men shed significant light on the diversity of socialization practices, and diversity of opinions held, in relation to sexuality and gender. As noted above, in a sample of this size it is difficult to draw conclusions about Sunni Lebanese men as a whole; nonetheless, common patterns of ideas emerge, and are still significant to understanding socialization in Sunni Lebanese society.

All of the male interview subjects reported regular interactions with the opposite sex, and most described observing fairly normalized, frequent interaction between men and women in the communities in which they grew up. The majority of subjects reported discussing topics related

to sexuality and gender with friends or peers of both genders. Some of the men in their 20s reported being more open about these topics with female friends than male friends. A 22-year-old man, who was more conservative about sexuality and sexual behavior, reported not discussing these topics with female friends on any regular basis. All of the men over age 60 reported discussing these topics with female acquaintances. A 62-year-old man described himself as having a reputation in his community for being particularly open about sexuality in his community, and for talking with young people (both relatives and youth in the community) about topics related to sexuality. Despite this openness to discussing sexuality and gender, though, several men said that sexuality is a taboo topic in Lebanese society; however, these men still reported discussing these topics with their peers.

Although all subjects reported discussing sexuality and/or gender in social circles, there was far less uniformity when it came to discussing related topics in their immediate families. I asked if their immediate families had discussed any of the following while they were growing up: what it meant to be a man in their society, what values and/or behaviors were expected of them as men, and about sexuality and sexual behavior. Several men reported that their parents directly told them they needed to be tough, and to handle their emotions independently. The 62-year-old man, who was raised in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, said his community was focused on the collective, not the individual, and that gender was not discussed, as identifying as Palestinian was more important. Interestingly, the 21-year-old who now identifies as a radical feminist and an anarchist reported that his family never discussed sexuality while he was growing up, though he described his parents as atheist and egalitarian. Several of the men reported being taught that women needed to be treated carefully, or protected, but none could

describe exactly why. A 23-year-old man reported his mother telling him that he should be careful with his girlfriends, because women were fragile (emotionally).

Great diversity was also evident in the men's responses to how significantly their ideas about gender and sexuality were influenced by the Islamic ideas about these topics. The 22-year-old man said Islam is one of the main influences on his ideas about these topics, and his answers demonstrated this overall. Several men of varying ages said that Islam had been an influence on their ideas when they were younger, but that it no longer was. At least some of the subjects who responded like this implied that they "knew better" now. The 41-year-old man explicitly claimed to not be influenced by any social conditioning or specific set of ideas, though his responses to other questions indicated a much more direct influence of Islamic ideas and a pervasive Islamic sociosexual ideology in his community.

In the first interviews I asked about why unregulated sexual behavior might be dangerous for society, but respondents had a difficult time answering the question, and didn't seem to be able to answer it. The 22-year-old man indicated knowing it would be bad, but not knowing why. Over the course of the interviews I shifted this question to say that Islamic social regulation of sexual behavior seems to indicate that it can be difficult to internally control sexual desires, and asked if people agreed with that assertion. Several subjects agreed that sexual desires (the sexual drive), can be difficult to control internally, and that social regulations do help, while several other participants of varying ages claimed it was not difficult for people to internally regulate their sexual desires, and one even asserted that the social involvement perpetuated the lack of internal regulation.

### On Sexuality

I then asked whether modesty, and specifically the practices of *hijab* (covering) help to reduce sexual desire, suggesting that Islamic literature supported the idea that it does. The 22-year-old man explicitly thought it did, since it made the temptation less overt. Most of the male respondents, however, did not believe modesty helped to reduce sexual desire, and several suggested it made desire stronger. Multiple people said that what is forbidden is what is most desired, and that covering makes a woman's form more intriguing. The 62-year-old man said that clothes don't forbid feelings. A 63-year-old man said that when people cover themselves, everything becomes sexualized. The male respondents felt similarly about separation of the sexes; no respondent claimed it was very useful in reducing desire, and most men said it was natural and expected for the sexes to mix on a regular basis.

The respondents were split on the question of whether women feel sexual desire as strongly as men. Several respondents said that men feel sexual desire more strongly. One said for men it is more contact. Several said women and men feel sexual desire equally, and several claimed women's sexual desire is stronger. Most could not provide an explanation for their answers beyond the anecdotal. Interestingly, most of the men qualified their answers in some way, by saying women hide their sexual desire more, or women think more about sexual desire, or women take longer to feel sexual interest.

Finally, responses were mixed in their responses to the question of whether Muslims misinterpret what Islam says about sexuality and gender. Several men said that people do misinterpret what Islam says, for example about regulations of chastity (which say both men and women should be chaste). The 22-year-old noted that it's difficult to live up to all of the regulations. The 62-year-old said that other than *tawhid* (the principle of divine oneness), all of

Islam is open to interpretation. The 63-year-old answered this question by saying everyone interprets with his own book in mind. More than half the men mentioned hymenoplasty, a surgery to attempt to restore the hymen/the notion of virginity, and while all who mentioned it disagreed with it, its prevalence in the discussions is itself significant. Some men “resolved” the question of interpretation by saying it is not Islam providing such ideologies, but society. The acceptability of interpreting Islam on an individual level varied among respondents.

### Socialization

In analyzing the interviews conducted, it is helpful to examine socialization processes in greater detail. Once again, socialization is the processes by which people learn the knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, attitudes and dispositions that govern daily life in a given society. There are obviously a number of factors and influences that shape people’s ideas and actions; however, several are most relevant for the discussion herein. The family is the earliest and among the most central factors in socialization. Dawson, Prewitt, and Dawson, who wrote a seminal text on political socialization, claim that since early personality and identity formation occur in a child’s earliest years, in which the child is most frequently around his or her family members, the family has a very significant role in the personality formation process that can later affect both opinion formation and the process of socialization. Arnett, a developmental psychologist who focuses on emerging adulthood, notes that the practices and methods by which parents socialize their children are often reflections of society, and, more specifically, the prevailing cultural belief system.

Peers are another strong influence during socialization. Peers serve to encourage conformity with social and cultural standards, but may also contradict the indications of other

socializing factors, such as the family, the school, or the legal system, particularly during adolescence. Peers are a complicated factor in socialization, because they can be formative, but they can also create confusion when the behaviors and values taught by peers conflict with the values and behaviors being taught by other forces. This contradiction was evident in the interviews – while most subjects had not experienced significant peer pressure to engage in sexual behavior, they did discuss peers’ sexual activity, and some described the knowledge they gained about sexual behavior from peers as informing their actions, or preparing them to be sexually active themselves.

Arnett addresses the role of community as a factor in socialization primarily in terms of the community’s roles in upholding expectations for behavior and in defining social and familial roles. He cites examples from around the world of practices that encourage masculinity in young boys and adolescents.<sup>iv</sup> The community is a particularly strong factor in socialization in Arab Muslim countries, since these societies often have a narrower range of acceptable ideas and behavior. The legal system can be an agent of socialization in that it categorizes behaviors as permissible or forbidden, and punishes those who do not obey the rules and restrictions. Laws that regulate sexual behavior, including laws about marriage, may have a significant impact on what people think about sexual behavior and interactions between men and women.

Arnett goes so far as to claim that the cultural belief system is the foundation for all sources of socialization. He articulates that the cultural belief system can be manifested in different ways, including religious institutions and political institutions. Here, overarching values such as individualism or self-sacrifice can be made concrete and understandable, and thus these values are transmitted all across a culture. It is important to note that in the globalized world in which we live today, with high rates of migration and a pervasive international media,

people may confront different cultural beliefs systems that contradict one another more frequently.

Based on my research, I believe it is possible to distill two distinct forms of socialization at work in Sunni Lebanese society. The interview subjects fell into two camps – those who had been directly socialized on gender identity and gender roles, and those who were socialized more indirectly. By directly socialized, I mean that people were given explicit (verbal) instructions either about the values and behaviors expected of them as men, and/or about how to interact with the opposite gender. By indirect socialization I mean that people learned about the expected values and behaviors through observation, but not through explicit instruction. I posit that these two methods of socializing people about gender have significant implications for their ideas and methods of forming opinions in adulthood.

I contend that those who were directly socialized about gender identity and/or gender roles are more analytical and less monolithic in their ideas about sexuality, gender identity, and gender roles in adulthood than those who were socialized indirectly. This is the primary distinction I observed from the interviews, and I believe understanding the effects of these types of socialization is critical in working with Arab Muslim populations on issues related to gender and sexuality. When people are not taught the dominant social values and expectations for behavior verbally, they will likely gain the majority of their ideas through observation and imitation (or rejection of the ideas). Imitation is “the most extensive and persistent mode of social learning known to man.”<sup>v</sup> Everyone, regardless of age, relies on imitation to learn values, behaviors, skills, expectations, and attitudes. Imitative learning may be both conscious and subconscious. There is indication that the close interactions between peers and colleagues are indicative of imitation being a form of socialization within such relationships. In discussing

imitation, it is also important to acknowledge negative reference-group effort, a sort of reverse imitation in which a child consciously rejects the values of parents or authority figures. This act of rebellion is often seen among adolescents as they struggle to define independent identities.<sup>vi</sup> As they move into adulthood, some people will reconcile these different ideas more readily than others.

Among interview subjects, those whose parents or other influential figures gave them direct instruction about how to think or act as a man had questioned their own ideas about gender identity and gender roles in more critical ways, and considered ideas related to gender more individually. Even when they no longer agreed with the ideas they had been taught as children, these men offered more differentiated views of sexuality and gender than did those who had learned about expected values and behaviors solely through observation. It is important to note that I am not placing merit or fault on either form of socialization; however, understanding how direct and indirect socialization affect thinking is critical to understand. Furthermore, I do not expect that people who are critical of their own ideas will necessarily diverge from them – it is entirely possible to question one's ideas and to conclude they are valid and sound and still what a person thinks. Yet, I do suggest that the process of questioning ideas leads to more differentiated, substantiated ideas.

The 22-year-old man was told by his father that he should be tough, and should handle his feelings independently. The 23-year-old man whose father put him in Muay Thai was told very similar things by his father. And yet, the former still believes that women should be distinguished from men in how they are treated and that they should be offered help and protection regularly. He was raised entirely in Lebanon and holds views about sexuality and sexual desire that are more closely in line with Islamic ideas about these topics. Nonetheless, he

also thought that double standards about the acceptability of pre-marital sexual behavior were “absurd”. The 23-year-old, who was raised in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, now identifies as a feminist, and believes in sexual freedom and deregulation of sexual behavior. Unlike the 22-year-old, who only discusses sexuality/sexual behavior with male peers, the 23-year-old is very open about sexuality and sexual behavior with both male and female friends. These young men, only one year apart, exemplify the differentiated ideas about sexuality evident after direct socialization. Though they disagree, each touched on different topics related to sexuality and gender without offering a singular, comprehensive idea or set of ideas that would explain all of their views.

By contrast, several interview subjects reported never having discussed sexuality or gender within their homes, and never receiving direct instruction about the values and behavior expected of men. All of these subjects described learning by observation, especially of their parents, and several noted they particularly observed and learned from how their parents interacted as husband and wife. Of these individuals, I observed that most had more monolithic ideologies about these topics, and their ideas were less differentiated. They were also more likely to use the term “reaction” to describe their views. The 23-year-old specifically described his views about women and gender as being in reaction to the ideas of his society, and used the example of expectations about pre-marital sex.

The 21-year-old radical feminist is a strong example of the observation method of socialization introduced above. As noted, although he described his household as atypical for Lebanon, and his parents as atheists and egalitarian, his family never discussed sexuality or gender when he was growing up, and he described observing his parents as his education about gender identity and gender roles. He now identifies as a radical feminist and an anarchist, and

advocates for the complete destruction of gender roles. The 62-year-old man told me a powerful story about walking in on his parents having sex when he was 10, and how he had no idea what he was observing because he had never been told anything about sexual behavior. He is now known in his community for espousing the ideas that sexual desires are natural, even toward parents (a very Freudian view), and talks about sexuality and sexual behavior in very biological terms. These men typify the effects of indirect socialization.

Additionally, those who were directly socialized appear to experience less cognitive dissonance about their ideas on sexuality and gender. Dissonance theory suggests that people have a desire to reduce dissonance, or psychological conflict about ideas. Thus, when a person is affected by dissonance, the goal of his behavior is to realign his ideas to fit the situation, or the governing set of ideas. A person reduces dissonance either by changing a conflicting belief, by changing the perception of the information or behavior that produced dissonance, by altering the importance of certain beliefs, or by striving to find more support for one of the conflicting thoughts. Bennett, who has studied the social effects of communication processes, argues that the course of opinion change in a given situation depends on three main factors: one, the degree of dissonance created by the conflict; two, the possibility of rationalizing away the conflicting ideas/opinions based on the absence or presence of certain factors; and three, the presence or absence of social support groups that advocate for the initial opinion. Psychological conflict increases when attitudes and behavior are more misaligned than when they are less misaligned. The reactionary, undifferentiated quality of the ideologies described by those who were indirectly socialized suggests that these individuals continue to have higher levels of dissonance, and have a more difficult time reconciling the behaviors and values they observe and the ideologies they absorb from society with their own ideas.

Balance theory, originated by Heider, is based on the idea that “people try to bring new opinions into a balance with the opinions held by reference persons or groups.”<sup>vii</sup> However, when the opinions, or ideas, of reference groups are not explicitly stated, it can be more difficult to bring them in agreement with the individual’s ideas. Balance theory is useful in understanding why people sometimes disavow the opinions of groups of which they are members, such as religious groups. This can be explained by examining the many different groups to which people belong and determining which group identification is the strongest or most inherent for the individual. Essentially, when ideas are in greater conflict, especially ideas from influential reference persons, they are more difficult to reconcile, and this process may lead people to more substantively disavow the ideas from these reference persons and groups, as the 21-year-old man demonstrates.

I believe that differences in socialization, and the subsequent levels of dissonance around sexuality and gender, are particularly significant in societies that socialize narrowly. Arnett distinguishes between narrow and broad socialization in terms of the range of acceptable ideas and behaviors taught in a given society. Narrow socialization encourages conformity and obedience and discourages deviation from cultural expectations. Broad socialization encourages people within a society to follow diverse paths to identity formation and identity understanding, while narrow socialization encourages the development of the person within a narrow or limited context. Although the number and diversity of socializing influences has expanded in the Arab Muslim world and across the globe, most Arab Muslim societies still practice more narrow socialization, which is evident in the greater social and legal regulations of sexual behavior and gender interaction.

In Lebanon, people claimed there is a greater range of acceptable ideas and behaviors compared to other Arab Muslim countries due to a diversity of religious sects (18 religions are recognized in Lebanon) and greater influence from the West, especially the French. Nonetheless, there are still strong prevailing social norms, and there are often harsh consequences for deviation from these ideas and behaviors. Pre-marital sexual behavior is one area in which narrow socialization is discernible. Although the Qur'an specifically instructs both men and women to remain chaste until marriage, many interview subjects told me that double standards exist regarding the acceptability of pre-marital sexual activity. For men such behavior is overlooked, and even sometimes encouraged, while for women it can lead to difficulty in getting married, or lead to the pursuit of hymenoplasty, a surgery to restore the hymen, and presumably, the appearance of virginity.

In narrowly socializing societies, the acceptable range of values and behaviors is smaller; as such, deviations from those norms may cause stronger dissonance than in societies in which more ideas and actions are accepted, even if those ideas are not accepted in a person's immediate community. I contend that in narrowly socializing societies, when socialization is indirect and children must deduce the expected values and behaviors for their gender, dissonance is greater, and that reconciling differentiated views is more difficult. When socialization is direct, people at least have concrete statements to analyze and agree or disagree with; without such illustration knowing what to believe and/or question may be more difficult. As such, it becomes necessary to question less, and to form less differentiated ideas about identities and roles. This was evident in the ideas given by the indirectly socialized men. I do not believe they had less to question, just less clarity in what ideas to examine. I believe this is critical to understanding how to encourage independent analysis about sexuality and gender in Arab Muslim societies.

Although different methods of socialization produce different outcomes in terms of ideas people hold and the ways they form and consider their ideas, everyone is affected by the pervasiveness of dissonance regarding ideas about sexuality and gender. For this reason, understanding how ideas are formed is critical to understanding how various methods of learning and forming ideas affect individuals on a daily basis. Through the information shared with me during the interviews, I conclude that there is a disconnect between the ideas people hold about sexuality and gender, and the range of ideas that is generally accepted in society, at least in how people perceive the range of acceptable ideas. When I returned from Lebanon, it at first seemed impossible to find commonalities among the ideas people shared with me, as everyone held different ideas about the nature of sexuality, the roles of men and women, and the ways they had learned about sexuality and gender in their families and communities. I then came to understand that it was the diversity of ideas that was key to understanding the differences in socialization.

While in Lebanon, I observed that Islamic ideas in particular seem to be an ever-present, slightly ethereal influence. It is intermittently discernible, and appears in the ideas shared even when people claim it does not. This rhetorical anomaly, coupled with several subjects' use of the word "plastic" in describing life in Lebanon, leads me to conclude that people often feel their ideas are at odds with the dominant ideas in their societies. I believe that this disconnect leads to higher levels of dissonance than in societies where there is a larger range of acknowledged ideas and influences, and this dissonance has consequences, as people seem to feel out of place within their communities, even though they are in fact of their communities, no matter what ideas they hold.

One interview subject, the 22-year-old, said he thinks there should be education about sexuality and gender, but that society is not yet ready for such a discourse. And yet, the time

seems high for such a dialogue to take place, since my subjects were quite diverse, but they still described themselves as being atypical for Sunni Lebanese, or outside of their communities. Several people said quite overtly that they were not representative of their communities or their societies, yet there are all products of their communities, even if they now disagree with the dominant ideas. It is in this disconnection from their communities and the ideas taught in the socialization process that the plasticity – the surface-level living – people are experiencing becomes demonstrable, and the need for expansion of socialization and greater focus on questioning of ideas becomes evident.

Although Islam and other religious and cultural influences do regulate sexuality and gender, both men and women would benefit from the social freedom to question their identities and ideas more. I am not suggesting that greater sexual freedom, or even broader gender roles, should be the anticipated outcome of such reform. However, more opportunities to question ideas about gender and sexuality would likely have positive effects on society on other topics as well, since the ability and freedom to question ideas is universally important. As we have discussed, this freedom is important not only intellectually, but psychologically as well. Greater opportunities to question ideas about sexuality and gender would likely decrease dissonance and lead to greater acceptance of diverse ideas, and individuals' reconciliation of their own ideas with those of society. The recommendation to place greater emphasis on people's abilities to reconcile their ideas and behaviors with their society may seem obvious, or simple; nonetheless, it is essential. While the emphasis of critical thinking and questioning is important in all societies, it is particularly crucial in the specific Arab Muslim context, for the reasons laid out above.

I strongly believe that focusing greater attention on developing critical thinking skills will have a positive effect on individuals and society, but I would be remiss if I did not highlight why this greater attention within development programs is necessary from a consequential perspective. As I mentioned above, the dis-identification with one's community that results from high levels of dissonance around gender and sexuality, fundamental identities and ideas for all people, seemed to have a negative effect on people. The people with whom I spoke did not feel their ideas fit into the acceptable range – this is why they described themselves as unrepresentative of the Sunni Lebanese community. And while they may be slightly atypical – well-educated, traveled – they represent the ideas of their communities as much as their peers who hold ideas more closely in line with religious or cultural norms.

Feeling uncomfortable within one's community leads people to identify outside their society, which furthers people's senses that their ideas are not accepted in their own communities. This may lead to greater differences in socialization, the ideas people are taught that will govern their daily lives in a given society, which will perpetuate high levels of dissonance, and the sense of being outside one's community about fundamental characteristics of who we are. The ability to integrate one's individual ideas into the range of acceptable ideas in a society will not be an easy process, but it is crucial to place greater emphasis on considering and questioning the range of ideas in a given society, so that more people and their ideas may become incorporated into a given community.

The critical importance of fully mapping out the range of acceptable ideas in Lebanon and in the Arab Muslim world at large leads me to my recommendations for future study. Conducting a larger body of interviews would allow me, or other researchers, to form a more comprehensive picture of the ideas people hold, and the boundaries of the range of acceptable

ideas as people understand it (whether these ideas are the ones actually held by interview subjects would be an important additional point of focus). Since scholarship on gender that focuses on men is very new and very small, I would recommend, and would pursue, a focus on the ideas men hold about gender, as they have historically been dominant in almost all societies, and also have been studied very little. However, future research should also pursue a larger sample of Sunni Muslim women, especially since women are often responsible for the bulk of child-rearing in Arab Muslim families. Finally, further research should also place an emphasis on obtaining a multi-religious sample, so that the boundaries of the range of ideas within Islamic families and communities is more clear, and it is also possible to begin to parse out the origins and strength of influence of different ideas about sexuality and gender. I believe the continued pursuit of this research is critical, both for scholars and for practitioners of gender-based development. We have only just begun to determine the ideas people actually hold about sexuality and gender, and to understand where these ideas come from and how they are formed. Continued research on socialization regarding gender and sexuality is vital to understanding how and why men and women interact as they do in society.

It is this final point, the importance of understanding how and why we think and act as we do, that brings me both to my conclusion and back to where we began. The three men introduced in the opening of this paper offer a glimpse into the diversity of socialization practices, and the ideas people have about gender and sexuality. This diversity of ideas is rich, and real, and, for the reasons I've discussed, it is crucial to incorporate this diverse body of ideas about sexuality and gender into the range of ideas accepted by society. The work continues as we seek to understand how we become who we are.

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ii W.W. Meissner, "GENDER IDENTITY AND THE SELF: I. Gender Formation in General and in Masculinity," *Psychoanalytic Review* 92.1 (2005) 2.

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- iii Al-Ghazali, *Al-Ghazali on Disciplining the Soul and on Breaking the Two Desires: Books XXII and XXIII of the Revival of the Religious Sciences*. T.J. Winter, trans. (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1995) 167.
- iv Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, "Broad and Narrow Socialization: The Family in the Context of a Cultural Theory," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 57 (1995) 617-628.
- v Richard E. Dawson, Kenneth Prewitt, and Karen S. Dawson, *Political socialization: an analytic study*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977) 106.
- vi Dawson, Prewitt, and Dawson 105-108.
- vii W. Lance Bennett, *Public Opinion in American Politics*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980) 167.

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