Spaces of escape: Sexuality in the age of the Internet.

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The American University in Cairo
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

“SPACES OF ESCAPE: SEXUALITY IN THE AGE OF THE INTERNET”

A Thesis Submitted by
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A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of Sociology, Egyptology, and Anthropology
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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements For the Degree of Master of Arts
in Sociology - Anthropology

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DEDICATION

To the soul of my beloved grandmother who had always believed in me.

To my dearest son Youssef, I hope this paves the way for a better future for your generation.

To my lovely mother, who paved the way until I was able to make this to the light. It would have never been possible without your time, patience and selfless support.

To my dearest friends Reham Mobasher, Dalia Gad and Ebtihal Khalifa for their continuous support, for the long countless hours of discussions, proofreading, researching and helping until I made it to this moment.

To my exceptional manager Nahed Youssry for her kind flexibility and support, as well as my lovely work colleagues: Nora, Maryam, Thaira, and Wesam, who always showed empathy, helped read, think and converse until I was able to write down my thoughts properly. Thank you for the love and kindness.

Finally, to all the good people who helped me finish this project -mentioned with names or without-, thank you for being the reason why my faith in humanity and goodness is restored and enhanced.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT:

A researcher may change how the people look at the world around them through the academic contribution, but in the process, he/she realizes that she is subject to many deeper changes too. To me, this thesis was not only an academic progress but also a personal and a social one. It was a journey of exploration of the society, the self and the goodness of people in my life.

That is why I desire to express and document my deepest and most sincere appreciation to Dr. Helen Rizzo as a professor, an advisor and foremost as a person. I would like to thank you for all the unconditional support, patience and motivation that you never ceased to show throughout many tiring fieldwork years. This work was done because of your kind guidance and benevolent nature. My gratitude is and will always be eternal.

I would also like to thank my thesis committee members Dr. Hani Henry and Dr. Malak Rouchdy for their thoughtful guidance and support. I truly appreciate the time you took to help me enhance my knowledge and finalize this body of work. Besides the academic dimension, it was a personal enriching experience.
ABSTRACT

This thesis is an online ethnographic study of anonymous sexual interactions and expressions on the internet in twenty first century Egypt. I draw on how the internet is used as a space of freedom and resistance against the regulatory powers of state, society and religion, which decides how sexuality is expressed, discussed and practiced. I look at how a parallel sex culture is constructed online as opposed to the offline hegemonic, heteronormative sex culture. I observe sexual interactions and expressions in three anonymous internet platforms: an Egyptian chat room and two closed secret social media groups. I explore how alternative sexuality is represented, how men and women perceive their sexuality and how new modes of masculinity are performed. I look at how the anonymous online platforms are deemed sites of cultural production where Egyptians anonymously use it as a ‘safe’ outlet to express their sexual dreams, fears, desires, orientations and behaviors without the fear of losing ‘face’ in their offline lives. I attempt to understand a side of our truth in sex through analyzing the reciprocal relationship of our sexuality and the internet.

Influenced by Foucault’s work on sexuality, I examine how online sexual interactions and perceptions are subject to various changing forces such as internet anonymity, wide accessibility of information, and the availability of sexualized material. I look at how these forces shape the way sexuality is performed and perceived online. I draw on how the internet is used as an easy affordable, accessible, and anonymous sexual gratification vehicle in a country with suffocating economic and social circumstances. I look at how sex constitutes an integral part of their everyday experiences, fears, desires and dreams. This thesis is about how sex is practiced and expressed online in context of Egypt’s strict regulatory powers of state, religion, and society and how in the process it was subject to other forces of change.
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MOTIVATION

I remember very well my first biology class in school back in the early 2000. A class attended by both boys and girls. We were supposed to be educated about our genital organs by our male teacher. But I do not remember much of what was explained, maybe because very little was really explained. However, I remember many other things about this day: my teacher’s red cheeks and avoidant looks, the secretive laughs of my male colleagues and the intentional absence of my female colleagues who were too shy to attend. I remember how my best friend criticized me for attending this class and said, “I was too bold to stay among boys and watch the teacher stripping me naked with his words.”

I also remember the first day of my menstruation. I remember how I cried for three long hours alone in my room thinking that I lost my virginity by mistake because the toilet water hose was too strong! I remember many of my female friends refusing to ride horses or join ballet classes because it will result in losing their hymens. I remember my friend breaking down after her first kiss with her fiancée because she thought she had conceived. I remember all those days among many other days that passed with many sexual misconceptions that generated fears, problems and negatively affected the course of many peoples’ lives around me.

Because of this, I developed a very gradual curiosity about this “taboo” called sexuality. Specifically about how people deal with sex, how they talk about it, and how sex influences how we think, believe, dress and communicate with others. I was intrigued to study how sexual censorship can produce different sexual behaviors and conceptions.

In addition, in my teenage years, I was an internet addict. I was a regular chat room user for several years. I made lifetime friends throughout this period until I noticed that something was changing gradually. Many users started using chat rooms for other purposes other than to chat and make friends. They used it for various sexual purposes: textual sexual harassment and sex invitations and many times sexual counseling or venting. These behaviors were not exclusive to a specific dating or mating chat room. I noticed that something phenomenal was happening, a world inside our real world. The same people we meet every day but with different identities, dreams and desires.
Finally studying sociology allowed me the freedom to study and explore the restricted area of sex. However, as expected, there was little academic research about sexuality in Egypt and less about sexuality online.

Initially I was motivated to study sexual problems between married couples. However, I realized how hard it is to ask about such a sensitive topic in a face-to-face setting. I knew that asking people to open up about their sexuality to someone they know was not an easy task and the result might not be credible for many reasons. Moreover, sexuality in Egypt is still a highly private issue.

For that reason, I decided to study their sexual interactions on the internet and specifically sexual interactions done anonymously. I wanted to explore the same people but in a much more comfortable platform “the Internet”. Influenced by Erving Goffman’s concept of “impression management”, I believe what many Egyptians choose to do online reveal parts of what he called the “true self”.

In this thesis, I aim to explore a rarely researched field in Egypt. I am exploring sexuality perceptions and maybe hidden realities, and on top of all, a very vulnerable side of who we are as sexual subjects.

I hope this thesis sends out a message to everyone that sex is not the enemy. Sex is private but not illicit; it is a legitimate field of study. It is an important and essential part of our lives that does not deserve to be neglected, marginalized or feared. It needs to be studied carefully, addressed, and guided. I hope this illuminates people and lead every socialization institution to use the information provided to help build a better future for the next generation where we will be using sexuality for our own interest and not used by it.

I hope this thesis contributes to the academic literature on sexuality and encourages other researchers to do more advanced work on sexuality in Egypt.
ACRONYMS

- **ASL**: Age-Sex-Location. (commonly used by chat users in the beginning of a chat).
- **BDSM**: Bondage & Discipline / Domination & Submission / Sadism & Masochism.
- **BJ**: Blow Job.
- **CAPMAS**: Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics.
- **CMC**: Computer Mediated Communications.
- **CS**: Cybersex; sexual arousal using computer technology, especially by wearing virtual reality equipment or by exchanging messages with another person via the Internet.
- **ED**: Erectile Dysfunction.
- **EHIS**: Egypt Health Issues Survey.
- **EIPR**: Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights.
- **Femdom**: Female Dominance.
- **FGM**: Female Genital mutilation.
- **FSD**: Female Sexual dysfunction.
- **FTF**: Face To Face.
- **HPMT**: Hyper Personality Model Theory.
- **IMS**: Intercontinental Marketing Services.
- **IRC**: Internet Chat Relay.
- **IVF**: In Vitro Fertilization.
- **LGBT**: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender.
- **ODE**: Online Disinhibition Effect.
- **ODM**: Online Disinhibition Model.
- **PM**: Private Me.
- **RP**: Role play.
- **SRH**: Sexual Reproductive Health.
MY INTERLOCUTORS:

First, due to the sensitivity of this topic, I have altered or concealed all websites and groups titles as well as all names of research participants in this body of work, to ensure privacy. The precaution measures were extended to include their usernames in anonymous chat rooms or account names in social media groups.

All research subjects interviewed in this thesis are anonymous Egyptians who have internet access and I have never met them offline. All interviewees were males who identified themselves with the following categories: men, homosexuals and sometimes bisexuals. Some of them were single and most of them were either married or divorced/separated in their late twenties to late fifties. All female users refused to complete the interviews until the end. Some of them only answered some of my questions and either dropped out of the interview suddenly or asked me to pay for their time (I believe they were online prostitutes who thought I was a potential customer). Many female users refused to reply to any of my messages after I requested an electronic consent; such behavior is very common in chat rooms as they suspect that everyone is trying to drag them into a sexual conversation. Thus, unintentionally all interviewees were with males only. However, there is not a possibility to explore sexuality from the male’s perspective only. Hence, the incomplete female interviews are taken into consideration in the analysis as well as their discussion in the main public chat window. Also females’ sexual interactions, views and expressions are well represented by their anonymous posts and comments on social media closed groups.

Subjects in this thesis express themselves in three different language forms: in Arabic, and English, or transliterated Arabic. The last was extensively used by chat room users and in many of the social media confessions. Thus, I translated Arabic (written in Arabic or Latin letters) into English so that readers who are not familiar with the Arabic language or Egyptian slang expressions written in Latin letters are equally engaged like Arabic speaking individuals.
CHAPTER 1:

LET US TALK ABOUT SEX

Introduction:

A hot Girl in her ‘abaya is flirting with me in the mirror

I winked at her, she winked at me, for sex she danced

In a deserted place, I stopped the vehicle

I asked if she is interested in me, she said yes, I agree man!

So I went down completely with my all. I went down with my all!

I turned off the vehicle headlights; she hugged me while I kissed her

Her braid was touched by my fire. When I was caressing her dangerous part

Whenever I pushed her harder, she held to the vehicle’s body.

(Tuktus’ Pampering (Dala’ el Takatek” - Sang by Ahmad Nafe’, Houda Gomaa..and others) (Nafea, 2016)

The previous is an excerpt of a very popular folk song1 (aka festival “Mahragan” in Egypt due to its loud fast beat that stimulates dancing) that went viral in a very short time in 2017 viewed by 24 million people on Youtube. This song has been played in cars and weddings- including weddings held in five stars hotels-, sung by people of all ages regardless of its explicitly sexual content that describes a make out scene between a Tuktuk driver and a female customer. This song is one of many others that succeeded to make its way to popularity among many social classes irrespective of its content. However, Egyptian authorities arrested the singers of the song in December 2017, who faced charges of “inciting debauchery” (VetoGate, 2017). This incident follows the jail sentence of another Egyptian pop singer Shyma for two years over the same charges (The Telegraph, 2017). Shyma, who appeared in a video clip on Youtube in her underwear, eating and

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1 “Music of ‘Mahraganat” (festivals) is a type of music that emerged in 2007 and made its way to popularity among different social strata. It is a mix of rap and techno music, or electro- folk music originally created by slums and poor areas’ residents. It has been described as “Mahragan” or festival due to its rattling loud music and fast beats that easily stimulate dancing.
licking a banana and spilling milk on it, was harshly criticized for her obscene clip, yet millions of Egyptians viewed her video clip online.

Besides songs, TV shows, which contain highly sexualized innuendos and expressions, have vastly grown in popularity such as: The Show (Al-bernameg) by satirist Bassem Youssef, Saturday Night Live (SNL Arabic), which have become among the top shows in Egypt. The two shows, despite their different goals, utilized sexual innuendos systematically. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that the Egyptian authorities suspended both shows. ‘The Show’ was suspended for political reasons and for using sexual innuendos (EgyptToday, 2013). SNL (Arabic) was suspended by the Supreme Council of Media Regulation (SCMR) for using several sexual innuendos. Moreover, The “Abla Fahita” talk show anchored by a puppet was subject to waves of suspension over sexual impersonations and expressions (Egypt Independent, 2018).

In addition to artistic and media expressions, Egyptian sexual minorities have been using the internet as a “safe” outlet to discuss their concerns. LGBT use different online platforms to express their sexual orientation and activities on social media and dating websites. In reaction, “the Morality Police began its systematic, electronic campaign on some LGBTQ dating applications and websites to arrest LGBTQ individuals through luring them and making arrangements to have sex and then ambushing them” (EIPR, 2017:12). However, these campaigns have not resulted in abandoning the internet as a space for expression, but have led to a more careful internet usage by sexually persecuted individuals as will be demonstrated in this thesis.

On a different note, the Internet currently has many human rights based websites and articles that speak about the persecution of sexual minorities (Nader, 2017; Kodean, 2017). Those online websites also tackle various sexual issues openly such as sexual education, sex work in Egypt, sexual harassment, marital rape, etc… (Sheils, 2014). Such efforts contribute to breaking the silence around discussions of sex in Egypt and trying to change how people understand and practice their sexuality. Nonetheless, such platforms are still subject to legal persecution or suspension by authorities.

As shown, despite the tight censorship on sexual expression and practice in Egypt, several persistent, noticeable yet understudied public sexual phenomena deserve considerable attention. These include Egypt being a top viewer of pornography worldwide (Hussey, 2015),
the high levels of sexual harassment as well as the remarkable increase of using sexual innuendos and expressions in various media outlets such as songs, TV shows, movies, swears, jokes and online communications. Egyptian society seems to be in a contradictory state: sexual voices, which have been silenced in the public sphere by the regulatory powers of the state and religion, are breaking free in other ways, especially on the internet. A continuous power struggle between individual sexual freedom and state authority has been taking place in twenty first century Egypt.

Hence, in this thesis, I observe the manifestation of such a power struggle. I look at marginalized sexual voices, be it a minority or alternative sexual desires. I look at the vulnerability that comes with their sexuality. I look at the secret voices of desire, the sexually active singles, the married, the incest addicts, sexually depressed people, etc… I draw on how heterosexual and alternative sexualities are both presented, discussed and expressed online. I look at how Egyptians use the internet anonymously as a tool of freedom and resistance against the regulatory powers of the state manifested in its laws, religion manifested in its rules, and society manifested in its sexual and cultural values and perceptions. I argue that an online sex culture is being produced and shaped by internet sexual interactions and expressions. The process, through which sexual values and activities are shared, discussed and freely expressed. As Shereen El Feki states in her interview with the Guardian on book “Sex and the Citadel: “If you really want to know a people, start by looking inside their bedrooms” (2013). Thus, I argue that the internet is the one of the widest windows into understanding how Egyptians perceive or choose to represent what happens – or what they desire happening- in their bedrooms and minds. I use sex as a lens into understanding Egyptians as subjects of desire. I examine how Egyptians are creating a new sexual discourse by expressing their sexuality online as opposed to the hegemonic and heteronormative discourse in offline Egypt. My hypothesis is influenced by Foucault’s argument that “talking about the prohibited disrupts the established order of the society” (1990). This thesis may not be about what really happens on the streets of Egypt nor in their real bedrooms. However, it is about how Egyptians choose to represent their sexuality including their implicit sexual desires, identities and activities in anonymous platforms. Thus in the following I will discuss my review on the literature on the topic as well as my conceptual framework and methodology in order to provide the larger context for my thesis project.
Literature Review

Examsing internet sexuality puts information studies and sexuality studies in conversation. In the following, I attempt to present an overview of the literature relevant to internet and human behavior, sexuality and power (offline) in general and internet sexuality specifically.

Sexuality has become a matter of public discourse in the West. First, it was very much perceived and treated as merely a biological act “until a sociological approach to the study of sex had emerged in mid 1900” (Rambaree, 2004, 5). Then, other dimensions of sexuality such as the political, psychological and cultural were recognized and studied. Later the term “internet sexuality” emerged in the internet age to refer to all sexual related content and activities observable on the internet (Hunsinger, Klastrup, & Allen, 2010). This included activities such as sex chat, pornography, online sex matching, etc…

According to Adamse and Motta in their first popular book on internet sexuality, Online Friendships, Chat-Room Romance, and Cybersex, sexual activity and romantic interactions have become prevalent on the internet (1996). In fact, different kinds of online relationships have become part of the everyday life of a considerable portion of the net population, which is increasing exponentially (Doring, 2002). This explains the substantial academic attention that has been given to studying different types of sexual and social interactions on the internet.

In that respect, scholars have given much attention to the relationship between virtual and real spaces as well as the social nature of internet interactions. Vieta (1999) argues that “social interactions online are extensions of and not apart from the everyday, situated life-worlds” (ii). He believes that the internet "paints a portrait of a technically positioned yet multi-dimensional, socially situated, and embodied self that mediates the intersubjectively linked life-worlds of its users through the retinas of its screens and the arteries of its network" (1999: 218). Likewise, Chalmers argues that “virtual reality is not a second-class reality. But may be a second-level reality, in that it is contained within our physical reality and realized by processes in the physical world, but this need not make it less real or less valuable” (Chalmers, 2009: 35). Thus, both Vieta and Chalmers along with others contest the argument that virtual space and real life are in dichotomy. According to them, “the sociability that is mediated by the internet is best thought of as ‘the world online not a separate online world’” (Vieta, 1999:4).
However, the basic debate between scholars was on whether internet interaction is deemed a social activity or if an online community is considered a social community or not. On one hand, Michael Dertouzos, proposes that online communities do not completely qualify to be true communities due to what he called "the forces of the cave" a term that refers to our primitive human emotions. He notes that our ancient feelings of trust, fear, love, and anger and physical attraction “form a clear threshold and a boundary to the quality and extent of human bonds that the information marketplace can support” (Dertouzos, 1997: 284). In his opinion, such emotions can be facilitated by online networks but not replaced by them. Dertouzos argues- as cited by Etzioni- that online interaction is a simulation of reality that happens on an intellectual and intuitive level, a process that allows users the ability to turn off the machine and avoid the impact of the forces unlike real interactions (Etzioni & Etzioni, 1997). Later, Lyon and Driskell agreed with Dertouzos’s proposition that although the internet may allow for community reinforcement, it may also reduce communities or provide a weak replacement. In their opinion, “virtual communities may not be true social communities, since they fail to include normal close, emotional, and holistic ties of social relations. They add that virtual communities are spatially liberated, topically fused, and psychologically detached, with a limited liability” (Lyon, 2002).

Consequently, the previous scholars argue that “online interaction is not a social activity for it lacks the physical space and emotional aspects; while others claim that the internet is a form of social interaction” (Morrison, 1999: 26). In that respect, Lee argues, “communities no longer exist only in the physical world but also in the virtual world which operates through the Internet” (2005:14). He proposes that “the virtual space transformed the concepts of place and traditional communities” (Lee, 2005:3). Lee’s argument was first introduced by Rheingold, who suggests that community as a place “is a cognitive and social one, not a geographic one”. Thus, he argues that “virtual communities might be real communities, they might be pseudo-communities, or something entirely new in the realm of social contracts” (Rheingold, 1993). Rheingold proposes that “virtual communities are in part a response to the hunger for community that has followed the disintegration of traditional communities around the world”. On a different note, his thoughts contest the argument of Dertouzos regarding the emotional aspect in virtual interactions, he says: “I have seen people hurt from interactions in virtual communities” (Rheingold, 1993), and others who experienced feelings of conviviality,
anger, and passion with strangers that they have never met offline. A statement upon which he grounded an important argument; that maybe “telecommunication culture is more than just a “pseudo-community” where people lack the genuine personal commitments to one another. Maybe online interactions are changing our notion of “genuine”. Rheingold in his thoughtful article “A Slice of Life in My Virtual Community” explains how emotions and identities can be reduced and encoded as words on a screen, making online social interaction possible. A process that determines the nature of collective culture of its users (Rheingold, 1993).

Based on this, and despite the presented debate, there are more available academic works that favor considering the virtual world as a part of real world and not separate from it, and which agree that online communities are a unique form of social communities that share common characteristics and exchange information through interaction. Hence, this thesis will be based on the latter view that both online and offline worlds are linked and that even though virtual interactions lack the physical space, they are still a form of social artifact performed by the same humans in that physical space. In that respect, questions about the nature of these online interactions have inspired scholars to study the relation between the internet and human behavior. In the following, I demonstrate their efforts in pursuit of exploring the differences between online and offline human behavior.

The Internet and Human Behavior

Numerous studies have found that online behavior is usually marked with disinhibition “which includes higher levels of self-disclosure than in face-to-face (FTF) communication” (Donohoe, 2007:9). This phenomenon is explained by the effect of the internet’s relative anonymity and its “multiple venues for social interactions that afford individuals a kind of virtual laboratory for exploring different versions of themselves” (A. Bargh, Mckenna, & Fetiszimons, 2002: 33). Thus, research has found that people were more comfortable expressing different aspects of themselves online, exposing information that would normally be unacceptable in society. In that respect, Sobel -as cited by Joinson and Paine-in explaining the relation between the high level of online self-disclosure and anonymity, argues that anonymity allows people to seek information and disseminate it “while maintaining their privacy and reputations in both cyberspace and the material world” (Joinson & Paine, 2011: 239). While Caplan- as cited by Walther- adds that,
online interaction reduces anxiety and “provides individuals greater control over their messages and their self-presentation” driven by the belief that “one is safer, more efficacious, more confident, and more comfortable with online interpersonal interactions and relationships than with traditional (face-to-face) social activities” (Walther, 2011:466). In addition, Suler in his very interesting Online Disinhibition Model (ODM) further attributes the phenomenon of online disinhibition effect (ODE) to seven elements which include: “dissociative anonymity, invisibility, asynchronicity, solipsistic introjections, dissociative imagination, minimizing authority, and personality traits” (Suler, 2004). Nonetheless, I will highlight three of these elements that are relevant to my research, in addition to anonymity. To Suler, people in textual communications enjoy physical invisibility, which amplifies the disinhibition effect. In his opinion, people in text communications “don’t have to worry about how they look or sound when they type a message” (2004:322), unlike in face-to-face communications where facial expressions and body language do inhibit people’s behaviors. Also, Suler proposes that solipsistic introjection is another factor that affects users’ online behaviors. He argues that the “absent face-to-face cues combined with text communication can alter self-boundaries, Where people may feel that their mind has merged with the mind of the online companion. Reading another person’s message might be experienced as a voice within one’s head” (Suler, 2004:323). Thus, Suler suggests that solipsistic introjection blurs the boundaries between one’s fantasies, imaginations and the online reality. Additionally, Suler argues that dissociative imagination is an important factor that makes users consciously or unconsciously “feel that one’s online persona along with the online others live in a make-believe dimension, separate and apart from the demands and responsibilities of the real world. They split or dissociate online fiction from offline fact” (2004:323). “In dissociative imagination, the expressed but split-off self may evolve greatly in complexity” (324). Accordingly, Suler argues that textual communications serve as a unique safe site for psychological and cultural altered behavior. People in textual communications tend to go places and do things they would not do in real life. They would say and express things that they would regret later in the absence of real physical reactions.

Thus, I argue that online textual anonymous communication can disclose new worlds and realms of meaning about our sexuality practices and culture. Given the
internet’s anonymity, I will be able to discover unique aspects of the subjects’ sexual selves that would not be disclosed in FTF communications.

Moreover, research has expanded further to study the relation between online interactions and the offline lives of users. Hardey suggests that “the internet for many is just a different space where people can address and fulfill their offline needs.” He argues that “virtual interactions may be shaped by and grounded in the social, bodily and cultural experiences of users” (Hardey, 2002:1) where people escape their embodied selves, the expectations and norms of behavior to drive satisfaction through the disembodied anonymous interaction. He further adds that disembodied anonymity that characterizes the internet enables the process of “exploring the other in relation to the reflected constructed needs and desires” (570). And finally, Hardey proposes that the internet in some cases may act “as a foundation for the building of trust and establishing real world relationships rather than the construction of fantasy selves” (2002: 570).

Thus, in this thesis I argue that Egyptians as sexual subjects use the internet anonymously as a resistance tool to express, practice and satisfy their sexual needs freely irrespective of the expected norms of behavior. While doing that they choose to represent themselves with specific sexual identities. But do these identities differ in the online space?

The Internet and Identity

Numerous studies focused on identity representation and construction on the internet. Debates were drawn on the links between online and offline identities. The first debate started with Donath’s signalling theory in 1999- as cited by Walther-which argues that online anonymity could facilitate identity or self presentation deception (Walther, 2011). However, other researchers argued that “anonymity’s lack of utility in the case of deception is captured in the fact that individuals may lie about themselves (online or offline) using their real names or pseudonyms” (Walther, 2011:453).

On a different note, another interesting research paper on the topic was by Bullingham and Vasconcelos- guided by and applying Goffman’s concept of presentation of the self - proposes that an online self is only a facet of the offline one. They argue that the internet allows users to re-create their offline self online and embellish their offline identities (2013). Along the same lines, Rodogno –as cited by Tsatsou- argues that online and offline identities are not in dissociation, rather he thinks that although “personal
identity is affected by online contexts, but these contexts do not shape a different personal identity from the offline one” (2014; 103). The previous propositions challenge the post modern theses of 1990 which suggests that online and offline identities are in duality, and stresses on the existence of radically different identities in cyberspace. Nonetheless, although there is a growing body of research that demonstrates that there is not a contradiction between offline and online identities, there are still some limitations that have not been overcome. For instance, researchers who advocate for the online and offline selves as two sides of one coin, consider identity authentication online as an unquestioned given, the assumption which overlooks the possibility of using the internet for identity play for the sake of fun or experimentation, etc… however the counter-argument remains that identity play is still also possible in offline spaces.

Hence, in my opinion, the real question should not be whether or not online interactions or online communities or identities are real or not, I believe our efforts should be directed towards studying the nature of the online world as a unique one. My belief - which will be used as a foundation for my thesis- that scholars regardless of the debates agree that “the internet is a space that has its own distinct rules, tools and affordances that can enable self expression, and identity liberation to a greater extent than offline spaces” (Tsatsou, 2014; 104).

However, the online world as shown above subsumes different interactions, presentations and relationships -including those of sexual nature- which have their own specific power dynamics. Thus, in the following I will present the most important research on the relation between sexuality and power in the offline world, as an attempt to apply them to my analysis in the online world.

**Sexuality, Power, and the Internet**

There is a growing body of research on various sexuality topics, but Foucault’s work on subjectivity, sexuality and power is one of the most important to cite as a foundation for other work on the topic. According to Foucault, citizens tend to regulate themselves with respect to the expectations of the wider society. He argues that citizens internalize this regulation through customs and habits that help them to govern their actions and desires (Foucault,1995). In addition, he thinks that sexuality discourse and practice were subject to deliberate control by a system of taboos and prohibitions. For example, sex discourse was treated as a private matter and its practice was confined only
to its procreative role within the marital realm. In his opinion, prostitution and psychiatry served as the only two outlets of confession in the past, where improper or alternative sexual feelings could be released safely (Foucault, 1990). Hence, in my thesis I argue that the internet is deemed as the third modern outlet for confession and free sexual expression in Egypt.

In that respect, Foucault believes that truth and sex are joined in the act of confession, where both a truth of sex and a truth about sex were produced. To him, sex discourses/expression that contest the regulatory powers of society is a revolt against a repressive system/the hegemonic sexual discourse, the act which can tell us a lot about our reality. Relevant to that, Vieta argues that “the internet is an opportunity to liberate the self from state oppressive powers” (Vieta, 1999:42).

Based on this, I aim to examine how the internet is used anonymously as a freedom and resistance tool against the regulatory powers of state, religion and society in Egypt. I look at how an online sex culture is produced as opposed to the hegemonic and heteronormative sex culture in the offline Egypt. However, the academic library had little or no research addressing online sexuality in Egypt. The only study- that I have come across- that examines a sexual topic on the internet was a very recent cross-sectional survey on cyber sexual harassment. The survey focused on female university students in the Beni Suef governorate. The survey used an offline self-reporting questionnaire and concluded that “Female subjects were highly vulnerable to cyber sexual harassment, which was shockingly prevalent” in the study (Arafa, et al, 2018:61). The study focused on online sexual harassment as a type of violence against women. It only included the female point of view and tackled the issue from a gendered perspective with no regard to the hegemonic sexual culture or values that govern our sexual attitudes and interactions or even the effect of internet on the sexual behavior.

In addition, even thought the academic work on online sexuality was almost absent, other academic work on offline sexuality in Egypt was also very limited. And since I am willing to study the processes of cultural production in the online space- that are linked to the offline space-, it would be beneficial to present some of the most important studies that tackle various sexual issues in the offline Egypt, in order to position my thesis about internet sexuality within the larger context of sexuality studies in Egypt.
Sexuality Studies in Offline Egypt

Most of the studies I have reviewed have given abundant attention to sexual harassment, while other limited sexual issues were mostly studied from a medical perspective.

Medical Anthropology studies had the lion’s share of the literature, with some work focused on sexually transmitted diseases (Abdel–Tawab, 2016; T.T., 2014). Abdel-Tawab and T.T. in both studies on STIs (Sexually Transmitted Infections), especially HIV, shed a light on the lack of academic attention and sufficient statistics on STIs in Egypt due to the stigmatization and criminalization of many sexual acts. Other studies that focused on female genital mutilation (FGM) concluded that it was a fundamental cause of at least two types of Female Sexual Dysfunction (Sahar A. Ismail, 2017). On a different note, studies on Male Sexual Dysfunction usually focused on its relation to masculinity and fertility and in many cases the research was conducted from the female point of view about her husband sexual performance. For instance, Inhorn in her article, “Sexuality, Masculinity, and Infertility in Egypt” (2002: 343), explores male sexual dysfunction as both a cause and consequence of infertility in Egypt. She attributes the reluctance of impotent men to seek medical treatment to the hegemonic masculine culture of ‘don’t ask, don’t tell policy” among her subjects. She also argues that medical advice given to patients to treat infertility often collide with the hegemonic culture that prohibits and judges women who are sexually enlightened or proactive (Inhorn, 2002). Although Inhorn’s study was on male’s sexuality, all of her subjects were females.

Fewer studies addressed sexual activities from a socio-psychological perspective. One of these studies explored masturbation prevalence among medical students in Tanta University. The study reported high prevalence among the study sample, and was often associated with feelings of guilt, discomfort and body weakness (Kabbash, et al., 2017).

Another study that explores the relation between culture and a common medical corrective procedure among sexually active single women focused on the relationship between hymenoplasty and extramarital and paramarital sexuality in Egypt. Wynn in his study “Like A Virgin: Hymenoplasty and Secret Marriage” explores how the hegemonic culture stresses the importance of the social visibility of female sexual status. Wynn exposed how females who secretly engage in a customary “‘urfi” marriage seek hymenoplasty to disguise their premarital sexual activity although religious jurisprudence asserts that “that women’s sexual history and moral status are the concern of God, not
kin”, he explores how such religious opinions goes against the dominant social culture which advocates female sexuality as a social, -but not a private- matter (Wynn, 2016).

In my opinion, there are some important remarks that can be discussed based on this review. First, most of these sexually relevant studies focused on a limited number of Egyptian governorates; mainly Cairo, Alexandria and few upper governorates. Thus conducting my research in the online space might enhance my chance to reach people from a broader geographic scope. Second, all of the studies indicate that the hegemonic sex culture in Egypt is governed by specific gendered and sexual values that deserve serious academic attention. Thus, it is important to compare between the offline findings and online findings of the thesis in the online space. Third, medical and sociological studies refer to the dire need for a more accepting and less judgmental sexual culture that enables stigmatized individuals -such as HIV patients- or sexually dysfunctioned individuals to seek medical and psychological help without fear (Matarelli, 2013). In that respect I aim to look at how this- social stigma- might be reflected in their online interactions. Fourth, some of the studies highlighted the duality between our sexual needs and actions (like masturbation, secret marriages, hymenoplasty, etc…) and the regulatory powers of religion, culture and society. It sheds a light on how modern Egyptian society has become schizophrenic for “it is preoccupied inwardly with sex, though it outwardly behaves as if sex does not exist” as Sharabi argues- as cited by Fernea (2010: 145). This opinion offers a starting point for investigating the validity of this claim in the online space. Fifth, most of the studies reviewed only included women’s voices, experiences and emotions while men’s voices were either excluded or avoided due to the sensitivity of the topic, while I am willing to fundamentally include mens’ voices in my thesis. Sixth and last, it is apparent how sexuality in general and online sexuality specifically are understudied in Egypt.

Complementary to my last point is the publishing of two important revolutionary books, which addressed many overlooked and understudied sexual activities in offline Egypt. The two books were written by female writers and mostly documented women’s sexual voices and experiences. The first book is “Sex and the Citadel” by Shereen El-Feki who exposes the contradictions that dwell in our sexual behaviors, starting from engaging in secret ‘’urfi’ marriage (which is an officially unregistered type of marriage that usually takes place secretly without family knoweldge) (Telum, 2016) and temporary or “mut’a” marriage (“which is a short-term marriage between a man and a woman that does not come
with a long-term commitment and may have an explicit, pre-established timeline or endpoint” (Turnbull & Badran, 2017:1) to where poverty and religion intersect with our sexuality. She examines how our sexual values are practiced in light of our religious and cultural traditions as well as the economic and political situation. She tackles issues of masturbation, assisted reproduction, sex selling, sexual violence against wives, sexual rituals between married couples, LGBT struggle in Egypt, etc… but mostly from women’s points of view, the task which was easier given that the writer is a woman herself. Her ethnographic work exposes how women are controlled by systems of taboos and prejudice (El-Feki, 2013). In my thesis I attempt to investigate many of these topics in my online observations, mainly looking at how our sexual values and practices are reflecting as well as shaped and reshaped by religious, legal and cultural powers.

Along the same lines, the second book, by Mona Eltahawy, “Headscarves and Hymens: Why the Middle East needs a Sexual Revolution”, focuses on six main areas of women’s lives in Egypt, Yemen and Saudi Arabia. She discusses issues of hijab (head covering), sexual harassment, marital rape, FGM and domestic violence in Egypt. In her opinion, women are hated and repressed by men, where hijab and controlling women’s sexuality are two main examples of her argument. She attributes such phenomena to the mix of Wahabi intrepretation of Islam and hegemonic masculine culture (El-Tahawy, 2015).

I tried to cover many of the sexual studies in offline Egypt, since they tackle many issues that will crosscut with cultural topics tackled in my thesis. The literature showed how much sexuality is shaped by culture and practiced within a discourse. Using this as a beneficial background, the validity of this statement is to be investigated in the online space in my thesis.

However, as important as positioning my thesis within the sexuality studies in Egypt, it would also be beneficial to position my topic within online sexuality studies globally.

**Online Sexuality Studies Globally:**
Unlike in Egypt, online sexuality has been extensively studied in other parts of the world especially the USA and the UK as well as other Western countries such as Sweden, Australia, New Zealand and Asian countries like China.

Research on the topic started in the early 1990s to study aspects of masturbation, child pornography, effects of pornography on relationships, online sexual identities, internet sex addiction, internet infidelity, sex education, sex culture and online sex work (Griffin-Shelley, 2010). The vast majority of the studies were psychological and sociological. Other studies also expanded to examine the effects of internet usage on our lives and personal wellbeing. These studies focused on “identities and gendered dynamics in digital space, cyber bullying, home-made pornography” (Brickell, 2012: 29).

Generally “academic studies have focused overwhelmingly on the possible negative effects of internet sexuality, while little research has been conducted on potential benefits” (M.Doring, 2009: 1089). In addition, limited research was devoted to studying sexual interaction or online sex culture and values in chat-rooms or social media. Therefore, in the following I will discuss the most relevant studies to my thesis topic.

Erni in his very useful chapter “Sex and Freedom in the Chat-Room of Hong Kong” offers a grounded based online ethnography to study sex interactions in a public popular chat room. He uses the chat room as a springboard for theorizing the conception of contemporary sexual values in Hong Kong and exploring men’s vernacular online sex culture. He argues that chat rooms serve as a very useful platform to investigate cultural contradictions through analyzing their textual and media interactions. While Lia and Mileham, in their study about marital infidelity in chat rooms, argue that anonymity facilitates engaging in sexual conversations without losing face in real life. It also enhances users’ ability to avoid psychological discomfort throughout their sexual interaction with strangers. They add that users in chat room have what she called a “behavioral rationalization” perceiving their online infidelity as “innocent and harmless” (Lia & Mileham, 2007). Both studies used textual interaction as a window into cultural understandings of sexuality, which I aim to apply to the Egyptian case in the thesis. However, limited studies focused on the relation between those online sexual interactions and power dynamics. In that respect, one of the most insightful work on the topic was done by Brickell in his study “Sexuality, Power and the Sociology of The Internet” where he criticizes the lack of attention given to studies of power dynamics on the internet.
Brickell looked at three ideal typical strands of power in relation to sexuality on the internet: the constitutive, the regulatory and the unequal. He argues that “internet sexuality involves a matrix of power, where power can marginalize people or provide them with means to organize resistance. He argues that “power constitutes the meanings we give to the sexual world, the ways we live those meanings on the internet life and the ways we put our identities” (Brickell, 2012:29). He adds that “power may reside in the individual’s ability to change their age, gender or sexual orientation in anonymous digital spaces” (2012:28) to create moments of pleasure, empowerment or equality. To him, the internet space is a site of subjectivity construction, where we produce and reproduce ourselves in symbolic ways, “in a forum that is anchored in the broader flow of social processes, inequalities and modes of regulation” (Brickell, 2012:40). Finally he proposes that internet sexuality manifests power through pleasure, possibility and freedom. Brickell’s study is considered the most relevant to thesis’s main question: how the internet is used as a freedom and resistance tool against offline regulatory powers.

In conclusion, the available reviewed literature asserted that anonymity has a remarkable effect on the intensity of online self expression and self disclosure as well as the nature of online interactions. It also proposed that online spaces – especially anonymous- provide a safe site for power to practice where people symbolically interact to give certain impressions without losing face in their offline lives. However, to my knowledge no study has comprehensively investigated the power dynamics that reside within the online sexual interactions in anonymous spaces in Egypt.

Consequently, the academic literature on internet sexuality is increasingly comprehensive in the West, limited in Asia and almost absent in the Arab world, especially Egypt. There are many gaps in the literature on the topic of sexuality in general and on internet sexuality specifically. Academics mainly focused on the reciprocal effect of the internet and sexuality, giving little attention to the virtual interactions and their power dynamics, although they are now part and parcel of our lives and have influenced social transformations in many societies.

After reviewing the literature, I believe my research is one of few sexually relevant studies and the first to tackle online sexual interactions in Egypt, also the first to
investigate online sexuality from a cultural and gendered perspective. Based on the previous discussions, my thesis aims to examine how the internet is used as a freedom and resistance tool against the regulatory powers of state, society and religion. It also explores how a parallel online sex culture is being produced, shaped and reshaped by these online interactions. I believe my thesis will contribute to an understudied field of knowledge in Egypt.

**Conceptual Framework:**

This thesis outlines a theoretical framework for the analysis of the sexual use of the internet as a space of freedom and resistance against the regulatory powers of state, religion and society. Post-structural, symbolic interactionism and internet communication theories will guide my analysis, engaging concepts of sexuality, subjectivity, performance, power and resistance.

As presented in the literature, users tend to behave differently in anonymous online spaces. In that respect, the dramaturgical theory of impression management espoused by Erving Goffman proposes that: “any interaction is viewed as a ‘performance’ shaped by environment and audience, constructed to provide others with impressions that are consonant with the desired goals of the actor” (1959:17). According to Goffman, “everyone is always and everywhere, consciously playing a role” (1959:19). He argues that it is in these roles that we know each other and know ourselves. Goffman believes that the individual performance tends to differ according to the person’s relationship with the “audience”. He explains that “in the presence of others, the individual’s performances tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society” (Goffman, 1973:35), while in the absence of this specified audience s/he can drop his/her mask and perform differently.

To further explain, in his impression management conceptualization, Goffman distinguishes between the “front” region and the “back” region behaviors. In the front region, the person performs before the front region audience; s/he puts on a mask where s/he tends to accentuate some aspects of his/her self/personality and suppresses other impressions that could be discredited by society. While in the “back” region, s/he drops this mask to let the suppressed impressions make an appearance in front of the back
region audience. Goffman used the telephone as an example of the back region where the individual enjoys some privacy, where “he can relax; drop his front, forgo speaking his lines and step out of character” (Goffman, 1973, p.112). In this respect, I argue that the internet, when used anonymously, can in some cases be regarded as the users’ back region: where individuals express and perform sexual roles- in front of the online audience- that do not necessarily comply with the rules or values of the state, religion and society. In addition, Goffman defines the back region as “the place where the performer can reliably expect that no member of the audience will intrude the passage from the front region to the back region” (Goffman, 1973: 113). In other words, it is the place where the back region’s performance will be hidden from the front region audience and kept closed to members of the back region (Goffman, 1973). In that respect, since this research focuses on online sexual interactions in specific online communities designed to conceal identities and requires no registration, I argue that users’ sexual confessions, activities and questions expressed and practiced online anonymously can always be hidden from the offline, front region audience. Thanks to the allure of anonymity, the offline (front region) performance can remain unaffected by the online (back region) performance. However, it would be inaccurate to assume that all online anonymous interactions belong necessarily to the back region. In this regard, I will also use Bullingham and Vasconcelos contribution, where they argue that users tend to recreate facets of their offline self online. They conceal aspects of the offline self while they embellish their online self (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013). In other words, some users in their interactions may choose to recreate parts of their offline self online while others might choose to only express parts of themselves in the back region.

On a different note- as stated in previous discussions—, Michel Foucault draws on the idea of changing performance but in terms of power and repression. In the first volume of his book, “History of Sexuality”, he states that “sex is placed by power in a binary system of licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden” (Foucault, 1976:82). This binary system was resisted by the act of confession that not only contests the system but produces a different discourse. In this respect, Foucault argues that: “Discourse transmits and produces power, discourse can be an instrument and an effect of power, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (Foucault, 1976: 101). He further

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2 Sexuality and power in the literature review.
adds that resisting power is achieved by detaching itself from forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates presently (Foucault M, 1995). Thus, guided by Foucault’s framework I aim to explore how Egyptians might be using the internet to detach themselves from the hegemonic powers of the state to voice their own needs, desires and practice their sexuality freely. It is a process where an online, alternative sexual culture is produced as opposed to the hegemonic and heteronormative offline one.

Lastly, since I conduct my thesis in the online space, I use the Hyper Personal Model Theory (HPMT), which relates to Goffman’s theory of Impression Management but in the online space. According to the HPMT, Computer Mediated Communications (CMC) facilitates selective self presentation; where CMC senders “may construct messages that portray themselves in preferential ways, emphasizing desirable characteristics that invites preferential reactions” (Walther, 2011:461). The HPMT further explains that in text based communications “users capitalize on the ability to edit, delete, and rewrite messages to make them reflect intended effects before sending them” (Walther, 2011:461). Accordingly, “computer mediated communication may facilitate impressions and relationships online to the extent that it exceeds the desirability and intimacy that occur in parallel off-line interactions” (Walther, 2011:460).

To summarize, HPMT argues that online interaction is a type of social interaction. It also argues that anonymity may enable users to portray desirable facets of themselves to invite preferential reactions, and lastly anonymity can influence the level of self disclosure and intensity of intimacy between online users. This theory is important to explain the effect of the internet on sexual interactions in my thesis. It would also be of considerable importance to consider the effect of anonymity on the level of self disclosure and identity representation in my analysis.

In conclusion, this thesis uses Erving Goffman’s theory of impression management to help understand Egyptians’ sexual interactions on the internet and the meaning they make through these anonymous interactions. It is also guided by the Foucauldian theory of power and subjectivity and knowledge to guide the analysis of the power relations between the regulatory bodies and individuals in Egypt using the internet as a tool of resistance. Lastly, I will use the HPMT in my analysis of the effect of internet anonymity on these sexual interactions.
Methodology:

This research explores the use of internet as a space of freedom and resistance against the regulatory powers of state, religion and society through analyzing online sexual interactions. It also explores how an online, alternative sexual culture is being produced through these interactions. I observe sexual interactions and expressions in three online platforms. I will utilize an online ethnographic method, which is specifically designed to study online communities.

I chose to conduct my research in two main online communities: an online Egyptian Chat Room and two closed social media groups (will be referred to as Our Stories 1 and 2) for privacy concerns. First in the online Egyptian chat room, I utilized both the open-ended semi-structured interviews and both participant and non-participant observation. I conducted all interviews in private windows (one to one chat that is exclusive for the two users) after gaining the users’ electronic consent. I aimed to explore the meaning made by the interviewees’ sexual interactions and expressions in the room. I looked at the sexual topics they discussed in the public room, their sexual nicknames, and their sexual conversations with me while I continuously changed nicknames for a more comprehensive observation (because each nickname attracted different groups of people, for instance male nicknames attracted gay men, while female nicknames attracted straight men…etc). I examined how sexual dreams, fantasies and values are expressed, negotiated and shaped in the room. I observed the sexual terms they used and meanings they made. The interviews along with the electronic consents are copied on a personal laptop that no one has access to but the researcher.

Second in the two social media groups, I used non-participant observation as a regular member. For ethical concerns, I sent the groups’ administrators a private message to inform her that I was conducting a research that would involve participants’ stories. However, since all confessions were already anonymous and getting an informed consent from 170,000 members was an impossible mission, I made sure all confessions and quotations written by anonymous users were paraphrased to avoid source identification. All comments by identified accounts were paraphrased and summarized. Screenshots of observed confessions were collected to complement field notes without disclosing the commentators’ identities, confessions were copied without their label numbers or dates,
and groups’ names were altered. A copy of all confessions used in this research are kept on my personal laptop and secured by a personal password.

In both groups, I aimed to examine how they were used as freedom and resistance spaces. I looked at how women and men express their sexual problems, dreams and sins anonymously in the form of confessions and questions. I observed how the audience in both groups react to them. I also looked at how these two groups work as cultural production platforms where sexual values are widely expressed and discussed. I also analyzed media posts of sexual nature shared on the two groups to understand how both sexes perceive sexuality in light of the hegemonic censoring sexual discourse that predominates in the offline Egypt.

Case Selection and Field Work

I conducted open ended semi structured interviews with twenty-five users on the Egyptian chat room. All interviews were conducted after an informed consent procedure. Interviewees were randomly selected. Chats are initiated either by me or by any user in the room. On one hand, I chose users with sex relevant nicknames as a priority to understand why they chose to represent themselves in a sexual way, and non sexual nicknames were also contacted. On the other hand, male chat room users frequently initiated the conversation whenever I used a feminine nickname. Nonetheless, only chats with electronic consent will be discussed in the thesis.

My interviewees as well as other interlocutors’ age range was from 20-70 years old. However, interviewees in the chat room were only males, due to the scarcity and unresponsiveness of females in the room. In addition, males were easier to agree to participate in the research given that the chat room was male dominated and that I identified myself as a female researcher. Nonetheless, most of them thought I was just some "naughty" girl, as they called me, who was trying to find pleasure in a role-play mode. Many of the interviewees asked for an offline meeting or a voice communication via Skype or Yahoo away from chat room limitedness to ensure my female identity. Many promised to be completely cooperative in case of my agreement. Requesting my picture, number and other personal information was a common reaction to asking for their participation in an interview on sexuality. Most of them completed the interview with
expectations of a sexual reward (sexting, offline sexual encounter, sex-cam…) at the end, although I have never promised any. Many of them were disappointed to find out that my questions were exclusively for research purposes and that no further contact will be pursued.

Moreover, participant observation was utilized in casual chats. Different nicknames were used such as (The girl, Glamorous girl, Tough_guy, Merna…etc…) in order to attract all types of users for a rich and comprehensive experience of diverse participants. Observation lasted for more than 16 months. The average time for observing was about six hours per week.

Most users were in their thirties. The sample included people of different marital statuses (married, divorced, separated and never married) and different professional backgrounds, as reported to me (engineering, education, business, medicine…etc) which makes the data sufficiently diverse for the study.

**Research Limitations**

Due to the scarcity of data on sexuality in Egypt as well as the little academic research, I depended on newspapers and various online venues to acquire needed statistics and information about the Egyptian society. I believe they serve more as indicators of the current situation more than a reflection or a representation.

**Chapter Overview**

In chapter two, “Sex and Power in the Offline Egypt”, is influenced by the belief that the online and offline worlds are interlinked. I devote this chapter to position the online sexual interactions and expressions within the broader context of sexuality discourses in the “offline” Egypt. I examine how online interactions can be a reflection of the state’s forces of tradition, economics and religion. I explain how the state’s repressive and ideological apparatuses exercise power in order to produce mechanisms of taboos and censorship that decide how sexuality is practiced and expressed in the offline world. All of which, I propose, is directly linked to sexual activities that take place in the online world.

In chapter three “The Facets that Breathe Here: Sexuality in the online Egyptian chat room”, I move to the anonymous chat room to look at the meanings made by the exchange of views about sexual beliefs, identities and behaviors by male users. I examine
how they may be contributing to the construction of an alternative sexual culture as opposed to the hegemonic conceptions of sex in offline Egypt. I explore how masculinity and queer sexualities are expressed, practiced, shaped and reshaped in a country with strict censorship policies and suffocating economic circumstances. I explore how different users choose to represent themselves sexually. I look into their sexual stories, secrets, dreams, and thoughts to understand this side of our sexuality.

In chapter four, “Sex Expressions and Discussions on social media”, I move to two social media secret groups “Stories 1” and “Stories 2”. I aim to include the female voice, which was not represented in the previous chapter through looking at her confessions, online interactions and expressions in the first group. I look at how an Egyptian female as a subject of desire uses the group as a safe outlet or a space of freedom to voice her sexual problems, and concerns without losing ‘face’ in her offline life. I also look at how sexual beliefs and behaviors are discussed and negotiated in a female-dominated space and how they may be projecting a specific perception of masculinity and producing a distinctive sexual culture. While in the second group, I explore sexual confessions from the men’s perspective and how both sexes reacted to men’s confessions and what kinds of confessions are associated with women versus men.

In chapter five, “A beginning of an Exploration Journey”, I conclude the thesis to show how Egyptians as subjects of desire and through their OSS used the internet as a “safe” and free space against the regulatory power of the state, society, and religion. I will show how our sexuality is affected by gender, culture, and the internet. It will also include my recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 2

SEX AND POWER IN THE OFFLINE EGYPT

In this thesis, I look at how the internet is being used as a space of freedom and resistance against the regulatory powers of state, society and religion in the twenty first century Egypt. However, it is not possible to study acts of resistance or the meanings they make without understanding the power relations that produce them. Thus, this chapter will position the online sexual behaviors/communications within the broader context of sexuality discourse in the “offline” Egypt. I explain how the state’s repressive and ideological apparatuses exercise power to produce mechanisms of taboos and censorship that decide how sexuality is practiced and expressed in the offline world. All of which, I propose, is directly linked to sexual activities that take place in the online world.

Influenced by the belief that the online and offline worlds are not separate worlds, but interlinked and influence one another as Jurgenson proposes: “Our reality is both technological and organic, both digital and physical, all at once. We are not crossing in and out of separate digital and physical realities, ala The Matrix, but instead live in one reality, one that is augmented by atoms and bits” (Jurgenson, 2011). Understanding the socio-economic, legal and cultural dimensions of sexuality in the offline world is important in the analysis of sexual behaviors that take place online. How people choose to represent their sexual personas, fears, problems, dreams and desires online cannot be separated from the power forces that control and shape their sexual behaviors offline. As Foucault states in the first volume of “The History of Sexuality”:

Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or an obscure domain which knowledge tries to uncover, but as a great surface network in which the stimulations of bodies, the intensifications of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledge, the strengthening of controls and resistances are linked to one another in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge. (Foucault, 1976:102)

In this chapter I explore how sexuality in twenty first century Egypt is shaped by multiple apparatuses which act at all levels: the legal, societal, religious and educational levels to produce the current sex discourse which defines and guides how sexuality is expressed and practiced.
Sex and the state

In Egypt, the principles of Islamic religion (Shari’a) is the primary source of jurisdiction. In addition, laws are influenced by cultural values and beliefs (‘urf) that are often described as ‘conservative’, all of which put firm restrictions on sexuality expression and practice.

Since the 1952 revolution, media was subject to strict government censorship. All sexual audiovisual materials – including movies that contained sexually proactive scenes such as ‘ḥmām ālmālāṭly’ Or ‘The bathroom of Malatyly’, ‘ālmḏnbn’ or “The Guilty”, and “āby fwq ālšǧrh’ or My Dad is Above the Tree” - were banned from national television (Hameed, 2016). Nonetheless, the state partially lost its absolute control over media material after the growth of satellite channels in the early nineties, which broadcast less censored, highly sexualized media material through different private local and international channels (Y.Amin & Fikry, 2001).

However, the state still censors most other sexuality related practices. Nudity, partial nudity, obscenity, premarital sexual relations, perverse sexuality and prostitution are not just undesirable acts, but prohibited by a code of ethics and the Egyptian Law (Y.Amin & Fikry, 2001). Homosexuality, which is not explicitly criminalized under the law, is not tolerated. Homosexuals are not only perceived as deviants who are not allowed to express their sexual orientation but also as criminals who deserve punishment. Many homosexuals have been prosecuted and sentenced to prison under two laws: the 1950 anti-prostitution law and a 1961 law against “debauchery”. “The first highest-profile action taken against them was a raid in Cairo in 2001 on the famous Queen Boat, a gay-friendly club on the Nile, where 52 men were arrested” (ALMasry-Alyoum, 2017). Twenty-one of them were sentenced to three years in jail. Many other individual prosecution incidents have been going on since that time, with a noticeable increase in the recorded cases in the last few years. In May 2011, an Egyptian court sentenced two homosexuals to five years of prison with hard labor (Amr, 2013). Another court sentenced four Egyptian men to prison for practicing homosexuality in April 2014 (AFP, 2014). Moreover, the most recent incident was the mass arrest of 33 people after the appearance of a gay pride flag at “Mashrou’ Leila” music concert in September 2017, upon which they are facing charges of promoting sexual deviancy and debauchery (BBC, 2017).
Legal prosecution is not only a threat to prostitutes and homosexuals but also to public figures who dare to contest the repressive hegemonic discourse on sexuality. As an example, in November 2017, TV anchor “Doaa Salah”, who presents a social program on an Egyptian private channel, was charged with outraging public decency and had her program suspended for three months and faced three years in jail for speaking about single motherhood (Agerholm, 2017).

In light of this, it is apparent how “sex is placed by the state’s power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden” (Foucault, 1976, p.82) and how the state’s apparatuses adopts an approach that does not tolerate any type of “perverse sexuality”, an approach that confines heterosexual sex practice to the realm of marriage only. However, the path to marriage for many Egyptian youth is fraught with hurdles in the current socioeconomic situation, exacerbated after the decision to float the Egyptian pound in 2016, which affected the prices of gold, furniture and real estate along with other marriage costs (Osman, 2017). In addition to the high rate of unemployment, especially after the 2011 uprising (which negatively affected the two large employment sectors: tourism and investment), along with the poor wages of employed youth, all of which impeded the ability of youth to marry at a young age (Zein, 2015). According to the last census released by CAPMAS in 2017, there are 13.5 million unmarried youth in Egypt above 18 years old (CAPMAS, 2017).

However, while the inability to get married might impede the legitimate access to sex, Egypt reached its highest divorce rate in two decades in 2015 (ALmasryAl-Youm, 2016) while sex related issues are believed to be one of major reasons for divorce (Youm7, 2014).

In Egypt, unsettled sexual problems between married couples are common yet rarely discussed. Dr. Heba Kotb, leading sexologist in Egypt, “attributes 80% of divorce cases to sexual problems, she believes that married couples in most cases do not know how to deal sexually with their partners” (CNN, 2009). Moreover, they are often shy to talk about their sexual challenges until they exacerbate to the extent of divorce. She adds that “wives often get scared of opening up, for it might result in husbands suspecting their morality and honor” which leads to continuous sexual miscommunication and
disappointment (Sterns, 2007). In her opinion, sexual illiteracy is a serious problem that needs to be eliminated to save many marriages (Albawabnews, 2017).

Besides the cultural reasons, clinical problems are among the common reasons causing sexual disappointment in marriage: male and female sexual dysfunction, sexual rigidity, are examples that might lead to marriage breakup. The insufficient, available evidence suggests that erectile dysfunction (ED) is prevalent among Egyptian males, but is often understudied due to the sensitivity of the problem. The only two scientific papers on the subject reported that 64.6% of Egyptian males (from 35-70) years old suffer from ED (Egypt Independent, 2011). While the older paper reported 63.3% prevalence rate of ED among Egyptian males (K Z M Shaeer, 2003). Moreover, the aphrodisiac drug “Ereca”, which treats ED, was listed among the top five best selling drugs in Egypt as mentioned in the Intercontinental Marketing Services (IMS) Health report for 2017 (Tahrir News, 2017).

Likewise, female sexual dysfunction (FSD) and its subtypes (lack of libido, arousability and orgasm, pain disorders) are highly prevalent among Egyptian women (Ibrahim et al, 2013). The available studies reported statistics that range between 46% to 74% prevalence of studied samples. FSD is reported as a common problem that is directly related to the poor quality of sexual satisfaction, however, like MED, it is still under-investigated in Eastern societies (Atrash, et al, 2014).

The struggling sexual situation in Egypt can be attributed to the lack of sufficient sexual knowledge, which is a direct product of other powerful forces that interact to maintain and reproduce mechanisms of taboos and censorship. In other words, the legal and cultural restrictions on expressions and discussions of sexuality and their implications, as explained earlier, are congruous with the weak roles of the school system and family as formal and legitimate sources of information. As Foucault explains: “Repression has indeed been the fundamental link between power, knowledge and sexuality” (Foucault, 1976, p.5). Hence, in the following I examine how the institutions of family and education contribute to the current problematic sexual situation.

**Sexual and Reproductive Health Education in Egypt**

After the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development which stressed on the population’s, especially younger generations’, right to sexual health education in its Programme of Action” (UNFPA, 2017), the Egyptian government officials
stated that recommendations will be implemented within the framework of Islamic law. As a result, very limited sexual reproductive health (SRH) lessons were included in the public schools’ curriculum for senior grades. These lessons only cover a description of the structure and functions of the male and female genital systems along with a brief mention of reproduction. The only genital diseases discussed are puerperal sepsis (genital infection after delivery) and syphilis (Wahba & Fahmi, 2012). Nonetheless, teachers often avoid presenting these lessons; “they often ask pupils to read it at home or discuss it with their parents. If the lessons are given in class, the teachers usually do not allow questions or laughter. The information in those lessons is not tested in any examination” (Wahba & Fahmi, 2012, p.4).

Likewise, SRH curricula in international schools covers a few additional topics but fail to include many important aspects such as: interpersonal relationships, intimacy, body image, gender roles, the biological, socio-cultural, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of sexuality (Geel, 2012). Also important to note is that these international schools, due to their expensive tuition which may cost parents up to two million Egyptian pounds per child to graduate (Daly, 2017), are exclusively accessible to wealthy and sometimes middle class Egyptians who can afford such expenses.

Furthermore, the absence of sufficient formal SRH education is enhanced by cultural and familial restrictions. Egyptian parents not only restrict their children from getting any sexual education, but they also refrain from being their source of sexual information, influenced by traditional religious and conservative family values designed to keep children sexually illiterate and repressed, therefore, from their viewpoint, protected (Wahba & Fahmi, 2012).

Moreover, a special effort is exerted from the family to keep females sexually repressed. Sadly, despite the criminalization in the penal code, “Egypt, has the greatest number of women and girls who have experienced female genital mutilation (FGM), with 92.3% prevalence among ever married women and 87.2% prevalence among all women aged 15-49 in 2015” (European Health Interview Survey (EHIS), 2015, p.104). FGM is perceived as part of protecting women’s virginity based on misled beliefs that women are ‘oversexed’ and that FGM reduces their sexual appetites, thus preventing adultery and limiting women’s sex drive even after marriage (El-Awady, 2016). A vivid example of
this is the call of a parliament member for Egyptian women to agree to FGM to reduce their sexual libido to match with sexually weak men who are top aphrodisiacs consumers (RTNews, 2016). In Egypt, more males than females support the continuation of FGM because they “associate the act with higher social acceptance and more sexual satisfaction” (UNICEF, 2013:63). However, unsurprisingly, studies show that FGM is highly associated with female sexual dissatisfaction and reduced scores on the Female Sexual Function Index, (Ismail et al, 2017). A result that explains the high level of FSD prevalence mentioned previously.

Based on this, it is apparent that the many women in Egypt suffer from organized criminal acts that affect their psychological and physical wellbeing and unequivocally affect their perception of their bodies and perception of sexuality in general. Those sexually violent acts are performed based on distorted beliefs rooted in the hegemonic masculine culture that gives males the legitimate right to exercise power over women’s body, mobility, dress and behavior allegedly to keep them hygienic, chaste, safe and protected. However, women in Egypt are not safe. The Thomson Reuters Foundation report (Poll, 2017) classified Cairo as “the third most dangerous megacity for women in terms of sexual violence or their ability to live without facing the risk of rape, sexual attacks or harassment” (El-Faizy, 2017). Another survey released in 2013 by The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women on sexual harassment shows that 99.3% of Egyptian women are sexually harassed (ELMashad, 2015).

“Sex has been so repressed and demonized that it comes out in unhealthy expressions.” (Huerta, 2016)

The sexual situation in Egypt is very serious, the absence of needed sexual awareness in the current socioeconomic circumstances results in dysfunctional and dangerous sexual behaviors such as the ones presented above. Due to the weak roles of family and school system, Egyptians lack legitimate outlets to safely express, experience, and learn about their sexuality.

Hence, adolescents and curious individuals were left no choice other than seeking informal sources of sexual information regardless of their accuracy. Formerly, before the rise of the internet, they depended on many secretive sources to satisfy their sexual
curiosity. The top sources were media and peer discussions which used to be the main avenues for learning about sexuality. In addition, pornographic tapes and books which were secretly sold and borrowed in local shops and on the street constituted important sources of information (Khalafallah, 2017). This secretive journey of seeking sexual information was strongly expressed in a famous Egyptian movie titled, ‘A Cultural Tape’ or “Fylm Thāqāfy” produced in 2000, which portrays the persistent efforts of three young jobless Egyptians in finding a private place to watch a pornographic video tape which was secretly acquired. Though it was not the main message of the movie, it shows how scarce and inaccessible sexual material was at that time when the internet was just an elitist phenomenon, accessible to only 438,000 Egyptians out of 68 million (Interlivestats, 2017).

Almost two decades later in 2017, the internet became widely affordable and accessible to more than 37 million Egyptians (Stats, 2017) resulting in easier accessibility to all kinds of free sexual information and material. That resulted in Egypt ranked second worldwide with the highest share of adult websites. According to “Smiliarweb”, adult websites constitute 14% of the top 50 websites visited by Egyptian (Hussey, 2015).

In light of the previous discussions, in the next chapters I study the relationship between sexuality and the internet in Egypt. I explore how the internet is used for different sexual purposes: watching pornographic material, engaging in conversations of a sexual nature (sexting), arranging sexual encounters, sexual counseling and acquiring academic sexual information. I look at how these acts are a result of the weak institutions of the family, school and the state. I examine how, through such practices, Egyptians create their own spaces of freedom to speak the language of desire and create an alternative sexual discourse as opposed to the normative sex culture presented previously.

Given this background, I argue that the internet is being used as a space of freedom and resistance against the regulatory powers of religion, culture and politics, which try to enforce how sex is discussed, practiced and expressed.
The Rise of the Internet as a Tool of Resistance in Egypt

Since the 25th of January uprising, in which social media played a key role in its mobilization, more Egyptians started giving attention to the wider revolutionary uses of the internet. It started with the Khaled Said’s incident, an Egyptian young man who was beaten to death by the police. His case was widely publicized on a social media page created by politically active youth, who wanted to inform the public of the brutal incident upon which the calls for a revolution were triggered. To the government’s surprise as well as the general population’s, what happened online inevitably spilled onto the streets, “starting with a series of “Silent Stands” that culminated in a massive and historic sit in at Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo” (Vargas, 2012). The result was, an uprising that ousted a thirty year president, an uprising that was mobilized first on the “internet”.

In the meantime, the Egyptian government believes in the power of the internet. New security policies are currently applied to intimidate and stifle free political expression on social media networks. These policies include blocking free basic internet services to guarantee the government’s ability to conduct surveillance, along with other security measures that aim to ensure the regime’s survival (Reuters, 2016). Nonetheless, I argue that the internet is still used as a place of resistance and freedom culturally and sexually in anonymous platforms. I use the internet as a window into the secret sexual lives of my interlocutors through studying their sexual activities, communications and expressions. I look at the sexual identities presented, the themes and tones of their chats, the stories they share about their sexual lives, their fears, their desires and their fantasies as acts of resistance. Deliberately, this thesis will only focus on online platforms that do not require disclosing any personal information such as anonymous social media groups and chat rooms that do not require registering.

In this chapter, I tried to introduce briefly the most prominent issues related to discussing, practicing or expressing sexuality in Egypt in daily life outside of the internet. I believe understanding the cultural, legal and economic environment surrounding Egyptians’ sexuality in offline spaces is important for the analysis of their sexual activities in virtual space.

In the next chapters, I will try to answer the following questions: How do some Egyptians represent themselves sexually in anonymous online platforms? Which sexual
identities are presented online and how do they use the internet as a tool of freedom and resistance against the regulatory powers of state, religion and society? How does the internet influence our sexuality and how we do use it for sexual purposes? What do our sexual activities online tell us about who we are as subjects of desire? Moreover, how is an alternative, online sex culture produced as opposed to the normative sexual culture in Egypt?
CHAPTER 3

“THE FACETS THAT BREATHE HERE: SEXUALITY IN AN EGYPTIAN CHAT ROOM”

This chapter explores how an anonymous Egyptian chat room is used as a site of freedom and resistance against the regulatory powers of the state, society and religion. I look at the meanings made by the exchange of views about sexual beliefs, identities and behaviors and how they may be contributing to the construction of an alternative sexual culture as opposed to the hegemonic normative sexual culture in offline Egypt. I explore how gender (masculinities and femininities) and queer sexualities are expressed, practiced, shaped and reshaped online in a country with strict censorship policies and suffocating economic circumstances.

This chapter will be guided by the work of Foucault on sexuality to explain how sex is produced and practiced in relation to power dynamics in Egypt, how sex is practiced in light of competing cultures. I also utilize Erving Goffman Impression Management Theory, which draws on a theatrical metaphor to explain human behavior in social situations. Goffman argues that “everyone is always and everywhere, consciously playing a role” (Goffman, 1973: 35). According to him, individuals always ‘perform’ in order to project a desirable image of themselves. Their front stage and backstage performances differ according to the type of environment and audience present. Although Goffman’s work was based on face to face social interaction, it has been applied to internet mediated interactions (aka CMC). Hence, using his theory as a framework, individuals’ performance online will differ according to the type of the platform; they will probably behave differently in highly structured online platforms like e-mails which require formal communication and identity disclosure than less structured Internet Relay Chat (IRC) platforms that induce less formal social interactions.

Thus, I look at how users, who engage in sexual chats in an Egyptian Chat Room perform before an online audience to either recreate an edited version of themselves where only some aspects of their offline identities are revealed, or to adopt a persona that they wish to live up to in the real world. The online edited self is the “mask the users choose to wear”. It is not necessarily a new created self as Baptista suggests (as cited in
Bullingham and Vascencelos): but “can be thought of as a facet of a wider identity, joining the self in other offline contexts” (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013:2). In other words, my analysis is guided by the argument that "online social interactions are extensions of and not apart from the everyday, situated life worlds" (Vieta, 1999: ii). Thus, the “online environment could be seen as a stage with the offline life as the backstage, and users could be seen as “performers” who strongly invest in their online “costume” wishing to provoke the desired reactions from others” (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013: 3).

1. Setting the Stage

I logged in to the chat room website and clicked on the chat rooms icon. Chill out music played in the background, and a list of miscellaneous chat categories was shown. I chose the targeted chat room where I was directed to another page showing an introductory message that reads: “Welcome, meet and chat with other people that might share the same interests with you”.

I was not required to disclose any personal information or to sign up. I was only required to type a nickname to be granted access; I typed "Intellectual_F" and I was in. The screen was divided into three sections, public chat, people chatting and other chat rooms.

The public window was very active, it showed notifications of the new users joining and leaving the chat room:

"Submissive woman has just joined the chat room".

"Naughty guy has just joined the chat room".

“Bianca has quit (Bye Bye)”.

In the middle of the red and green notifications, users were greeting the new ones joining the room, making fun of some nicknames, inviting others to chat with them in private.

Users were also able to maintain multisided conversations in the middle of this busy window. Topics like politics, atheism were discussed publicly, daily incidents were shared. It looked like a virtual reception party where everyone is talking to and
welcoming everyone. Emojis were used to express their mood, laughing faces, astonished faces, etc... Between these lines, you read “Cyber sex, PM (Private Me)? “Anyone interested in a hot talk”? - “Any girl who wants to be in control PM ” sent from random users.

Notifications of punished users were also posted in the same window, those who were permanently or temporarily kicked out for breaking the rules (using an inappropriate nickname or insulting other users). Decisions were immediate and taken by room administrators without prior warning. Nicknames with sexual terms or innuendos were met with swift actions. Ban decisions are notified in the following manner: “Adick4u is banned for three days-inappropriate nickname” posted in red in the public window.

Recently in mid 2017, links from other websites have become non-sharable but they were not at the time of my observation. Using terms such as “sex” or “porn” are automatically censored by the system and replaced by the words “censor1” or “censor2”, etc... However, experienced users knew how to trick the system by using separated words such as “S ex” to avoid a new restricting procedure.

Users used English, Arabic and transliteration (typing Arabic words in English letters) to chat. The latter was the most common typing style among users. Communication in the chat room is text based; no pictures or videos are allowed.

2.0 The Screen as a Pleasure Vehicle

In this part, I provide a reading through how a specific sex culture built around the notion of “pleasure” is constructed through sex chat practices. I explore how sexual pleasure and power are linked in the act of confession, and how that might be reshaping our sexual values and behaviors and unmasking our understanding of masculinity.

“Pleasure is never quite as easy as it seems: the lure of the senses and the retreat into leisure always confronts the individual with their sense of themselves in the world, of what they value, of how they will be judged by others”. (Bending, 2017)

It was my first time online since I decided to make this room part of my thesis. I wanted my experience to be as natural as possible. I decided I would not initiate any
conversation but would reply to every message I get. (Nonetheless, I did initiate some interviews with intriguing nicknames). In seconds, the white and green screen was full of texts, buttons were continuously flashing to notify me of new chat requests. I tried to reply to as many messages as I could at the same time. Chats were initiated either with the two common questions: “Hi, Age, Sex, Location (ASL), please?” and “Hi, can we chat” or with daring sexualized sentences and questions:

- “Do you have a sexy body with nice big b***s’’?
- “Do you wanna talk about sex’’?
- “Can I get it in very slowly’’?
- “Do you want me to c*** all over your face’’?
- “Are you wearing your b** today’’?
- “What would you like to see if I opened my webcam’’?

After few minutes in the room, I was bombarded with lots of profane and graphic sexual sentences in different tones, different wordings, and in different languages. Sentences contained Egyptian sexual terms that are completely inappropriate to use publicly, such as: “N***” (a very graphic vernacular sexual expression of intercourse) and “F*sh*” which means violently spreading someone’s legs wide open and usually said to express violent sexual intercourse. And “B***b*” which means playing in someone’s gentiles or in some contexts, means humiliating him. They also used the vernacular synonyms for genital areas. In addition they used certain numbers to refer to different type of sexual practices; they used “a´srā” which is number 10 to refer to the masturbation of a man and “sb´ā w noṣ” to refer to female’s masturbation and “ne3mel wa7ed” which means ‘let us do one’ and means let us have sex. In short, such terms are usually used between sexual couples; but they are socially unaccepted to be used in everyday conversations among family members, colleagues or strangers. However, users were purposefully using such words in their initial sentences to filter their targets; so they can attract females who are daring enough to engage in an intense sexual experience. When I asked one of the respondents why did he send me “Do you want to l*ck my d***?’ without even saying hi, especially that my nickname was “Intellectual_F” which
did not carry any sexual connotation. He said: “you will only reply if you understood and liked what I wrote, I don’t waste my time saying hi and bla bla, I want to get girls wet, I want her to be open to explore what I can offer her and how I can please her, so shall we move to Skype”?

Seeking “pleasure” seemed to be the implicit target of most users in the room, but the path to it differed from one user to another. The lonely, the horny, the perverse, the bored, the imaginary, and the slave all came together in one space to make their own choices of how to reach a momentarily “pleasure” (either physical or psychological) possible. A process where a unique sex culture was produced through confessions, practices and exchange of views.

Many of the users kept sending their messages repeatedly to my unresponsive window in a persistent manner waiting for any sign of agreement. Sometimes I could not handle more than five conversations at one time, so by the time I move to new ones I find that the same sentence was sent to my window more than five or six times in a row which indicates how idle were some users. Also important to note that the chat room was male dominated, with minimal presence of females who were usually unresponsive or disguised in neutral or masculine nicknames. Thus, males in the room were competing to get the attention of any female who declared herself as such. They were very creative; they used sarcasm, storytelling, jokes, teasing questions to stimulate conversations. However, sexual role-play sentences were the most common:

- “I want to F*** you hard and rub my d*** against your p**** while I am looking in your eyes, what else do you want me to do?”

- “If you are at work, wearing a chemise that shows your cleavage, and there is this colleague who is closely looking, would you zip it up or keep it open to torture him?”

- “Can you imagine stepping in your bedroom to find two naked men waiting for you in your bed just to do whatever you desire to please you?”

There were no emotions in there, no ethical considerations, no limits, just an imminent search for pure “instant pleasure”. Most users welcomed all types of sex chat; sexting or engaging in a role-play mode or even talking about personal sexual experiences from real life: “Tell me how do you feel when your husband ru*s your p**** in your
sleep, etc…”? They were searching for anything that helped them masturbate and reach a moment of “pleasure”. “Please it is like a rock, relieve me”, “I am r***ing it hard now do you wanna see?” What happens in this chat room shows how the internet has unequivocally transformed the notions of sex, desire and “pleasure”. How sex and desire can exist in disembodiment; how fantasy is employed to compensate the absence of human touch and feelings. How fantasy replaced the warmth of bodies with imaginary erotic scenes. What has been taking place in the room has transformed desire from a unitary act; where two bodies react and unite to produce a feeling of satisfaction into a solitary act where the second body is replaced with a keyboard and a screen; a screen that is used as a pleasure vehicle. This urges me to think of how the constant availability of instant communication affected our perception of sex and its practices; sex has become like many things in the digital age ‘easy, instant and on demand’ (Panek, 2012). On the internet, sexual pleasure is just one click away, either by talking about, doing or watching it.

2.1 Pornography: Where Fantasy and Reality Collide

One of the many ways users sought their sexual pleasure online was through watching pornography. Users sometimes circulated pornographic links, before the website policy banned them in 2017, to steam the chat. They sometimes sent a description of the watched material at the same time of the chat. “I am now watching him undress her…” “Would you like me to gently massage your….etc….?” According to the interview data, 96% of respondents reported watching pornographic material on the internet; a few of them said they are porn addicts. The majority of respondents preferred watching hardcore sex followed by lesbian and gay sex, and BDSM respectively. While threesome and group sex were appealing only to few of them (See Fig 2). None of them said they were interested in soft core pornography (a type of pornographic material with less explicit imagery but involves emotions), unlike the hard-core pornography, which explicitly depicts sexual acts like penetration, ejaculation and might involve acts of aggression and harshness (Williams, 1989).

3 BDSM stands for Bondage, Discipline, Sadism and Masochism
Users employed pornography to complement their sexual experiences online. For many of them, it was linked to openness and readiness to explore various ways of having fun. Pornography, like most of their sexual activities online, was watched in private, behind their partners’ and families back: “I watch it when my children and wife sleep, I am afraid my wife will scandalize me if she knew”.

Despite the clear religious prohibition and societal stigma, watching pornography was a very common practice among users, who were themselves divided on the issue. Proponents said it helped them get the needed knowledge before their first sexual encounter, helped them get sexually stimulated when they could not do so naturally and provided them with new ideas to enhance their offline sexual experience. “My wife is fat and conservative, throughout my eight year marriage she only agreed on one position, I watch porn then everything becomes possible, everything is easy, a guaranteed pleasure and a marriage saved, why wouldn’t I keep watching then?” Single people said it is their only way to release their sexual energy when all other doors are closed. While opponents said, it is the primary reason they are constantly ‘horny’:

“No woman is now enough, I want to touch every girl on the street” said Zakaria. In addition, they linked how watching pornography for long lengths of time lowered their level of sexual satisfaction with their wives.

“It makes you want to search for unrealistic things, like the perfect body, the perfect performance, the perfect face, the perfect experience all together, but in reality it is impossible, what you get is always incomplete”.

Another respondent believed that porn objectifies people:
“It makes you forget that you have emotions and feelings, you only think of desire and lust, too much porn makes you a sexual object yourself and everyone around is not human, but a tool for your pleasure”.

Nonetheless, such awareness did not stop even the opponents from watching it. One respondent told me I was stupid to ask why porn is so appealing to many of them: “People do harmful things for their pleasure all the time, you smoke, you eat junk food, you drink, you sleep late and you watch porn”.

On a different note, studies show that pornography can provoke intimate extradyadic4 behavior, (Gwinn et al, 2013) but most users did not agree that watching pornography is considered cheating or might lead to it, rather they described it as a mere unhealthy habit: In addition, most of them did not agree that engaging in a sexual chat online is infidelity. "I am a newlywed, my wife got pregnant and her doctor said we cannot possibly have sex until her condition is stable. What should I do? I have a strong urge to do it with any female I meet, I better talk, watch and do it here and not do it in reality; it is not cheating anyway.”

78% of the married respondents reported cheating on their wives, 68% said they engage in sexual relations in both the offline and online world and 11% said they do it online only. Users opened up about their extramarital and sometimes weird relationships, with honesty and in many times pride. A phenomenon well explained by the (Hyper Personality Model Theory (HPMT)), which suggests that people are ready to engage in high levels of self disclosure conversations in anonymous CMC. Thus, users were comfortable showing no guilt in their words and needed not to mention justification for their acts. Moreover, users aggressively refused talking about religion or their wives’ probable reactions if they figured out about their extramarital relations. Many of them talked about their insatiable desire as a manly inherent characteristic. For them, a strong sexual libido was linked to masculine qualities which entitles pardoning their illegitimate sexual actions: “It is natural in men, not all women love sex, they are pussies, but all men love sex more than anything else, I love my wife and she is good in bed but every women has a different taste, different touch, the color of her skin, the way she orgasms, they cannot be equal. I love sex and I cannot stop wanting more and more”.

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4 Extradyadic behavior refers to a wide range of behaviors occurring outside of a committed relationship, especially vaginal sex occurring outside of a marital relationship.
Even those who felt guilty used their strong desire as a sufficient excuse for their affairs: "I am afraid my wife will find out one day, she will leave me and I do not want that, but I can't stop. I find my friend very attractive and I cannot help not sleeping with her, I feel guilty a lot but I do not want to stop. It is better for her if I cheat, I treat her better when I am full of guilt and I do not enjoy sex with my wife anyway." Both respondents said they would divorce their wives if they cheated on them. "I am a man, no matter what I do I do not have honor, but my wife is my honor."

The commonality of cheating stories in the room along with the intolerance regarding wife’s cheating is a production of an unfair reality and a reflection of one of the most unjust criminal laws in Egypt (which is reflected in an unjust culture). Marriage in Islam and Christianity is a holy sacred bond between the couple. Any sexual encounter outside this context is prohibited religiously, imposing the same punishment on men and women equally (Noor, 2010). However, culturally, adultery is only tolerated if committed by a man. The man is usually excused for his deed if unmarried, and the blame falls on his wife’s negligence or failing to satisfy his needs if he is married. Married women who ask for divorce or file ‘Khula’(one of the divorce schemes through which a wife can divorce her husband by returning the dowry and renouncing all her financial rights) are seen culturally as the one breaking up the family regardless of the reasons, including cheating. Women are often encouraged to forgive and excuse her husband’s ‘common’ sexual sins/weaknesses to save the marriage. However, women are not treated with the same kindness if committed adultery, they get cursed, battered, scandalized and sometimes killed by male family members (Khafagy, 2005).

Likewise, legally there are clear discriminatory articles in the Egyptian penal code: "Egyptian law imposes harsher penalties for women committing adultery. A wife is penalized for two years, whereas a husband is penalized for no more than six months. For adultery, the evidentiary standards are different for women and men. While a wife is penalized for committing adultery anywhere, a husband must do so in the marital home in order for such an act to be considered adulterous. The murder of a wife (but not a husband) in the act of committing adultery is categorized as an extenuating circumstance, thereby commuting the crime of murder to the level of a misdemeanor" (Human Rights Watch, 2004).
The analysis will use the previous discussion to contextualize the answers in order to understand how a parallel sex culture is produced and affected by the different cultural discourses of masculinities presented in the room. Through which I discuss how chat themes and practices illustrate how males’ sexual desires and gender relations within the marital realm contribute to such culture. Husbands in the room prioritized their physical pleasures regardless of the ethical and religious laws they were violating. They were following their desires accompanied by a cultural shield that protects their right to forgiveness. While doing so they were subconsciously reshaping the sexual culture in Egypt, contesting fixed boundaries and creating new sexual needs and stigmas as will be explained further.

2.2. The Emergence of Sexual Performance as a “Need”

Mohsen

Mohsen is a 38-year young man who has been married for five years to a woman he loved. Mohsen chose a nickname that described him as a “good man” who was searching for love. He is a regular guest in the room seeking his usual pleasure through sex chat and pornography. Mohsen’s language was very daring; however, he was one of few who used words of love and passion in his requests. When I asked him about the reason why he cheats on his wife he said:

“She is cold, very cold, like a dead body, she does it as a duty, a religious duty because she can’t say no, but I still do not enjoy her as long as she does not enjoy herself, I want real pleasure, that is something she can’t offer”

Me: “Have you tried to talk to her?”

Mohsen: “Many times, but nothing changes, it is a performance thing, call it a talent, a skill she has to learn. But now in this world where sex is everywhere she cannot just wait for me to do everything while she is passive, that is why I come here, I search for a substitute every day, the girl who can enjoy fantasy, love and sex.”

Me: ...
Mohsen: “I am not alone, it is a human thing, to seek pleasure, and pleasure is not something you get in marriage, at least not in Egypt, not among anyone I know, but here you can find anything you want, here I find a few girls who are open enough to explore what sex means, they are sometimes married who do not find what they need with their husbands. But I know how to pamper and please them”.

Mohsen did not stop asking me to relax and let myself try his charm. He kept asking me over and over again to empathize with his desire and to have mercy on him. For two long hours, Mohsen was dropping his sentences filled with random sexual questions and sentences to stimulate my curiosity. He said my marriage was a privilege, I could do whatever I wanted and nobody will know. He also said that he will prove my husband was not as strong as he is after we meet. Like Mohsen, seeking sex chats and offline sex encounters because of an alleged unsatisfactory sexual life in marriage was very common among interviewees. The wife’s coldness and conservative attitudes were frequently mentioned in their answers:

“I love crazy acts but my wife is conservative, she wouldn’t agree to watch porn with me, she doesn’t do anal, not even a Blow Job (bj)! Here I find a lot of women who accept me as I am, who are willing to enjoy pleasurable sex”. Said Ahmed, a 36-year old man, who introduced himself as a very successful engineer who is willing to please me, if I am a woman who thinks she deserves fun.

Ahmed: “You know what I always fantasize about? Sharing my wife! Yes sharing my wife with another man, that would turn me on like a fire, imagine how exciting is this? But of course I cannot even dare to ask her”.

Me: “But don’t you feel a little jealous that somebody else will be touching your wife?”

Ahmed: “It is about having fun, I do not think this way, didn’t even cross my mind, it is something new, we always need something new to excite us”.

Me: “which type of porn do you watch?”

Ahmed: “I watch everything but mostly hardcore and group sex”
Me: “and how does it make you feel at the end of the day, when you are done watching porn and having sex with women other than your wife, when you are back in your bed next to her, do not you feel guilty?”

Ahmed: “I feel great, refreshed, but the desire is insatiable, it does not go away, porn makes me want to touch all ladies on the street, so I give my wife what she wants and here I get what I want, that is better for all parties”.

It was surprising for me as an Egyptian woman to find men who no longer act according to the ethics and values I was raised to respect and abide by. How could those men blindly follow their lust and forget about faithfulness, honesty and the sacred bond in marriage? How much is this true and how many like them are out there in real life, would it be a cousin? A colleague maybe? Then I remembered what this research is all about; exploring our differences, even differences we could not imagine would exist. So I tried to minimize my reactions and abstain from judging any of my interviewees, no matter how shocking their thoughts and activities were to me. Rather, I tried to stimulate them to critically think like me for a while through few guided questions. I asked if they think pornography is one of the reasons they were no longer satisfied with their wives, especially that most of them were interested in hard-core material. However, most of the interviewees did not make any correlation between the exposure to pornography and the common sexual disappointment they encounter in their marriages. Except for Fawaz a 45 year old university lecturer and a managerial trainer, as he introduced himself, who believed pornography in reaction with other pervasive sexual problems changed how people think and practice sex:

“Porn makes you aspire an ideal partner, a partner that doesn’t exist, that is why nobody will ever be enough. That is why our perception of sex has been reshaped forever. Egyptian men will always be dissatisfied with their wives because women in Egypt are cold; they are brought up to be scared of their bodies, of men and of making a mistake that will ruin their future. We call girls a match, that is how we treat them, like objects that cannot be weak, and who do not deserve forgiveness. In return, women are raised to be receivers not doers, they learn to follow and never lead, even when decisions are made about their lives, they do not take part in the process. That is why men are responsible for this crime. We are responsible for this. So what did this culture produce but a woman that
does not know how to enjoy her body, to give pleasure and take part in it? And in the age of porn, men and women became in crisis, men have high expectations and women have little abilities and courage to try, it is a lose- lose situation.”

Fawaz, one of the most perceptive participants in the room, did not mind to share his personal e-mail with me, although he honestly told me about how he frequently cheats on his wife with his “virgin” girlfriend, he had his reasons and he welcomed to share them with me:

“Some sex actions cannot be done in real life, at least not with your wife because you respect her, and but everything can be done online and with prostitutes, my wife never agreed to do oral sex or BDSM and I respect that. But I am human; I am not perfect and do not aspire to be, but I love sex. Having a girlfriend solved it all, she is a virgin, we do not do intercourse for her own protection, we just make out, masturbate together. Sometimes she brings another friend over and we have group sex.”

Fawaz was comfortable speaking about his sexual experiences; he said he respects science because he is a scientist, so he wanted to give me honest answers. Fawaz is a porn addict as he reported, he loves watching hardcore and BDSM sex although as presented earlier he had his philosophy regarding the serious consequences of pornography on minds and relations.

Apparently, Mohsen, Ahmed and Fawaz and many others in the room divided sex into two categories, sex with their wives versus sex for pleasure. They emphasized the importance of a specific “performance” as a prerequisite for “pleasurable sex”. For them, the company of a woman and having a legitimate path to sex are no longer guaranteed paths to pleasure, rather, there seems to be an emergence of a particular “feminine performance” as a sexual need. A performance that is flexible enough to include different and sometimes “perverse” desires and acts. According to their answers, a sexually perfect wife is one who engages in pornography watching, who strips like a prostitute, who can split her legs wide open to insert objects inside in the presence of a husband to prove she enjoys her body, a wife who enjoys the taste of the semen and who enjoys a third and fourth partner maybe. She is a woman who is open to try anything and everything for the sake of pleasure without fear, without pain, without embarrassment and without emotions.
Based on this, it is clear how non-relational sex, sex for pleasure and emotionally detached sex were the most presented ideas by my interviewees as contemporary and common. These new needs constitute a new sexual culture that women are expected to meet and respond to. In the age of pornography, many of these desires/needs were communicated through sexually explicit material, until they became expectations then needs, needs that many women still find unacceptable and unnatural. In that respect, Williams argues that: “Pornography is a discourse by men for men, it is a visual confession of bodily pleasures and sexual imagination of men” (Williams, 1989: 229). This discourse of men for men has contributed to the construction of this contemporary culture that subsumes perverse needs and acts. For instance, oral sex and external ejaculation over the female’s body were acts first introduced in hardcore pornography to overcome the limits of camera visibility. Consequently, a visual representation of sexual pleasure that is detached from the bodies was introduced because it was impossible for the viewer to see what was actually being penetrated (Williams, 1989). That turned pornography from a documentation of the normal sexual encounter into an explicit show of both sexes’ genitals, which consequently introduced new ways of visual stimulation like oral sex to complement the viewer sexual stimulation. In other words, pornography has introduced a type of sex that “swerved away from the direct forms of natural genital engagement of the tactile sexual connection” (Williams, 1989: 101) to normalize visual and solitary pleasure. All of which I believe has influenced our sexual culture, expectations, needs and acts given that Egypt is ranked second worldwide with the highest share of adult websites, which constitute 14% of the top 50 websites visited by Egyptians (Hussey, 2015).

On a different note, according to the interviews data, not only do husbands find their wives’ sexual performances insufficient for a pleasurable sexual experience, but they also find it unacceptable to practice specific needs with them. To further explain, male users in the room were allegedly compensating sexual pleasures that were not attainable with their wives. However, a few of them believed such pleasures cannot be done within marriage realm even if their wives agree:

“I come here to do whatever I want with a naughty girl, a prostitute, whatever I can get, but my wife is respectable. She is not a bitch. I cannot ask her to do any of these
perverse acts, and even if she agreed, I will divorce her. I will question her morality and will disrespect her”.

The wife’s sexual performance that meets husband’s ‘weird’ needs is sometimes not sufficient to achieve sexual intimacy and the anticipated pleasure. Because if she meets his sexual needs, she loses a husband and breaks up a marriage, and if she does not, she has to expect that he will pursue satisfaction elsewhere. Sigmund Freud was one of the first psychologists to examine the Madonna/whore dichotomy, which I believe is applicable here. According to Freud, men divide women into two archetypes: the "virginal" figure of the Madonna and the sexually enticing archetype of the "whore". The first is pure and respected yet not desired while the second is licentious and sexually desired (Berry, 2012). In both Christianity and Islam, Mary is presented as the figure of purity: In Islam Mary the “virgin” has always been described as pure “O Mary! Lo! Allah has chosen you and made you pure, and has preferred you above (all) the women of the world (of her times) (Qurān, 3:43). While in Christianity, the perception of Mary as “the Queen of Heaven was achieved by isolating Mary from her sexuality” (Greer, 2016:12). In both religions, virginity and abstinence from sex is linked to purity. Nuns are celebrated as spiritual role models in Christianity. While in Islam, sexual intercourse is seen as a major impurity (Janabah) that requires a ceremonial bath afterwards (Alsheha, 2001). Such regulating conceptions may have contributed to the dichotomy that falsely associates sex with dirt and shame. Thus, men in the sample who were seeking their sexual “perverse” pleasures outside their households were not necessarily unable to practice them within marriage realm, rather they were victims of the same dichotomy that debases sex by associating it with disrespect and impurity. A conception that led them to separate their wives from pleasurable sexuality. To them, sexuality in the household was limited to procreation while sexual pleasure was associated with licentiousness. However, males according to the interview data, believe only they have the right to monopolize enjoying such pleasures outside marriage (because they are men with needs) while their wives are expected to abstain from such acts.

Based on the previous discussion, it seems that a distinctive sex culture that encompasses different sexual values is produced by such contradicting discourses of masculinity manifested in chat room discussions and practices. Males in the chat room safely renounced important, sometimes positive, aspects of their masculinity in pursuit of
their pleasures such as sexual jealousy but stressed other unjust ones such as the right to enjoy extramarital sexual relations. It is apparent how internet anonymity provides a safe space for such men to resist a predefined mode of masculinity by clearly expressing their sexual values and desires.

To illustrate, in Egypt, male family members are in charge of controlling and monitoring women’s sexuality. Even so called “honor” crimes may take place over just suspicions of adultery (Khafagy, 2005), yet in this chat room, sharing someone’s wife with another man is introduced as a “fun” idea. Conceptions of masculinity is changing in this room; a husband is no longer perceived as the patriarch, but an equal partner who no longer carries the responsibility for his wife’s honor or one who feels jealous. In contrast, new values are stressed in pursuit of pleasurable sex; high libido is perceived as a naturally masculine instinct, preserving a girl friend’s virginity - who is engaged in a sexual encounter - is perceived as a masculine noble gesture, not exposing a girl’s identity after a sexual encounter is manly, etc... However, all those values are in harmony with perceiving pleasurable sex as something degrading and dirty if practiced with a wife within the realm of marriage but tolerable if practiced by a man in an extramarital affair.

Such normalization of many sexual values and sexual practices produces a new sex culture that promotes “pleasure as the cornerstone of sex”. A pleasure that is intense and independent enough to drop ethics, morals, and personal circumstances from its consideration. A pleasure that detaches the sphere of sexuality from what Foucault calls “the system of alliance”; where sexuality is independent from marital ties and not confined to its procreational role, but promoted in terms of autonomous desire, pleasure and function. A process that results in the creation of new personages “selves” related to sex such as the perverse husband, the bisexual, the incest lover, etc... (Foucault, 1976).

Users in this chat room concealed their offline selves, which are guided by normative regulated expectations, to freely present their lusty, undisciplined self. A self that is not necessarily driven by unmet needs but by insatiable desire for novel types of pleasure. It is through this lusty self that users were engaging in a revolt: a revolt against the expectations of what constitutes masculinity, the laws of society and religion, as well as the laws of the “normal” and the virtuous. As Foucault states, “in the domain of pleasures, virtue was seen as a relationship of domination, a relation of mastery”
Users, using the anonymity of the chat room, sought freedom and independence from the need to dominate or master one’s desires and pleasures, the need to discipline the self or abide by society’s rules or expectations of the normal, the legitimate and the normative. They practiced what Foucault called “immoderation” which is “seeking sensual pleasures in the gratification of unnatural desires” (Foucault, 1990: 57). Users projected their disobedient self, a lusty self that does not regard satisfying the heteronormative sexual natural needs an internal limit. A self that gave in to desire and stood against society. As Foucault argues, “ethical conduct in matters of pleasure was contingent on a battle for power”. It is the duplicate battle of power against the self on one hand and the society on the other hand. In the following, I document their acts of resistance, of revolution. I explore how users explore themselves as subjects of desire independently, where virtue, discipline and laws are no longer the masters, only desire and pleasure are.

2.3 Pleasure Through Resistance:

Resistance might not have been possible for any of the users without the luxury of anonymity, which served as protection to users who needed to drop their masks, or wanted to adopt an enhanced version of themselves, or even adopt a new imaginary persona. On one hand, users used what Bullingham called “online embellishment of the self”; the choices of nicknames such as “Dr. handsome”, “King-of-power”, “Hot_guy”, “irresistible” and many others reflected better, hotter, and stronger versions of themselves. They were carefully chosen to provoke certain reactions from other users in the room. On the other hand, the allure of anonymity enabled other “queer” or users of “perverse” desires to freely express their true orientation safely; nicknames such as: “Bihusband”, “Ilovemysis”, “wifeswap”, “Gayincairo”, “dog4mistress”, etc… were in fact acts of “confession”, acts of empowerment, and acts of resistance. As Foucault argues: “Silence and secrecy are a shelter of power anchoring its prohibition but they also loosen their holds and provide for obscure areas of tolerance” (Foucault, 1976: 101). Gays, bisexuals, BDSM practitioners, and other queer identities used this chat room to find their own choice of “pleasure” but above all, to find the safety, acceptance and tolerance they long for in their offline lives. The chat room was used as a site of power, freedom and resistance; resistance that in many cases came in the form of confessions:
“I am married, but I have never loved women, and never wanted them to like me. I have a daughter but that is only a shield so people would not know my truth. I am gay, I have always been one since I was a little kid at school with chubby cheeks and protruding breasts. Everyone used to make fun of me and say I was not man enough, but I never felt insulted because I never wanted to be. All I want is to be in the arms of a man, I want to please him and feel the warmth of his company. I can never tell anyone I know about this, but I am telling you and it makes me relieved that even if you judged me I would not know. I travel to Europe every now and then and then to attend gay clubs and come back to my country putting on the mask of a straight husband, pathetic isn’t it?” According to Qusay, one of the gay men I met many times in the room, he came online just to talk about his problem of faking his true sexual identity in his every day life. It is through this anonymous window that he finds liberation, enjoys performing his most desirable persona without risking losing “face” in the offline world. For him, this act of confession is a short path to “Pleasure”. Pleasure of being powerful and pleasure of being true. As Foucault suggests: “the confession is a ritual of discourse that unfolds within a power relationship, a ritual in which the expression produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation” (Foucault, 1976: 62).

Unlike Qusay, for other gay men, the chat room was not only a site of confession, but also tool for achieving physical “pleasure”; using the online world as a place where other gay men could be found to meet in the offline world. It is an act that blurs the boundaries between the online and offline worlds; where the presented ‘online self’ is just a facet of a wider identity that joins the self in other offline contexts, in the following I present a conversation when I pretended to be a male:

_Tarek:_ “Do you f**k or get f**ked or both, top or bottom ya3ny”?

_Me:_ “I am not gay”

_Tarek:_ “Want to try? You can come over to my place, we will get to know each other but you have to be bottom, here is my number 01….., if you made up your mind”

The chat room was used as a tool to invite a particular “audience” into their backstage world (offline world). Tarek conveyed clear messages of his gay identity and
his sexual expectations, inviting only “the gay audience” who will accept it, granting them passage into his backstage world. It is through this screen that Tarek and others like him find power to talk, resist and challenge to defend their existence and their right to a chosen type of physical “pleasure”. Also, it is important to note the level of safety felt by users like Tarek in the chat room, which allowed him the luxury of inviting a stranger into his offline life. In fact, despite the few incidents were gays were ambushed online by the morality police, this chat room still acts as a safer space to many sexual minorities, probably because of its general unspecific title (Egypt Room), which makes it harder for police officers to lure specific targets like gays.

Likewise married and single bisexuals took advantage of the room’s anonymity to resist, live their fantasies and find sexual partners while remaining unexposed in real life. Resistance took distinctive forms: first, resistance against normative heterosexual practices as a frame for sexual behaviors:

- “I love my wife, but I also love men, I sleep with prostitutes and with men I meet here online. Life offers me a wide set of pleasures, why would I just take one. Of course my wife doesn’t know, nobody knows about that, that is why I am here, looking for friends who accept me as I am”.

Second, resistance against the confinement of sexual practice to marriage only; marriage for many users was “separated from the order of desires”. They considered it a limitation or a societal order that has nothing to do with achieving bodily pleasures:

- “I am a bisexual, I can be straight whenever I want, but I don’t want to get married, marriage takes all the fun away, people should be free to please their bodies the way they want”.

Along the same lines, the third type of resistance was against a religious body; Christian males who could not get divorced in real life used the chat room as a shelter for their suppressed needs and desires in opposition to the restrictive divorce rules imposed by the church in Egypt. “I can’t get divorced, my wife and I have been separated for 4 years and neither one of us can remarry, what are you expecting me to do? Of course I will search for any opportunity to have sex, but online it is an easier task given my religious identity”.

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Michael, like many Christian Egyptians, faces serious difficulty to get divorced. Under the Egyptian constitution, Egyptian Copts must seek divorce approvals from both the state and their individual church. However, even if a divorce is granted by the court, church divorce rules are highly restrictive. “Adultery and irreconcilable desertion remain the only two explicit reasons whereby a person may divorce a spouse” (Ross, 2010). It is a situation that leaves hundreds in a liminal state, neither married nor divorced (Ross, 2010). A few of those sought the chat room as a safe outlet to declare their lusts and desires against the rules of the church that celebrates self discipline and abstinence in their cases.

Shady, another Christian who is separated from his wife, finds his sexual solace in chat rooms and experienced pleasure through religiously and culturally prohibited paths. He has been meeting women online to meet offline for sex:

“I met tens of girls and ladies from this chat room, we meet, we talk, then we make out if she is a virgin and we have sex if she is not, last one I met was a divorced lady, we had sex cam first then we met. Now we do it a lot”.

Me: “but what about her religion, how do you manage to find Christian girls a lot in this small chat room?”

Shady: “I have never slept with a Christian ‘aslan’, they were all Muslims of course”.

Plato argues, as explained by Foucault, that “the ethics of pleasure is of the same order of reality as the political structure: if the individual is like the city, the same structure must prevail in him. He will be self-indulgent when he lacks the power structure that would allow him to defeat, to rule over the inferior powers” (Foucault, 1990: 71). It seems that Shady was lacking power in his offline life, but his desire was power, and his self-indulgence was his card of resistance. Shady created his own world of desires and possibilities against the will of the church and the state creating a sectarian dimension for the problem. He is a Christian man who sexually engages with Muslim women, some of whom might be married. This is a situation that has caused dramatic incidents of violence, hate and oppression in some of the Southern governorates in Egypt. (The Guardian, 2016). Such example illustrates how online interactions might have a profound effect on our offline lives.
Many of the sexual acts presented above were born from the womb of oppression on one hand, and the need to explore on the other. All of which transforms the chat room into a site of struggle and resistance where a continuous processes of cultural production takes place. It is in this chat room that alternative sexual values and beliefs are exchanged, negotiated and constituted. It is a process that reshapes sexual politics and “constitute new erotic possibilities for a minotarian sexual discourse” (Erni, 2017). Based on the previous discussion, it seems that the boundaries between the online and offline, the legitimate and illegitimate, the prohibited and the allowed are blurred. Users performed different types of resistance against the state, societal and religious rules in pursuit of their own sexual pleasure. Through these chat room practices, a new sex culture is produced, one that revolves around “pleasure” and “exploration”, where individual sexual freedom is glorified as opposed to the hegemonic perception of sex as exclusively “heterosexual” “marital” and “procreational”.

It is in this chat room, and through this screen that users resist the domination of societal and religious rules that govern their untamed sexuality, to give in to the power of desire and pleasure. Thus in the following, I demonstrate how desire is practiced in relation to masculinity as another dimension of resistance.

2.4 A Break from Macho

A distinguished type of resistance was also taking place in the room: male users who chose to represent themselves with nicknames that included terms of slavery, obedience, and submission. For example, men who described themselves as dogs and pigs.

- “Haw haw haw, I love to be at a girl’s feet, I want her to beat me, insult me, spit on me, and I shall be kissing her shoes and legs, haw haw haw (Dog barking)… Pleaseee.”
- “I would love to be her slave, to be her dog… please.”
- “Are you a mistress who would love to f*** my a** very hard?”
- “I wanna do your toenails, I will serve you to my best, make me your servant please.”

They are the BDSM practitioners. BDSM is the acronym for “Bondage, Discipline, and Sadomasochism. It is a type of sexual expression that subsumes control.
and pain. In BDSM, “the submissive partner willingly grants the dominant power over them” (F.Seltzer, 2012), including power of inflicting pain and humiliation. Nonetheless, the whole process requires mutual consent from both parties. Studies show that gender differences are associated with specific role BDSM orientations, where a vast majority of men were into dominant roles while women were more interested in being the submissive partners (McGreal, 2015). However, it was intriguing that during my long observation period, all of the BDSM men I encountered were always interested in being “bottom” (aka submissive) and none of them was interested in switching roles (being both the dominant and submissive interchangeably) in the process.

- “I will do whatever you ask me, I can be spanked, I will serve you as a queen, I am all yours, I am your slave, I can’t be dom, I do not want to be dom, I am only happy when I am serving my mistress.”

Foucault argues that “sex is deciphered on the basis of its relation to the law” (Foucault, 1976: 82). I believe Foucault meant law in its broader sense not only the legal but the cultural and normative. Thus, understanding the social milieu out of which these desires might emerge is important. I had to think of our culture, what it means to be masculine in the Egyptian society and to explore whether or not this is changing. However, the definition of what constitutes masculinity is different and multiple. In fact, research has confirmed the plurality of masculinities, -whether hegemonic or subordinated- nonetheless, hegemonic masculinity was the most normative and celebrated type worldwide including Egypt. By hegemonic masculinity I mean, using Connell’s definition, “the pattern of practice that legitimated the subordination of women and allowed men’s dominance over women to continue” (Connell, 2005:832). Hegemonic masculinity that is based on historical gender hierarchies formed in specific circumstances, which makes it subject to change in other circumstances where there is gender transformation.

Likewise in Egypt hegemonic masculinity was celebrated, where men were required to occupy leadership stations in society and be the heads of households; the ones responsible for protecting and supporting the family and dominating women, etc… (Ratele, 2008).

However, male hegemony in Egypt has been facing challenges in the current economic situation along with the gender transformation that accompanied it. To futher
explain, in a highly competitive neo-liberal society with minimal governmental support (such as unemployment stipends, sufficient housing and employment opportunities…), many males are still required to lead and support a family and practice domination while they are suppressed by challenging economic and social circumstances. In addition, the women’s rights movements in Egypt which resulted in wider female participation in public life (economically and politically), have drastically changed the gender hierarchy. Calls for gender equality has resulted in females entering the workforce – sometimes with authority over men-, while some men have started to share with the household responsibilities. Thus, gendered practices are changing through a continual process of negotiations and re-negotiations (Norbakk, 2014).

This domination is also extended to the sexual realm; where a man is, in an era led by industries that promote sexual performance perfection, expected to give sexual pleasure with an idealized performance and to be fully in control of his and his woman’s pleasure. These expectations they might not be able to meet without the consumption of sexually enhancing drugs (Boktor, 2016).

Thus, it would be legitimate to argue that their interest in the submissive role in BDSM is an emancipatory practice? A break from being “Macho”? A break from masculine responsibilites and expectations? A retreat where somebody else is in control? Along the same lines, Ogas and Gaddam argue (as cited by Seltzer) that "men who are in socially dominant positions find liberation in what they called “erotically escapist” situation by immersing themselves in a slavery scenario, they are liberated from all responsibilities related to their original dominant position including being in control. And, of course, since they get to choose the fantasy material that most turns them on; they haven’t really given up control in such a way that might produce anxiety” (Seltzer, 2012). Likewise, Weiss supports the same view -as cited by Green-, she argues that the choice to give up power not only displays privilege, but also allows BDSM practitioners with privilege “to sidestep the fact that they are beneficiaries of that privilege, to position themselves as lone individuals outside of the material relations of power, that give form to both privilege and oppression, opportunity and constraint” (Green, 2013).

While this is the case, it seems that BDSM submissive practitioners create an online-emancipated persona where they renounce domination and control although they
actually do not lose them. The submissive persona might be their desperate cry for a break from being Macho or it could be what I call “gender tourism”, where experiencing being the other sex becomes a possibility as a receiver of pleasure, as a follower not a leader.

It is in this chat room that men can experience weakness and submission without the fear of judgment of being less masculine, or losing “face” in their offline lives. Both single and married users were desperately asking for a controlling dominant woman who would inflict pain and humiliate them. They safely described themselves as dogs and slaves, resisting the fixed modes of masculinity that place control in the men’s hands. It is in slavery roles that they experienced liberation, and acquired power; the power to surrender and let other people be responsible for their pleasure.

Conversely, this online persona might be a recreation of a facet of their offline identities. A facet that is kept hidden and only revealed to a particular audience. Speaking of which, studies show that BDSM bottom practitioners are less socially confident than dominant ones and less comfortable in taking control in social situations (McGreal, 2015). They are more sensitive to rejection as opposed to dominant ones that score higher on extroversion, confidence and less sensitivity to rejection (A.J.Wismejer & Assen, 2013). On these grounds, the enslaved self online might be a recreation of a true facet that wants to breathe and declare itself as such. Thus, this online facet is a reflection of reality, an act of resistance against fixed gender roles. It might be a cry for acceptance, acceptance that constitutes new gender roles that are congerous with the rise of feminism and the participation of women in the workforce (sometimes forcefully by the husband driven by dire financial need) as partners and leaders who not only share in the work responsibilities but also in the household’s. In that respect I recall Elfeki’s quote: “If you really want to know a people, start by looking inside their bedrooms” (The Guardian, 2013).

To sum up, it is apparent that users through their performed “bottom” role were anticipating freedom, whether it was a recreation of their offline selves or just an adopted self, it produces a sexual culture that opens new erotic possibilities, questions our perception of gender relations, our perception of pleasure and constructs new modes of masculinity.
In pursuit of bodily pleasures, another facet was safely adopted in the room. A lusty facet that is only interested in the unnatural, the illegitimate and forbidden pleasures. A lusty facet that seeks female domination and practice another form of submission. Few users in the room were open about their darkest desires, secrets and sins, for example their incestuous desires. This type was encountered only when I no longer introduced myself as a researcher, but mingled as a normal guest in the room. This allowed me to dive into deeper and more meaningful conversations with users who were only there to talk about their sex dilemmas. Most of the users who fell into this category were helpless. They were not concerned about the availability of a sexual partner or an opportunity to have sex, they were searching for a specific type of pleasure, pleasure of the forbidden and the shameful. Or just the pleasure of speaking about them.

Incestuous relations in Egypt are culturally and religiously a great taboo. Its punishment in Islam is even graver than adultery’s; it might reach execution especially if the participants were married (Islamic Studies, 2017) and legally the participant might face a life sentence in prison. However, those I met there were not stopped by such threats, their desires were much stronger than their fear of punishment or judgement.

"I love my sister, more than anything but she is getting married, I cannot imagine another person will sleep with her" said Taha.

Taha as he stated in the conversation, has been visiting the chat room for years only to talk about his love and affection for his sister. Taha and his sister live in a poor neighborhood. His sister was twenty-eight years, 10 years older, and single when she first started seducing him. She was not allowed to go out after she graduated and she was not employed. Desperate for sexual contact with no opportunities to meet new people, she used her brother to meet her sexual needs in seclusion. Taha then became addicted. After a few years, his sister got engaged and stopped him from approaching her. Since then this chat room became his mourning space: "I cannot imagine being with another girl" he said desperately when he was telling me why he can never be married to anyone and he will always be faithful to her. “I am sure no one will give me the pleasures I found with her.” Taha was very conscious of the gravity of his desire, he told me he knows it is religiously forbidden, “ḥārām”, but he still could not resist thinking about and visualizing her in bed.
He said he started peeking at her body while she is asleep and when she changes her clothes out of desperation.

Since I was using different nicknames, I stumbled into Taha many times; he used to tell the same story without any modifications. He described her body parts with passion and sometimes recited details of their intimate encounters. Taha knew that his confession will only be tolerated in this space. He knew that even though the flame of his desire was put off in real life he can still revive it through confession.

But Taha was not the only one who was submissive to his incestuous desires; Samir had a sexual need that was much more sophisticated. Unlike Taha, Samir was a rich and successful engineer who lives abroad and in his early thirties. He was in the room searching for a bride, a very unique girl who was extremely kind and open minded as he mentioned. But Samir had one condition, or rather one secret that he preferred to share with candidates online before they moved to the next step.

**Samir:** “I can marry whenever I want, but it is not easy to find the girl I have in mind.”

**Myself:** “What is so special about your dream girl?”

**Samir:** “I have a weird condition that she must accept.”

**Myself:** “Which is?”

**Samir:** “She has to agree to do anal sex and to let me sleep with my step mother every once in a while”

**Myself:** “Why would you want to have an affair with your step mother?”

**Samir:** “She taught me everything since I was a kid and I am addicted to her, she taught me anal and it is not adultery”

**Myself:** “It is not adultery, but it is prohibited for everyone including married couples.”

**Samir:** ‘I know, but I know punishment of adultery in Islam, it is the act of a p***s penetrating the va****, so anal is not clearly stipulated, at least not a major sin “kbyrā”, I am sure God will forgive me.”
Myself: “But she is your step-mother one of your ‘Māḥārm’, she is eternally forbidden to you even if she divorced your dad!”

Samir: “I know but I cannot leave her that is my only condition. But I will love my future wife, cherish her and support her, I am rich I can make all her dreams come true only if she accepts my lifestyle. I want to make a family and have kids and I do not want to cheat on her. She has to agree first.”

Myself: “...”

Samir: “Please help me, if u can, do u know someone who can accept this offer?

...

Samir: “I did not choose to be like that, I was a kid when she showed me stuff, when she taught me what anal means... I could not help it... I did not understand, she used to bring up her friends so I do them too, now I am trapped and addicted to older women who can do anal, but I only chose her”.

Both Taha and Samir were not using the chat room for physical sexual pleasure, rather to talk about how they achieve that in their own secretive ways. The chat room for them was a breathing space. A space of freedom where they sought empathy, acceptance and enjoyed the luxury of telling the truth about their submission to desire. Like many of my interlocutors, they sought liberation in confession. And they contributed to the constitution of a sex culture that is no longer tied to procreation, but only guided by desire that brings relief and pleasure. In both stories, they put a spotlight on a distinctive female sexual practice, where desire is completely led and controlled by women. Taha and Samir introduced a different type of submission, where women dominate men psychologically through sexual pleasures even when sex is absent. Sex in their stories was a coin with pleasure on one side and security on the other. Female domination in the BDSM practice is a sexual act, but in this case, it is psychological. Taha and Samir were playing the submissive roles even when their bodies said otherwise. They were both trapped; they were both enslaved by a specific type of pleasure introduced by an older woman who was in control but they were not. The sense of helplessness in their conversations indicated a different break from Macho, their incest with women “māḥārem” were a break from
being Macho and they surrendered their powers to a strong woman who was in charge of their pleasure, who was confident enough to take the responsibility and the lead.

3.0 The Battle of Sex

In this chapter, I was able to observe sexually various practices and themes in the “online Egyptian chat room” and how an alternative sexual culture was produced in this room as opposed to the normative culture of sex in Egypt and how new modes of masculinity were constructed. I lived for more than a year in a screen with nicknames that by time became very familiar. I was told stories that I would not imagine I could have known about somewhere else. I saw a facet of truth, truth of who we might be as human sexual subjects. I witnessed how my interlocutors were focused on themselves and their desires regardless of their religion, culture or the rule of law or what Foucault calls “the system of alliance”. I was able to see how users could: “decipher, recognize, and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire” (Foucault, 1990: 6), subjects who have the power to break the cycle of prohibitions, and to let their desires speak against the laws that moralize sexual practices. I had the chance to explore how desire could exist in fear, in shame, and in the forbidden, how desire is autonomous and powerful, and how desire is liberated in the act of confession. I examined how desire dwells in facets of the self that are revealed to a carefully chosen audience. How users, through their practices and presented online selves, might be creating a multiplicity of alternative sexual discourses. Multiplicity that does not reduce sex to the heterosexual or the procreational, that no longer holds sex in a binary system of the licit and illicit, rather, a discourse that deploys “pleasure” as the cornerstone of the sexual experience, and employs a fixed definition of performance as a prerequisite. Moreover, since the chat room was male dominated, I was able to witness the production of new sexual values that contest the normative conceptions of masculinity and gender relations from the male viewpoint. I explored sex as a pure desire, as a language of pleasure in a country that strips from its citizens most of its manifestations.

In this chapter, I demonstrated the multiple facets that use the anonymous Egyptian chat room to breathe. The repressed, the liberated, the lustful, the perverse, the slave, the queer, and the fantasy master. They all used the chat room as a site of freedom and resistance against the regulatory powers of the state, society and religion. But they are still trapped in the battle of sex, trapped in subjectivity; they are either subjects of desire
or subjects of the state. They are either controlled by their desires or controlled by the state.

Users in this chat room comfortably created, edited or adopted an online self that is not disconnected from their offline self. The anonymity enabled them to bring forth certain aspects of their offline self such as the level of their sexual libido, their fantasies, their sins, their aspired pleasures, their shameful desires, their sexual orientations, they were all shared in the context of their offline lives. The availability of their offline lives data such as phone numbers, work positions, their marital status, and in few times their addresses anchored their online facet to a wider offline identity. As Goffman argues -as cited in Bullingham- “both the mask worn and the hidden person behind it are facets of the same individual but in different contexts” (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013).

In conclusion, what happened and still happening in the chat room is only a virtual representation of who we might be in the real world. Because desire is -in the end- a language of truth, truth of who we are as subjects of desire. It is a representation of how individuals can give in to the power of their untamed desires, creating a parallel and not necessarily a better reality.
CHAPTER FOUR
SEX CONFESSIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA GROUPS

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how male users used the chat room as a space of freedom and resistance against the regulatory powers of state, religion and society. I explored how an alternative sexual culture was produced through analyzing their chat themes and discussions as opposed to the normative hegemonic sex culture. However, since the aforementioned chat room was male dominated, the previous chapter became one about male voices without any female representation. Yet a proper exploration of sex culture is not possible when female voices are excluded. Hence, in this chapter I aim to complement the journey of exploration by including women’s voices. I will explore the meanings made by the anonymous confessions posted in two secret social media groups titled “Stories 1” and “Stories 2”. In the first group, I examine how Egyptian women, as subjects of desire, used the group as a safe outlet or a space of freedom and resistance to voice their sexual problems and concerns without losing ‘face’ in the offline life. I also look at how sexual beliefs and behaviors are discussed and negotiated in a female-dominated space and how they may be projecting a specific perception of masculinity and producing a distinctive sexual culture. While in the second group, I explore sexual confessions from the male’s perspective and what kinds of confessions are associated with specific gender types. I hope to put the findings of this chapter in conversation with what was explored previously in an attempt to understand how an Egyptian (male or female) can be a subject of desire in the era of the internet.

This chapter consists of two parts: the first and main part will focus on the females’ sexual confessions in ‘Stories 1’ group. The second part will be dedicated to the males’ sexual confessions in “Stories 2” group.

The two groups explored in the chapter are secret (cannot be found in normal social media searches). All group members join upon the approval of the groups’ administrators. All confessions are sent through an anonymous external link posted by the groups’ administrators. The confessions then become subject to public discussion for all members including members (with known identity) in the group. Also important to note
that, although both groups included ‘married’ in their titles, the confessions were open to users from all walks of life irrespective of their marital status.

1.0 First Group: Stories 1:

“A platform where women can speak up and support each other, if you are single, engaged, married, divorced or a widow, this is a place for you.” Group administrator

The secret group was created by a young newly married woman as a support group for females only to voice their marital problems and share their marriage experiences in a judgment and embarrassment free environment. The members in the beginning were groups of mutual friends who sent their confessions anonymously and then the circle started to expand by recommending other members to join the group, irrespective of their marital status. Until now, the group has more than 80 thousand female members. Single and engaged females used the group as a learning platform that enlightens them about marriage-anticipated challenges and problems, while married females used it as a support group.

The group is guided by a number of rules that aim to protect the privacy and secrecy of both the confessions and the identity of members who take part in the discussions. On top of that was the women-only membership rule that aims to guarantee the freedom of all members to express their opinions, advice and personal experiences without being judged or bullied by men. Moreover, any disclosure of confessions or comments outside the group is banned by consensus; sharing posts or taking screenshots of confessions or discussions are deemed acts of violation and met by expulsion.

So far, the group has more than six thousand distinctive confessions sent by women who chose to present their social, financial, psychological and sexual problems anonymously. In addition, members could directly post questions, pictures and comics on the group wall anonymously upon the approval of the group administrator. However, in this chapter I will only focus on both the confessions and posts of a sexual nature. I collected more than 50 sexual confessions in addition to twenty random posts throughout a year of exploration. In the following, I will demonstrate the meanings made through these textual expressions and discussions.
1.1 The Sex Secret

Sexual stories and inquiries occupied many spaces on the discussion wall. Confessions of impulsive sexual sins, questions about sexual performance, details of the engagement process, libido, and specific sex practices were parts of this lived experience. The newlywed, the unmarried and the abandoned wife, each had her own secret that in most cases was unspoken about. Through these confessions, a ‘truth of sex’ and the ‘truth in sex’ were investigated; an investigation of Egyptian women as subjects of desire, as creators of a sex discourse. Sex the desire, sex the lust, sex the duty and sex the taboo, a series of contradicting feelings seemed to reign the confessions scene. In general, the main theme in the majority of the confessions was women’s sexual dissatisfaction. Different reasons were demonstrated as will be presented in details:

1.2 Two Bodies… One Soul

It is argued that, for many men “sex is sheer lust and a mere physical gratification” (Schwartz & Rutter, 1998: 51). But for most women it is less tied to the body and more linked to their psychology and emotions. What sex means and how it is done differs according to gender; many confessions highlighted this drastic difference:

“My husband is such a bad kisser, and he does not kiss unless he wants to sleep with me. Sex for him is a mission, he laughs and jokes during our most intimate moments, the possibility of me having a romantic or emotional sex is just nonexistent. I had a very high libido in the beginning of my marriage but it is steeply dropping every day. Sex has become part of my marital duties that I have never enjoyed, didn’t even have an orgasm once in 3 years”

Dina like a few other women who sent their confessions, had no physical problems that impeded the completion of sexual intercourse, but the lack of emotions and communication was her main problem. Sex for women who confessed was an emotional need but for their husbands was a mere physical experience:

“My husband has been biting me for five years during sex, I told him many times that it hurts, that I get disconnected and get completely out of the mood but he is so selfish and violent. I wish I was just a normal woman who can long for sex and enjoy it”

Studies have shown that “men are likely to see sex as fun for its own sake but women are more likely to believe sex can be enjoyable only when it has a meaning, affection and love” (Schwartz & Rutter, 1998: 47). Although these studies date back to the ninties, they still resonate with what those women said:

“He just cares about penetration, gives no attention to foreplay or anything that would please me.”

Those women were searching for something beyond the physical pleasure, something more relational, more passionate and much more personal, while their husbands were only focused on releasing their sexual energies regardless of their partner’s needs:

“My husband and I fight a lot, but he does not make it up unless he wants sex, how can he be so emotionless?”

Most confessions of this type emphasized the existence of a sexual communication gap between men and women. Confessions show how the ‘marital bed’ can become a site of cultural manifestations, where men are dominating while womens’ needs are silenced and neglected. According to the confessions, husbands treat sex as an activity while women perceive it as a connection. Husbands in their wives’ stories did not seem to be listening to what their partners needed, rather they treat sex as a sport where they only care to perform well and win by ejaculation. This win-lose situation is one of the most common problems presented to express women’s sexual dissatisfaction in the group. However, regardless of the pain expressed in their stories, women in the presented stories were mostly passive; many of them endured a sexless marriage where they helplessly renounced their right to pleasure for several years. While many others resigned themselves to the idea that they were made to please men as a priority while they come in second place.

“Anyone have any idea what to do to enjoy sex? I do it everyday because my husband wants it, I cannot refuse of course because he needs it, but he is very quick and it is only missionary for him. I never complain anyway because I never climax, so why bother to insult his masculinity?”
It was clearly shown in the stories how women were socialized to be enduring in the relationship, the one who does not mind giving up her needs for the sake of her family members whose needs always come ahead of her own:

“I don’t enjoy sex, so at least I let him enjoy it... I fake orgasms many times just to deceive him that we were on equal terms but I am bored, I want this to change.”

This socialization could be the result of the misogynist myth which associates women to maschosim (Caplan, 2012) a myth that places pain (physical or psychological) as part of the woman’s natural sexual experience. Women were told they were maschosists instead of ‘sacrificial and courageous’ as Dr. Caplan argues as cited by Collins (Collins, 1985); a conception that normalized her sex sacrifices as a feminine, natural trait and normalized her sexual experience as painful.

“Since my first marriage day we had our challenges and I could not let him get inside, but he was not patient, he forced his way in and it was very painful, he kept doing this for three weeks until I visited a gynecologist who told me I was badly injured. Things got a tad better but throughout my 5 year marriage he is still violent, very harsh and selfish, sometimes he rubs his thing against me when he does not have complete erection just because sex frequency is something to him. I want to divorce him to get rid of sex, is this normal?”

Mona, as I called her, endured a painful sexual experience for five years and she sent the confession to get people’s opinions whether or not she should leave. Mona never mentioned that what had happened to her could be classified as marital rape. She was still asking if it was normal to desire divorce or refuse violence.

“I gave birth a year ago, and since then I am having terrible problems in my intimate relations, I am always in pain and I never orgasm, I never told my husband because I feel this will hurt him or insult his ego, so I have been faking orgasm and many times I let him assume I did, if anyone has gone through a similar experience would you please advise what to do?”

Painful and disappointing sex was the little secret those women tried to uncover in front of a very specific and carefully selected audience. The secret they could not share sometimes with their own partners, their families or friends or even medical personnel.
In this regard, it would be useful to recall Goffman’s theory of impression management, to explain how a woman in her sexual relationships puts on the mask of pleasure for the sake of her husband. She silences her needs, she performs the role of a responsive wife who is emmersed in desire to please and satisfy the other partner. She fakes orgasm, she sighs, she screams in pleasure to deceive him. His orgasm becomes her triumph, her needs are kept only for her. And only in a safe outlet such as ‘Stories I’ that her mask can fall and her desperate cry for help can be heard. Thanks to anonymity, she could safely share a side of her true self there.

1.3 Sex as A Power Relationship

In addition to the previous discussion, women had another type of secret to conceal. This time it was not about their desires or their bodies. Rather, about their husbands’ bodies as a masculine carrier of pleasure and the power that dwells in the processes of giving it. Many women sent their confessions to express their frustration and helplessness towards their husband’s sexual problems. Complete and partial erectile dysfunction (ED), ejaculation problems and small penis size were mentioned several times. However, their main concern was mostly about their husbands’ passive attitudes. The sense of helplessness in their confessions could be attributed to the fear of being the sole partner responsible for pleasure. ED makes men lose control, lose the privilege of domination, they become no longer the pleasure givers. ED switchs roles, women with sexually impotent husbands were suddenly responsible for preparing their partners to be in control in order to become the carrier of pleasure again. The passivity of the husband and their body’s impotence rendered women confused and disappointed when they were forced to play the active role in the relationship.

- “My husband’s penis is on the smaller side, he has performance anxiety and ED, I tried everything to help him. Then we decided to seek medical help, the doctor prescribed some supplements and he got a bit better because I always help him get aroused, I introduce new positions. Then suddenly he decided to stop taking them, I am tired of being the one asking for sex, I want to be desired. I am tired of making the moves. He is lazy, he is shy but I do not want to leave him, please tell me your advice.”

Women’s confessions reinforced traditional practices of gender and sexuality. The desire of placing sex as power that is primarily under the control of the man was apparent.
On one side, women wanted their husbands to regain their power and ability to control. Their sexual relationship was not satisfying when the traditional hegemonic gender roles were switched. On the other side, husbands with ED wanted their power back, if not with their wives, if not in the marital bed, then somewhere else. If not in the natural way then in any other way.

Husbands’ defense mechanisms varied from one story to another when they were confronted with their sexual dysfunction. Some husbands used denial, where the wife was blamed for her inability to arouse the partner, some were consuming aphrodisiacs secretly and others sought extramarital relations. Erectile dysfunction was mentioned seven times in the confessions, in three of them husbands sought extramarital relations especially with prostitutes when their impotence was exposed to their wives.

“My husband and I were school sweethearts, after marriage I found out that he had erectile dysfunction and a problem with ejaculation, I got pregnant through IVF without telling our families. Since then he changed, he started cheating on me and at the same time spreading rumors about how poorly I perform in bed. I ended up divorced and then upon contacting one of the prostitutes he knew, she told me he wasn’t into normal intercourse but only into anal sex and that he couldn’t do that without viagra. She told me he knows he is weak but she is paid to deceive him so that he is okay, but I know he was sexually dead, unable to have a normal relation. I told nobody but I feel so bad and I think about scandalizing him just like he did.”

An unsuccessful session of sexual intercourse might be disappointing for women, but for men it might cause larger psychological sensitivity. Sex for men is an agency of power, a chance to perform their masculinity and to satisfy their ego. Thus, the failure to sustain an erection or have successful intercourse not only deprives them of the bodily pleasure but presents them as less masculine (Barnes & Thompson, 2013). Male’s sexual performance is in fact a performance of masculinity, where even women’s orgasm is deemed part of masculine achievement (Chadwick & Anders, 2017). Sex is the man’s theatre and masculinity is the role every man wishes to perform in front of a female audience. Thus, for the sake of a successful performance a man may seek multiple ways to get the desired affirmation of his masculinity from the audience, be it his wife (naturally or with aphrodisiacs) or any other woman.
Based on this, sex for their husbands was not only a relationship of pleasure, but also a relationship of power; not only a site of bodily experience but also a site of masculine performance. Denial, aphrodisiacs consumption and extramarital relations were their acts of resistance against their bodies’ dysfunction and their inability to stay in power. These acts aim to maintain and reaffirm a flawless masculine performance. Seemingly, women in their confessions understood the power struggle that dwells in sex, that is why they give fake impressions of pleasure in bed and sought sex therapy advice and medications secretly online. Women were subconsciously preserving their husbands’ masculinity by keeping their missing pleasure hidden and their husband’s dysfunction a ‘secret’. Renouncing their own pleasure for the sake of protecting their husbands ‘face’ in real life. They used this platform to seek advice without exposing their husbands to the embarrassment of having their masculinity evaluated or insulted by other people.

“My husband suffers from ED, is it treatable? Are there any pills or supplements I can give to him’”?

To sum up, women in their confessions seemed to reinforce the hegemonic norms of gender and sexuality which place penis, performance and power at the core of men’s masculinity. Also their confessions reflected a male sex culture where aphrodisiac medications, extradyadic sex relations are behavioral resistance mechanisms aimed to fix the ‘crisis of masculinity’ caused by sexual impotence. It is a sexual culture that situates women’s sexual satisfaction within the context of masculine achievement. However, another culture where power is shared by women was emerging. A culture that emphasizes sex as masculine agency of power but reserves a place for women’s participation, power that women would welcome to share but would not want to monopolize.

2.0 Female Sex and the Body Struggle

In the previous discussion, I illustrated how sexual performance, gender and power intersect to produce a female sexual culture that reinforces specific gender norms. I also illustrated how women related their sexual dissatisfaction to external factors presented in the lack of communication and men’s sexual dysfunction. Yet another common factor was highlighted as an obstacle in some women’s path of sexual
satisfaction: the obstacle of fear. Fear was demonstrated in their confessions as an unconquered enemy, an enemy that dwells in their bodies or rather in their minds.

“I love my husband, and he is very nice, gentle and deep inside I want him, but my body does not seem to agree, whenever he approaches me I am turned off, he does everything right but I don’t know what is wrong with me, I saw a gynecologist and he said there is not any medical problem. Please help.”

Mahinor, was suffering from ‘vaginismus’ which is a condition caused by the involuntary contraction of the pelvic floor muscles, a condition “that can make sexual intercourse, gynecological exams and even tampon insertion painful, if not impossible” (Smith, 2016). Causes of vaginisums are physical and mostly psychological. Women who suffer from vaginismus constituted 20% of the confessions studied in this thesis.

“I have been married for a year and 2 months but until now we couldn’t have successful sexual intercourse. I visited many gynecologists and they said I need psychiatric treatment. Psychiatrists prescribed sedatives but nothing is working, we have tried everything. My husband loves me but he can’t take it anymore, I love him but I don’t know what is wrong with me. I am so afraid of pain.”

“I can’t have intercourse with my sensitive and loving husband, every time we try I keep pushing him, last time I injured his back and I kept screaming and crying until he stopped. I feel so guilty but I just refused him in bed, it is very painful. He said he wishes he could take all the pain away so we can get it done, but I don’t know what to do.”

Vaginismus was often expressed in confessions of newly married wives, who were attracted to their husbands and were open to engage in a loving sexual experience. Their minds desired sex but their bodies were not responding although medical reasons were excluded. From a socio-psychological view, the mixture of desire and refusal could be attributed to two factors: a long process of gender biased socialization that debases female’s sexuality and the lack of sufficient sexual education.

In Egypt, the general culture requires any chaste woman, unlike men, to abstain from any sexual encounter unless she is married, she is supposed to keep away from any sexual stimuli and protect her virginity (mostly proved by protecting her hymen), until her husband takes it (virginity) away (Wynn, 2016). Otherwise she can be called a “slut”, her
act might result in pregnancy which might scandalize her family and sometimes jeopardize her life. She, unlike men, is taught about desire but only to resist and control it. However, when she gets married, the same culture expects her to turn into a passionate, lustful and disinhibited lover in a matter of days with a man who was the same stranger she used to avoid (Schwartz & Rutter, 1998). Expectations collide with reality after marriage, when a woman fails to switch from the chaste to the lustful to meet her husband’s expectations. Like in most of the confessions, women expressed difficulty in having intercourse or to be immersed in sex as a state of enjoyment despite desiring their partners. Women were socialized to associate desire to resistance otherwise they would be demeaned. Unlike men who were raised up to believe that “sexual experimentation enhances their masculinity” (Schwartz & Rutter, 1998: 19).

In addition, sex in their confessions was often associated with pain, fear, disinterest and disgust. Their confessions highlighted the struggle between the mechanics of their bodies and their perception of sex. To illustrate further, it would be of great importance to demonstrate the meanings made by casual sex posts and sex discussions in the group. In an attempt to explore the contradictions that may surround the female perception of sexuality.

According to the Neuro Psycho Social Theory of Speech (NPS), the language people use “is never chaotic, meaningless or random” (Jay, 2000: 22), rather it is subsumed by a socio-cultural system. “The words people use in their daily lives can reveal important aspects of their social and psychological worlds”. As Jacques Lacan proposes as cited by Pennebaker et al, “language is the bridge to reality where the unconscious is asserted.” (Pennebaker et al, 2003: 548). Thus in the following, an analysis of female members’ language will be explored:

Since the group was exclusively female dominated, members were very open to express their thoughts about sex. Sexual jokes, videos, and pictures were posted for discussion and sarcasm every Friday when confessions are suspended. However, despite the female only membership which guarantees a high level of privacy and provides freedom from harassment and judgement, there were mixed reactions regarding those posts, some members were actively participating in sex discussions while others requested filtering them as they were inappropriate and embarrassing. Upon the requests,
the group administrator created an online poll to allow members to vote. The poll introductory message read “I noticed that some members have been into ‘dirty’ posts but other members complained about it, so here is a poll to decide whether to not to ban the ugly “el ābeeha” posts. The group administrator used ‘dirty’ and ‘ugly’ or ‘vulgar’ to describe sexual posts. The word sex was never mentioned in her message. However, the majority voted yes and implicitly understood that “dirty” was a synonym of “sexual”.

Similar to the group administrators, female members showed this binary attitude of desire and sex baseness in their discussions. They were eagerly waiting for the Friday sex posts. However, they often associated sex with many negative terms such as: dirtiness ‘wāsālh’, baseness ‘sāfālā’, ugliness or vulgarity ‘qbāḥ’, shame ‘‘yb’ and impoliteness ‘qlt ādb’. Nonetheless, the posted sex pictures were not obscene nor did they included nudity, rather they were sarcastic and often funny but they were still perceived as “dirty”.

For instance, a member posted a picture (Fig 4) with the caption:

“One of Ikea workers was assigned the task of arranging those teddy bears, and that is how he did it”.

The picture depicts teddy bears in different sexual positions. The funny post received many comments:

- “Even when they get creative, their mind is still dirty, haha.”

- “Amoot fel qbāḥh 😜” which reads: “I am deadly in love with vulgarity.”
Another photo that shows a quote sarcastically attributed to Shakespeare read the following: “No matter how beautiful is the face, the heart always goes for the butt” and Shakespeare was renamed as ‘Shakespeare’ which is the first part of his name mixed with the vernacular Egyptian synonym of butt. Members in their comments also mixed sarcasm with sex demeaning terms:

- “yes, that is the dirty fact!”
- “Oh dirty boy” 😛
- “Impolite (ya ālyl ālādb)”

The third picture (Fig 5) depicts a couple in intimate position with the caption:

“The impolite husband is a blessing, the polite one should be married to your mother.”

Most of the comments on this post were emphasizing that sex is naturally ‘impolite’ and that dirtiness and impoliteness were synonyms of a good sexual performance:

- “Unfortunately, politeness has become the general norm in marriage 😘！”
- “Of course impoliteness is a blessing, how can a husband not be impolite?”
- “Nothing is better than dirtiness 😁. Why would I marry a good boy?”
- “Just let him come and we will do dirtiness ‘wāsāḥh’ and baseness ‘sāfālā’ everyday.”

Although impolite was used to indicate the meaning of “naughty” and “playful” and polite was used to indicate “shy” and “conservative”, the choice of these specific terms reveals the truth of how sex was perceived as a dirty act in the end. This contradictory blend of desiring sex and demeaning it is a cultural artifact that has its roots in both Christianity and Islam. Both religions link sex to a state of “impurity” as illustrated in the previous chapter.
Hence, women who have been socialized that chaste virgin women is one of the rewards for Muslim men, especially martyrs, in paradise: “In them shall be those who are chaste with restrained glances; whom neither man nor jinn shall have touched before them (Quran, 55:56), might think of virginity as something “clean” and ‘valuable’ and associate its loss to ‘uncleanness’.

Consequently, it makes sense that, for some women, losing virginity would be deemed as an eternal sentence of impurity, especially that religious rules indirectly emphasize this fact. In both religions, bathing is obligatory after sex. In Islam, sex is a called a ritual impurity, but one regains his/her state of purity directly after performing ‘Ghusl’, while in Christianity in the old testament, sex attaches impurity to the person until the evening regardless of the cleansing act. “After having sex, both the man and the woman must take a bath, but they still remain unclean until evening” (The Bible, Leviticus 15:18). Thus, sexual intercourse for some women is not just a physical activity but a turning point in their lives, a transforming act that moves them from the perfect state of purity to the state of sexual impurity.

“I can’t have intercourse, but the doctor said it is not vaginisums, I am okay and don’t tell me my husband has to do lots of foreplay because he does, and I get sufficiently lubricated. the point is that whenever we are about to do a ‘real try’ my body just shuts down, I get turned off and I keep pushing him with my hands.”

In the previous discussion, a facet of the psychological struggle that dwells in the female sexuality was explored. And how sex was linked to impurity, disgust, dirt and impoliteness as a product of a long process of cultural and religious socialization through analyzing the members’ language.

On a different note and complementary to the avoidance of impurity, there is also a cultural association between female’s sexuality and pain, which might be attributed to the lack of sufficient sexual education and the dependence on informal sources of knowledge.

“I am too scared, I heard that the penis can go in the wrong places and the idea is terrifying me.” Pain was mentioned a lot in the confessions of women struggling to succeed in having sex: “I have been married for two years and half, but we have not succeeded to
have a complete intercourse, the doctor said I have vaginal cramps because I am too afraid of pain. I heard that in the first two times I will be hurt badly. I do not want to be selfish but whenever we try I panic, any help?”

The fear of impurity and pain might explain why intercourse within the realm of marriage can sometimes be a difficult mission in the absence of formal sexual education that should have addressed such critical issues. Also, the confessions demonstrated how much the failure to have a sexual intercourse was associated with shame and fear. Moreover, their questions and problems showed how much basic sexual information was lacked and how many wrong conceptions are culturally circulated and enhanced.

“My husband says nobody has sex in the this cold weather, is that correct? Can’t people have sex in the winter?”

“Can an overweight woman be on top? My husband refuses it thinking he will get hurt?”

“I love a guy and we have been kissing for a week, my period is late, can I be pregnant?”

“I am single, and of course I can’t have sex but I have strong sexual desire, so I am thinking about getting genital cut to get rid of my high libido, has anybody done that?

“Any reviews about Spanish butterfly or any other medication that would help me orgasm? My husband and I tried everything but I just do not succeed.”

The ramifications of sexual illiteracy can be devastating as shown above, to the extent that women would pursue cutting parts of their bodies because they were socialized to be scared of their desire:

“I am married but my husband lives in a foreign country, I miss him and when I asked him either to return back to live with me or take me there he said he can no longer trust me and that he will send his Mama to get me circumcised. I called the only aunt I’ve got left from my family to complain, she said it is religiously permissible ‘halal’ as he is my husband and it is his right to make sure my desire is under control, what do you think I should do girls?”

The confessions present a sexual culture that is built with blocks of sexual illiteracy, patriarchal discursive practices and normalization of violence against women.
Unsurprisingly, Egypt is among the countries where FGM is highly practiced by medical personnel, and among the countries that are more likely to support the continuation of the practice (UNICEF, 2013). Thus, it is apparent how confessions on the internet can be a reflection of what could be happening in real life and how some women are misled to believe that their desire is evil and should be subjugated. It demonstrates how violence against their bodies is tolerated, encouraged and promoted as acts of chastity and how a whole culture is built around the fear of women’s desire.

Thus, in the previous section, I tried to unpack a sexo cultural crisis through analysing females’ online confessions and language. I tried to explain the cultural and psychological reasons that produced the presented online sex culture which subsumes a binary attitude of desire and fear. A sex culture where female sexuality is her pleasure and her agony and her body is a site of struggle between the two opposites of desire and resistance. Conversely, in the following I will also demonstrate how guilt and fear were associated with female sexuality when desire was separated from the anticipated control. Finally I explore how females used this group as a site of freedom against the regulatory powers of state, society and religion.

2.1 The Unforgiven Desire, The Unforgiven Sin

“I am 27, I am a top faculty graduate and working in a very reputable company with a pretty good salary. I come from a family that fought its way into the higher classes until we reached a very good financial and social level. So I don’t really have a serious problem, but I am devastated and damaged inside. The problem is that I masturbate. I have been masturbating for six years and I can not quit although I tried a lot and asked God to forgive me. It has become my escape whenever I face a problem. It started with a guy I knew when I was young, he introduced me to everything about sex when I was very innocent, he sent me videos to learn, I tried and since then I can’t stop. I am so afraid of God’s punishment, I do not want to make him angry. Please recommend a good psychiatrist to help me get treated.” (Norhan)

Although masturbation is a solitary sexual act, it triggered feelings of guilt and shame. Norhan was not the only girl who linked fear and guilt to her secretive sexual activity. Many other single women who were not lucky to get married in their early twenties attached shame to their sexual desire. Masturbation was perceived as “dirty”
upon which the doer deserves punishment. Moreover, sexual activities that resulted in the loss of virginity often triggered larger fear and deeper sense of guilt and helplessness. Desperate and unsure hopes of heavenly forgiveness were demonstrated to show how much guilt was felt when their desires were not controlled as decided by the regulatory powers of religion and society.

“I lost my virginity and I totally regret it. I changed the lifestyle that kind of led to this. I really hope God forgives me. The point is since I changed, I got many opportunities to get into decent relationships but I am freaking out that any one will find out I am not a virgin. How can I tell a man who wants to marry me I did such a thing? No man has touched me for over a year now and nobody will unless he is my husband. But I am so afraid I won’t be forgiven, I am afraid of people. Afraid of God, afraid that my family will get hurt, please tell me what to do?” (Judy)

Judy, unlike Norhan, was not only afraid of God, but afraid of everything and everyone: people, her future husband, the inability to have a future husband, her family, God, etc… Her only sexual sin became her life crisis in a society that deems virginity as the only index of honor and modesty and the existence of a hymen and hymeneal blood as its only sign. In Egypt, the loss or inexistence of the hymen might lead to catastrophic ramifications including “physical death, moral death or divorce on the day of marriage” (Saadawi, 2007: 40). This fine membrane is not only an index of the female’s modesty but a marker of her family’s ‘’ird’’ as well. In the Virginity Trap, Ghanim illustrates the difference between virginity as ‘’ird’’ and honor: “Honor ‘sharaf’ is the man’s. It can be augmented through right behavior and great achievements, but ‘’ird’’ is what women are born with, it can not be augmented but only destined to be preserved because once it is lost it can not be regained. ‘’ird’’ is a familial possession where male members are its guardian” (Ghanim, 2015, p.4).

In Egypt, an entire way of life is built around virginity. While men are free from such social imperatives, women’s lives are controlled, restricted and sometimes lost because of a persistent discriminating culture that deems virginity as a familial possession. Women who lost their virginity may be forced to make great concessions because as Ghanim states: “virginity is the most valuable trait in a female and a treasured commodity in the marriage market” (Ghanim, 2015, IV).
“I am engaged, and I confessed to my fiancee that I lost my virginity but he forgave me and then we started to fight a lot. After a lot of problems we broke up but then he scandalized me and uncovered my secret. Now my family is forcing me to marry him. They say I am now ‘defected’ and no man will ever accept me. They locked me at home, banned me work and from going out. They set the marriage date in a year but I don’t love him anymore. My family is afraid of the scandal.” (Nariman)

Comments on this confession recommended that Nariman undergoes “hymenorrhaphya” which is a medical surgery to restore hymens.

“Seek a hymen reconstruction surgery and get your value back, get your freedom back.”

Women in their confessions, projected fear, helplessness towards a culture that does not forgive a woman’s single sin, upon which she is devalued and her honor is forever lost. While the honor of men is preserved irrespective of the number of their extramarital relations. Confessions and discussions clearly reflected an unjust culture that is exclusively applied to females, however, it also reflected their implicit acts of resistance.

“Please I do not want anybody to blame or scold me, nobody is an angel and nobody is not mistaken. I loved a guy and we had a secretive ‘ʿrfi’ marriage (a customary marriage that does not require official registration) for six months. We got divorced and I am about to get married to another guy who does not know. I have an elastic hymen and during my six month marriage I have not bled even once. Now do you think I should tell him? I think my hymen still exists, what do you think I should do?” (Nadia)

Although Nadia did engage in a secretive sexual relation and she did lose her physical virginity, she was not as scared as the women in the previous confessions because she had an elastic hymen which is a type of hymens “capable of widening and stretching during penetration without bleeding” (Saadawi, 2007: 38). Nadia was safe from fear and guilt because her previous sexual encounters were impossible to prove through her body. Nadia chose to present her query in this very specific safe space anonymously, otherwise she might have faced catastrophes in her offline life.
The previous discussion resonates with what was discussed in the earlier chapter. According to the interview data, men were careful not to engage in the act of vaginal intercourse with their virgin girlfriends unlike married and divorced ones. Instead they performed anal and oral sex to preserve their girlfriends’ alleged virginity. The hymen then becomes a mask, and virginity becomes a mere social performance which all girls are required to play to a discriminantory audience. Fake virginity then becomes an act of resistance against a gender discriminating culture, one that punishes women solely while men are left free to celebrate their sexuality without fear of consequences. Thus, unfortunately, Egyptian women who indulged in an illegitimate sexual relationship are subconsciously producing a parallel sexual culture where physical virginity is separated from the moral virginity. In this parallel culture, females learn to enjoy their secretive sexuality and guarantee societal activities through acts of maneuver and hypocrisy; hymen reconstruction surgeries and engagement in incomplete sexual encounters are few of the various tools used to fulfill the desire, deceive audiences and keep ‘face’ in real life. Men in the chat rooms chapter seemed to comply with this parallel culture as long as their needs were met.

3.0 The Perverse Desire From a Woman’s Eye

In the previous part, I explored women’s heterosexual confessions and the sexual culture constructed through them as well as the moral and psychological struggles that dwell within such processes. However, a comprehensive investigation of the online sex culture should not exclude women’s views on perverse practices and desires, which has become a rising aspect of today’s sexuality. Perverse sex practices in this section does not have a fixed definition; rather it is anything and everything that is perceived as ‘perverse’ by the research subjects. In this respect, this section will provide a detailed description of confessions on non-traditional sexuality:

Although they were all women who sent the confessions, most confessions on perverse sex acts were about their husbands. Their confessions triggered an intense and empathetic participation from other female members whether single or married. Most of these confessions addressed issues of: wife sharing, threesome activities, homosexual acts and gender identity tourism. Women were less likely to agree to these activities. Thus, their confessions were sent out of shock and desperation:
“I have been married for 3 years to the guy I love; he comes from a very respectable family and he is a master’s holder. I mean he is not air headed. In our sexual relations, we are trying to be as open as possible to reach the maximum pleasure. But one day he showed me a video of threesome sex video featuring two men with a woman, he said his friend tried this with his wife and it felt great. He said it is only a way to break the routine. Of course I will not allow this to happen but please tell me how to help him get rid of these ideas and of nagging?”

“My husband and I are enjoying a great sex life, we have been married for 10 years. The problem is that lately he started to ask me to sleep with the foreign maid in his presence; he says it is something new and will help him get turned on again. He says I am selfish because I am saying no. What do you think I should do? Is this okay? I don’t know what happened to him.”

In the previous stories, engaging the wife in a threesome activity and wife sharing were presented as merely ‘new sex practices’. In both stories, the couple was already enjoying a satisfying sexual life where their desires and bodily needs were met. However, a desire that transcends the biology of the body emerges. A desire for non-conventional sex practices were presented as a sexual need for some husbands.

The female members’ reactions to the two confessions were varied from extreme astonishment and shock to disbelief. Most members in the group strongly opposed such practices that were described as ‘sick’ and ‘gross’. Disbelievers claimed the confessions were made up by attention seekers while others recommended divorce through court:

- “Your husband is not a man anymore, get a divorce and get all your financial rights.”

- “Oh my God, I am not going to get married ever, no men left on the planet.”

Their husbands were perceived as males who are no longer men. A few members called the husbands ‘dayooth’ (the man who permits women, whom he is responsible for, to engage in illicit relations, or to display their beauty to strange men). Confessors were attacked for their passivity. Their desire to preserve their marriages by responding to the husband’s perverse requests were strongly discouraged.
Clearly, the observations of such confessions and discussions are consistent with the traditional gender scripts of sexual behavior. Men were more likely to suggest new sex and non-traditional practices while women mostly favored traditional ones (Schwartz & Rutter, 1998). Men were more likely to favor and initiate sex for recreational purposes while women were less likely to initiate or agree to engage in them.

However, it is instrumental to note that, in both confessions, women indicated their affiliation to a relatively high educational and financial stratum (holding a master’s degree and hiring a foreign maid). Also, both reported enjoying an ‘open’ and honest sex experience with their spouse where wife sharing and threesome were introduced as ways to ‘spice up’ the relationship regardless of religious prohibition or the traditional hegemonic norms of masculinity. This study makes no casual links between high educational or economic levels and non-conventional sex practices. Only observations of this particular social media group had husbands whose education and financial status were relatively high and who identified themselves as “open minded’ who were interested in non conventional sex practices with their spouses.

The previous confessions reflected a sex culture that subsumes non-conventional sex practices and new modes of masculinity as opposed to the traditional masculine model celebrated by society and religion. Husbands in the previous confessions were not guided by religious rules or societal fixed definitions of masculinity. Rather they constructed an autonomous sex culture, where the order of desire is separated from the sacred marital bond, sexual needs and societal censorship.

Along the same lines, ‘gender identity tourism’ was mentioned in few confessions. Wives complained about their husbands’ ‘weird’ requests to behave and be treated as women:

“Every now and then my husband comes with a fetish which is okay, but the last time he asked me to f..k him and act as if I am the man. He asked me to f..k him with anal beads. He wore my bra and panty and kept acting as a woman screaming ‘f..k me’? Is this normal? Is he a bi or a gay or that was a one time fantasy? I can’t take what is going on my mind, I am dying and cannot keep pretending for so long.”
Homophobic and offensive comments bombarded this confession. The husband was called a “pervert” and ‘gay’. A few warned her of the possibility of getting HIV as a result of his suspected homosexual activities. Only a few members encouraged the confessor to engage in an honest conversation with the husband in order to channel her thoughts, and suspicions, while others asked her to cherish her husband’s honest trials to share all his fantasies freely with her. In general, most females’ comments were consistent with the traditional dominating masculine performance of a husband, strongly refusing a man to behave otherwise.

- “He wants you to f..k him, a woman cannot and should not f..k’!

- “He is a homo! Run!

In conclusion, according to the confessions, it might be argued that perverse sex practices are not necessarily a product of sexual repression or a manifestation of distinctive sexual orientation. On the contrary, perverse sexual practices were often introduced as alternative ways to bring life back to a sexually cold and saturated relationship. Men who were socialized to celebrate their sexuality were more likely to introduce and initiate unorthodox sex practices regardless of religious and societal rules, only driven by their desires and pleasures. Nonetheless, discussions showed that women were less likely to engage in perverse sexual acts for recreational purposes. Women were often influenced by traditional gender norms, paying more respect to religious rules. A disparity between men and women’s sex culture is portrayed through these confessions; men’s culture of sex seems to glorify pleasure as an end, while women’s sexual behaviors and beliefs are still consistent with religious and normative hegemonic definitions of masculinity and idealized femininity.

4.0 The Second Group: Stories 2:

‘Stories 2’ was administered by four social media members; two males and two females. The group was governed by the same rules of the previous group to guarantee a high level of privacy. It has more than 100 thousand members from both sexes. Anonymous confessions from both sexes and of all marital statuses were accepted. Nonetheless, the group witnessed a great disparity between the male and female confessions frequency; female members reigned the confessions scene with minimal participation of male members. Since female’s voices were represented in the previous part,
in this part I only focus on men’s confessions. While most confessions sent by men were about financial responsibilities and marital expectations, only ten sexual confessions were collected throughout the three months of observation. Sexual confessions were in fact sexual complaints and problems. Their complaints addressed: porn addiction, incestual sexual relations, and the most common was the wife’s sexual abstinence and coldness:

“I married 10 years ago after a great love story, the first five years of our marriage were very stable and our sex relation was very satisfying for both of us. After pregnancy and delivery, I made sure never to criticize her and always tell her how beautiful she looks. But suddenly sex became so rare in our life, then became one of the taboos, whenever I touch her or ask for it, she screams and scolds me. And if she agreed she is always too cold. I tried to talk with her to understand why has she changed, she said you are abnormal to think of these stuff in your age. We are in our thirties; I think we are in the heat of it, is this normal? She does not want to get divorced, she says: “she loves me”. Please give me your advice.”

This confession/complaint was given a remarkable attention; many members especially females participated in the discussion. Female members were mostly defensive and only a few were sympathizing with the confessor:

- “There is something wrong in your words; you are not completely honest, if it was a satisfying relationship, why did she hate it?”

- “If you do not help her have time to take care of herself and her body she will not accept you in bed, we need time to get prepared physically and psychologically, we are not animals like men”

- “It is your right to divorce her. That is sad.”

While male members were very understanding and supportive, polygamy and divorce were recommended as solutions, quotes about intensity of the male’s sex drive as opposed to the woman’s were shared, etc…:

- “We said a million times God permits polygamy for such cases, most women hate sex unlike men we would die without it. I hope one day women understand that this is just natural.”
- “I know many people in the same situation, remarry again or renounce your needs if you love her.”

- “Simply tell her this is ‘haram’ and she is cursed every night she says no for no reason, I do not know why do women control us nowadays.”

Confessors mentioned various reasons for their wives constant sex avoidance and coldness: pregnancy, delivery, circumcision, and household responsibilities were mentioned extensively as common excuses by wives. On a different note, men often complained about the rarity of their wives initiating sex:

“My wife never asks for it, she does not remember it, I have to ask all the time, I have to push her to bed and she rarely enjoys it.”

Moreover, a few men mentioned that their wives think sex is linked to dirtiness:

“I have been married for three years. My wife and I enjoy sex but she has a weird problem, whenever we are done she cries and she says I feel so guilty, we are doing something really bad, we are married why would she feel guilty?”

Guilt and refusal were always linked to the female sexuality in the male’s confessions, while high sex libido, sex initiation and constant availability of sex were always linked to the male sexuality. Men often talked positively about their desires and needs. Guilt, disrespect and disgust were only mentioned in the illegitimate sex, porn and masturbation confessions:

- “I am a married man, but I am a porn addict, I have been watching for more than 10 years. I also masturbate. I hate and disrespect myself. I wish to quit but I can’t, can anybody help me or recommend a place where they treat porn addiction?”

- “I found out by mistake that my fiancée watches porn movies and other dirty stuff, I cannot imagine a female can do this? I am so disgusted and I feel that I won’t be able to respect her again.”

Porn and masturbation confessions often received negative and preaching comments from both males and females:

“If you are married, then why are doing this alone? Poor woman.”
“Do not stay alone with yourself, whenever you are about to do it call your wife, call one of your friends. Lonesome encourages sins.”

“Do this with your wife idiot! Why are you using a screen?”

“That’s very weird you left what is permissible ‘ḥlāl’ and you prefer what is prohibited ‘ḥrām’?

The last confession was about a probable seduction from a female relative in the family, the one that received extremely negative, misogynist and hostile comments:

- “My uncle’s wife gives me weird looks, she keeps on touching me when I am at their place, she hugged me more than once and she keeps calling and inviting me over, she is 35 and my uncle is 60, do you understand what might be happening to me?”

To sum up, practicality characterized men’s confessions. Sex was mentioned as a pure physical need. The emotional and romantic aspects of the sexual experience were not mentioned as opposed to the male’s sexual potency. Flirtation, foreplay, helping with household responsibilities were always mentioned as means to an end (intercourse). The male sex voice was mostly positive as opposed to the negative and guilty female expressions of sex, while shame and disgust were only linked to religiously prohibited sexual practices.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to explore the male and female sexual confessions in two anonymous secret social media groups. Men were under-represented due to the rarity of their sexual confessions in comparison with women’s. Generally, this chapter attempted to complement the exploration journey that started in the previous chapter in order to unpack an online sex culture through analyzing online sexual expressions. Observations showed that female members used ‘Stories 1’ secret group as a space where they are free to voice their sexual problems without losing face in their offline lives. I explained how an online female sexual culture was produced through those confessions and discussions, one that subsumes notions of guilt, shame and fear as part of female sexuality and places penis, sexual performance and domination at the heart of male sexuality. I also demonstrated how sexuality is deemed a site of performance guided by an inherent gender power relationship, where both males and females play a role in bed to receive specific impressions of pleasure.
and masculine validation. In addition, I explained how both males and females play roles out of bed to get the desired acceptance from society and the state. Women use the mask of physical virginity, hymen reconstruction surgeries and incomplete sexual relations engagement as ways to resist a societal gender discriminatory culture, while men use aphrodisiacs and extramarital relationships as tools to fix the crisis of masculinity caused by sexual impotence. Lastly, I explored how males and females perceive their sexuality differently and how was that reflected in their sexual problems. Men who were socialized to celebrate their sexuality were more likely to initiate desire and engage in sex as a pleasurable experience unlike women who are socialized to resist and fear their desire, thus were less likely to initiate, or engage in sex as an enjoyable and pleasurable experience.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: A BEGINNING OF AN EXPLORATION JOURNEY

In this thesis and throughout a year and a half of online fieldwork, I attempted to observe, explore, and document a facet of our Egyptian sexual selves in the internet age. I used three anonymous internet platforms (‘An Egyptian Chat Room’, ‘Confessions 1, Stories 2 Group) as a window into our sex culture and practices. I observed online sexual interactions as well as expressed dreams, fantasies, sins, desires, fears, and secrets, in order to explore how the internet is used as a modern safe outlet of this age. I demonstrated how it is used differently as a freedom and resistance tool by both sexes, and how this helped me unpack a parallel sex culture that is in the making. I also engaged notions of masculinity and sexual performances as manifestations of this changing culture. In other words, in pursuit of exploring who we are as sexual subjects, I used the internet as a springboard for investigating how our sexuality intersects with power and anonymity to expose sides of our sex truth. Thus in the following, I will demonstrate how Egyptians sexual interactions through confessions and chat themes offered a rich site of investigating a series of sexo-cultural crises and sexo-gender disparity.

The internet and the Egyptian online sex self

In the age of the internet, in anonymous online platforms where masks fall and suppressed feelings and impressions are safely expressed, a facet of the Egyptian self has found a space to breathe, act and live. A facet that expresses its own sexual voice and translates the imaginations, fears and lusts of the flesh into words and practices that transcend the constraints of the body. This Egyptian online sexual self (OSS) used the internet’s anonymity to cherish unmonitored moments of freedom where laws were resisted, values were challenged, perverse practices found a way to light, and new sexual personas emerged. Thus, irrespective of its nature, whether it was a recreated, embellished or an imagined version of an offline self, its special existence was worth exploration.

Throughout this thesis, Egyptians’ online sexual selves demonstrated high levels of self-disclosure in the three anonymous platforms, turning them into platforms of multiple power struggles. These online platforms witnessed a double-edged struggle for domination: one against the state, religion, and society’s domination, and the other against oneself. In other words, while the men’s OSS was using the internet to acquire power and freedom to
resist the various cultural, religious, and legal regulatory powers, it was also using the same space to experience subordination and submission to the power of desires. Turning the internet into a space of both resistance and submission. Such premises explain why sexuality was expressed in the Egypt chat room in its most profane language and its most primitive nature. It also explains why many of the observed sexual interactions were not always driven by physical needs, but by what transcends the physical and glorifies the subordination to lust; as was narrated by married men who were interested in ‘tasting other women’ for fun, not out of sexual deprivation. Thus, this thesis documents a journey of resisting subordination to the state, religion, and society to acquire the right to the voluntary subordination to lust and desire. It is about a struggle between a state that allegedly uses its various apparatuses to protect virtues and enact laws that protect the community, and the OSS who uses the internet to acquire power to experience true sexual freedom, even if it subsumes a chosen type of submission to desires.

However, within this struggle between the online and offline, and inner and outer regulations, there was a great gender disparity in resistance mechanisms, because in the end this OSS is only a facet of a wider offline identity that is affected by various social processes. To illustrate, while Egypt chat room was filled by both males and females who interact sexually, only males (irrespective of their sexual orientation) were open to declare, talk, and confess their sins and perverse acts. Moreover, although they had the lion’s share of sensitive and perverse confessions, they were always armed with justifications, pride, and a sense of justification. This was unlike women who refused to be interviewed but confessed their sins and perverse desires in anonymous secret groups either to seek help or psychological support. This is coincided with women’s OSS confessions often being linked to shame, guilt, and fear. This remarkable gender disparity has its roots in the same cultural norms that were being resisted. As Foucault argues: “Wherever there is power; there is resistance. This resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. One is always inside power” (Foucault, 1990:95). Hence, both males and females OSS reproduced some cultural and legal gender discriminatory regulations while, at the same time, they were trying to break free from them. For instance, men’s OSS defended their right to all types of sexual pleasure, resisting the heteronormative, the legitimate, and the normal, while they denied women the right to the same free, unregulated sexual pleasure. Even husbands in the chat room who proudly narrated details of their marital infidelity experiences and their perverse sexual encounters in same sex practices, showed no tolerance towards their wives who might just intend to take part in such activities. This means that even in the online space, men perceived sexual freedom as a justified right,
while both men and women equated women’s desire for sexual freedom with licentiousness that is not deserving of tolerance or forgiveness.

Another example, that supports the previous point, is that the same men who attempted to break free from being macho and from men’s absolute sexual domination in their BDSM bottom roles, only allowed women’s sexual domination within the context that serves their pleasures. It seems that men’s acts of resistance were still practiced within the same offline discourse they were trying to oppose.

Therefore, there is an offline gendered dimension of the observed online sexual interactions, one that affected both men’s and women’s mechanisms of resistance. On the one hand, men’s resistance was usually bold, fearless, and justified while on the other hand, women’s resistance was much more secretive and painted with shame and disgrace. However, in my opinion, the common act of resistance between both sexes was seeking a safe judgment-free space to express their sexual thoughts and acts without losing face in their offline lives. Hence, although only men were brave enough to declare it, both sought the freedom to be their desirable true/imaginable selves in the security that the internet provides. Consequently, the key finding of this thesis is that, while Foucault proposed decades ago that psychiatry and prostitution constituted the only two safe outlets of confession where improper sexual feelings could be released (Foucault, 1990), I propose that the internet is a third modern and safe outlet that subsumes the previous two, one that provides a parallel reality. The internet is an interactive space that has changed how we perceive and practice sexuality. It has created new possibilities of sexual satisfaction, affected the creation of new sexual values and needs, and has paved new ways for the impossible to become possible. In that respect, men’s OSS in the chat room stressed the commonality of pornography consumption and the ease of fulfilling sexual desires online without instant human interaction. Thus, users in pursuit of instant pleasure willingly replaced sexual human contact with stimulating imagery on a screen. Moreover, using the internet screen as a pleasure vehicle not only changed how we practice our sexuality but also exposed how our sexual needs and beliefs have been altered. Men’s OSS in the room expressed their need of a modern type of sexual performance from women, one that is harmonious with the general sex culture in the room, which places pleasure as the cornerstone of sexuality, marginalizing all cultural, legal, and religious regulations. Such conceptions were the foundation of many resistance acts performed by many men’s OSS in
the room. All of which resulted in producing a new parallel sex culture that promotes same
sex desires and practices, sex novelty, individuality of sexual pleasure and the dominance
of lust over rules. This online sex culture clearly opposes the values celebrated by the
offline hegemonic culture, which promotes unity and confines sexual practice to the
heteronormative, procreative marital realm.

Along the same lines, Christian men’s OSS in the room used the internet to win a
different battle against their churches, which deny them the right to divorce and force them
into eternal abstinence, which led to desires of adultery online. Only through the internet
was it possible for them to create a parallel reality full of possibilities, where they were not
only capable of engaging in various sexual encounters with other Christian women but also
with Muslim married women. Nonetheless, it is important to note that these online acts are
not separated from their offline lives; for these acts of resistance were secured by
anonymity lest their offline social circles discover the affair resulting in catastrophic
repercussions in their offline lives and reputations.

Moreover, men’s OSS demonstrated a unique type of resistance against an idealized
definition of hegemonic masculinity, a resistance that has its own political, cultural and
economic dimensions. While offline hegemonic masculinity promotes patriarchy, men’s
authority, and subordination of women to men, men’s OSS in the room promoted different modes
of masculinity that resist the normative need of male domination. To further illustrate, both gay
and BDSM men who were interested in the bottom roles showed remarkable interest in
experiencing sexual subordination and humiliation by women or as women. They-
and other straight men- also showed great sexual interest in women who demonstrate signs of
independence, leadership, courage, openness, and rebellion as opposed to historical favoritism of
the ideal of the submissive, timid female model. In fact, men’s OSS resistant acts were a reflection
of the modern era’s new options of domestic, political, and economic partnership with women.
Their needs reflect the role women are now expected to play in the social and economic realm as
an equal partner in many places in the world, who rejects patriarchy, and all forms of control.
Hence, their acts are in fact a reflection of an offline reality, where men’s roles as head of
households have been diminishing gradually due to changes in the gender hierarchy. In addition, it
is logical to assume that it might indicate their need to break free from responsibilities as
patriarchs in light of the economic and political suffocating circumstances.
However, as much as the changed sexual modes of masculinity might indicate the success of women’s rights movements in changing gender hierarchies and fighting men’s historical domination, women in the room seemed not to support, welcome or accept these changed male sexual performances. Here lies the second gender disparity, which was manifested in men’s trials to advocate for their right to experience their sexuality as less dominant actors that women seemed to deny. In their confessions, it was apparent how women disdained men who showed a minimal interest in submissive sexual roles. Consequently, while men showed how modes of masculinity were subject to change, women tended to reinforce traditional masculine practices, reproducing the same normative offline culture which places men’s dominant sexual performance at the heart of a satisfactory sexual encounter.

Another discovery that I have found, as observed between the sexes, apparently men’s OSS were more flexible in accepting both relational and non-relational sex encounters equally, unlike women who highlighted their unequivocal need for a relational, meaningful emotional sexual encounter. In other words, while men highlighted pleasure as their main target of sex, women highlighted the emotional bond, warmth, and sexual exclusivity as meaningful targets, to the extent of equating watching pornography with infidelity. That being said, while men perceived perverse sexual acts, such as wives swaps, threesomes, and other unions as novel experiences, women expressed disdain in most of these requests, except for a minimal acceptance for oral sex.

Moreover, the greatest gender disparity was related to power and sex. On one hand, in an 18 month period of observation, I have never encountered a man who opened up about sexual dysfunction, while FSD was frequently mentioned as the sole reason of marital sexual dissatisfaction. However, women frequently mentioned ED as common problem in their relationships, and were also very open about their FSD. Their expressions were more congruous with the offline statistics about the percentages of ED and FSD in Egypt. Hence, while men’s OSS portrayed embellished versions of themselves (hotter, sexually powerful, handsome, masculine, intelligent, royal, etc…), women were more likely reproducing their true selves, showing their weaknesses at ease. Thus, the argument can be made that some men were using the internet as a pleasure vehicle as a resistance act, to fix a masculinity crisis. The online space served as a great site to escape the struggle between preserving the masculine ego and facing the psychological shame that accompanies sexual dysfunction.
Hence, in the online land of the possible, men highlighted impressions of power, hotness and good looks, while they suppressed indications of sexual dysfunction and other undesirable traits—if any—to achieve a successful sexual encounter, where their masculinity “wins”.

On the other hand, women’s resistance dwelled in their freedom of usage of the internet. In that respect, women were resisting the silenced sex discourse in Egypt, resisting the shame of the need for sexual treatment by using the internet as a free space where their fears, sins, and queries were safely expressed. Thus, while men were resisting the offline culture through recreating only embellished facets of their offline selves, women were resisting the sexually silencing culture for bettering their offline lives: seeking help for their spouses, acquiring information about healthier sexual relations, etc…

Based on this, it is possible to highlight another disparity between the sexes. On one hand, sex for straight men in the thesis was not only a relation of pleasure but also an agency of power, a sport where they are driven by the need to perform to win. Thus, men in pursuit of pleasure and guaranteeing victory engaged in all types of online sexual activities including watching pornography where sexual pleasure is easy and human judgment is absent, or online infidelity with regular women or prostitutes. Therefore, we can propose that for men, their sex culture situates women’s sexual satisfaction within the context of their masculine achievement. On the other hand, although women partially perceive sex as a power relationship where phallic performance is placed at the heart of a satisfactory relationship, they do not consider their sexual satisfaction a “victory”, rather one of their relationship targets, a chance to connect and enjoy being with their spouses. This explains their readiness to acknowledge FSD or ED, thus asking for help and sex counseling more than men. This finding indicates that cultural and social processes can be observed through our sexual interactions.

To conclude this section, men used the internet to idealize their performances, escape and resist their offline realities, where there is disability, dysfunction, dissatisfaction, and limits. Women used the internet to combat sexual treatment shaming and resist the silencing of sex discourse. As Brené Brown argues: “If we can share our story with someone who responds with empathy and understanding, shame can’t survive” (Brown, 2015:112). They freely shared their sexual sins including masturbation, engaging
in premarital sexual encounters, cheating, as well as their sexual fears, weaknesses manifested in their FSD, and lack of proper sexual education. Women negotiated the wider and truer definitions of honor, goodness and self worth through speaking up in the anonymous groups; they acquired power through seeking other women’s solidarity. They also resisted the state’s deliberate negligence of proper sexual education by seeking sexual enlightenment in the groups that helped many avoid, stop, and resist being victims of sexual crimes including FGM, marital rape, etc…

**Resistance is not always positive!**

“Like tiny gods, all that we say and do holds a power so great that any one of us in any given moment can be responsible for the birth of a new civilization or the collapse of our own.”

**A.J. Darkholme, Rise of the Morningstar**

Throughout my journey of exploration, I observed the interplay between the stories of our bodies and our social processes. I observed how power manifests itself in the intersection of our imaginations, desires, and weaknesses with the spaces that carry them to light. This thesis explored the power of the parallel reality of the internet, the power of free self-expression, and the power that dwells in their interactions. It is important to note that this thesis is not about whether or not our online sexual self is true, embellished or imagined. It is rather about a representation that is connected to our offline selves. A self that affects and is affected by offline social processes. Thus, while Egyptians used the internet as the modern third safe outlet to break free from regulatory forces of control and domination, they ended up being subjects of their desires’ domination that affected their offline sexual values, needs and practices, creating circles of resistance.

The Egyptian online sexual self was expressed differently between both sexes, sometimes resisting the offline hegemonic sexual culture, and other times, reproducing some of its unjust values. However, resistance is not always positive, and not, as argued by Althusser, that “desire is always positive”. Desire can sometimes hurt and divide if not practiced within a context of shared principles and values. In this thesis, I have seen how individualistic desire can lead to disappointing acts, where marital infidelity is normalized, individuality is glorified instead of unity and screens are replacing and objectifying our bodies. I have observed how resistance for the sake of pure pleasure can free us from regulatory powers of state, society and religion, but can also enslave us by turning us into subordinates to desire. However, I have also observed how women’s resistance acts
dwelled in their vulnerability, and how their perceived weakness helped to make a positive change in their offline lives.

Moreover, I have found through the lens of sexuality how gender disparities persists, and how social processes manifested in our laws, perceptions, and beliefs affected how both sexes expressed their online sex selves.

Thus in my conclusion, I hope this academic work contributes to an often understudied field, and inspires different state’s apparatuses and socialization entities to pay attention to the importance of providing a balanced national program of sexual education. One that acknowledges sexuality as a vital and important part of our well-being, one that places sexuality within the context of our values and traditions with wisdom. I hope this work enlightens other academics and public officials to conduct more advanced work on the relationship between internet sexuality and offline sexual dissatisfaction, divorce, and the formation of our sexual needs.
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