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# Cairene women: a bachelorette, not a spinster!

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The American University in Cairo

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**CAIRENE WOMEN: A BACHELORETTE, NOT A SPINSTER!**

A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, and Egyptology

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

In Sociology - Anthropology

By **Sandra Abdalla Khalifa**

Under the supervision of **Dr. Nazek Nosseir**

**January/ 2011**

The American University in Cairo


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A Thesis Submitted by


# Sandra Abdalla Khalifa


To the Sociology/Anthropology Program


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Has been approved by


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Chapter One

**INTRODUCTION**

**CAIRENE WOMEN: A BACHELORETTE, NOT A SPINSTER!**

"They ask young girls here [in Egypt] when they are three or four, who would you marry… they implant the idea your only purpose in life is to get married. Even after she goes to school they tell her that a girl's only future is in her husband's home. So what happens when a girl for any reason cannot get married? Should she set fire to herself?"
<u>Awza Atgawez</u>, Ghada Abdel'al

This study proposes that females who remain unmarried until a certain age are to be referred to as "bachelorettes" and not "spinsters". "The bachelorette" is a female who remains single by choice; she is simply an unmarried woman. The word "spinster" is heavily laden with negative and derogatory images, and carries a lot of stigma, that doesn't fit or apply to the "bachelorette" of today. The fact that marriage is based on freedom and consent of both parties makes it essential, and supposedly acceptable, to have "bachelorettes" in every society, hence, they should not be stigmatized and degraded by being called "spinsters", but rather to be referred to as "bachelorettes".

Lara, Marwa, Malak, and Yasmine are the "bachelorettes" of the study and they will be constantly referred to as the "bachelorettes". They offer insights into their bachelorette ideologies and share why they chose to be "bachelorettes", their goals, as well as the pushes and pulls towards marriage. Their profiles are as follows:

Born to a professional family and having two siblings, Lara is born in 1963, she was given a high quality education in Economics from the most prestigious liberal arts university in Cairo, after spending her whole childhood and youth years in

Kuwait studying in an international British school. After graduation she pursued a career in finance until she reached the highest position in the field business. She has two master degrees and right now she is dedicated to fitness and translation.

Marwa was born in 1981, she is a civil engineer, graduated from one of the national universities, went to a French school, and takes pride in wearing the Islamic headscarf. She lived in Algeria for two years and went to one of the international French schools, which had a great influence on her style of life. She works in the field of petroleum in one of the big British companies in a senior post. Moreover, she gives workshops in photo reading and business writing. After working from 9 to 5, she pursues extracurricular activities mainly in the family circle and with non-governmental organizations.

Malak was born in 1979; she has a bachelor degree in political Science and a Masters degree in development from a reputable and multicultural liberal arts university in Cairo. She currently holds a prestigious and influential post in one of the strong development, research, and policymaking institutions in Cairo, hoping to start her own consultancy firm and get her PhDs in the future. Malak is an independent thinker who has a clear idea of what she wants in life, and is very articulate and a deep thinker of her life and goals.

Yasmine was born in 1973, she is living in Cairo, graduated from the Faculty of Arts, working in the field of media and advertising in an executive position, in a reputable company. Her job and bubbly character allow her a wide base of social networks and a highly active social agenda, as well as she is interested in the arts, dance, adventure and sports. Moreover, She is applying to be a radio shows hostess and a cartoon vocalist. Yasmine grew up in Kuwait with her parents and siblings;

she is the youngest of three. Her parents are still in Kuwait and married, her brother and sister are also married with children. Yasmine is a bachelorette living alone in Cairo.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study attempts to answer questions like why change the term spinster to bachelorette? What sorts of women choose to be bachelorettes? What are the social correlations of their decisions? Do bachelorettes regard their situation as temporary or permanent? Is the "spinster" stereotype valid? Does being a "bachelorette" destine these females to be less human developed than their married counterparts? Is the "bachelorette" less fulfilled in her "femaleness", in other words, does she feel less of a female without a man and children?

**RESERCH OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this study is to propose that the word "spinster" or " 'anes" is to be substituted with the word "bachelorette", and present a real and objective examples of real life "bachelorettes" to counterfeit the existent stereotypes. Second, to offer a foundation and a reference for other related studies, and to pave the way to more studies on the topic of "bachelorettes", marriage or gender relations and sexuality, giving voice to bachelorettes, to speak for themselves. Third, to offer an objective, value free study of  "bachelorette-hood" among females, highlighting the reasons that lead to being a "bachelorette". Last but not least it clarifies that "bachelorette-hood" is a choice, and that "bachelorette-hood" among women is a response to sources of discontent.

**THEORY**

Females and males have a set of social norms of behavior that they are socialized into from early childhood; these rules of behavior are based on their gender. Society expects females and males to adhere to these norms, for they are considered the "norm", these set of expected behavior are referred to as gender roles, any deviance from the gender roles leads to gender stereotyping and stigma. The gender role becomes the habitus of the "bachelorette", which becomes conflicting with her individuality and choices, and in which she is deprived of her agency over her identity by being stereotyped and stigmatized as a "spinster". However, her possession and control of different kinds of capital render her authority and power to regain that agency, entering into a negotiation to reshape gender roles, her identity as a "bachelorette" and the hegemonic masculinity.

Agency is the capacity of the individual to make free choices and act autonomously, one's agency is determined by one's ability to act on one's will; this ability is affected by one's beliefs and perceptions, which one has formed throughout one's life and experiences, held by society and embedded in the social structure(Wacquant, 2006:7). . On the other hand, structure refers to the factors that limit and influence the choices of the individuals, and these factors are religion, culture, social class, customs, education, and ethnicity (Wacquant, 2006:10) . This study will best be explored under the light of Bourdieu's Habitus and Capital from his *Habitus and Field Theory*, and Rae Lesser Blumberg's *Gender Stratification Theory.* Habitus is the individuals' perception, dispositions, and common sense that are used to act. Capital is crucial to the construction of social space, and its important to workout the correct hierarchy of different forms of capital, for capital has various forms of power held by agents. The different forms of capital are economic wealth,

social capital which is social connections and networks, corporeal which is physical attractiveness, as well as academic and linguistic. Agents acquire different forms of capital through the accumulation of various forms capital that are proportionate to their position in the social order.

Rae Lesser Blumberg developed a theory on the premise that the degree of control that women have over economic resources in relation to men the more political, social, and ideological power they have, as well as more authority in the household and their personal lives. Blumberg developed her theory based on a vast body of empirical data of diverse society types, ranging from hunter and gatherer societies, through horticultural, agrarian and industrial societies, explaining women's' position in relation to men in all types of societies, from the earliest to the most complex societies of our time.

**METHODOLOGY**

The qualitative method of in-depth interviews is used for data gathering. The qualitative approach best fits the purpose of this study because it is an approach that explores how people understand and interpret their experiences. It is also an exploratory method that accepts subjectivity and focuses on samples that are representative of the issue instead of the whole population. This research focuses on 4 bachelorettes, Lara, Marwa, Malak, and Yasmine who are Cairene and from the age group of 29 to 47 years. They are Egyptian, educated, Muslim and belong to the upper middle class. The profiles of the bachelorettes of this study are as follows:

POPULATION

According to the 2006 consensus, the population of Egyptians in Egypt is approximately 72.6 million; 35,478,177 million are females, representing 48.8 % of the population. 37,100,853 million persons are males, representing 51.12% of the population. In Cairo there are 7,787,000 million, representing 10.73% of the population of Egypt, 5,476,704 million persons have bachelor degrees or higher (CAPMAS).

SAMPLING

This study is exploratory in nature; it attempts to know the Caireane "bachelorettes", and since it is almost impossible to identify all the "bachelorettes" in Cairo for this study non-probability sampling best fits, which includes three methods that are specifically relevant and they are purposive, snowball, and convenience sampling; the three methods will be used interchangeably. Purposive sampling is the selection of elements and informants based on the researcher's judgment to facilitate the investigation (Adler & Clark, 2008: 121). This particularly applies to the fact that this study is confined to urban females who have never been married before. Snowball sampling is using some members of the group to identify other members Snowball sampling provides a concentrated understanding of a subject that has been concealed by ignorance (Adler & Clark, 2008:122). Convenience sampling allows the researcher to choose a group of people that are readily accessible to, and convenient for the researcher (Adler & Clark, 2008: 122), this particularly applies to the initial criteria for choosing informants, gender, age, class, marital status, social background, education and faith.

SUBJECTS

All the subjects for the study belong to the upper-middle class. All live and socialize in upper middle class neighborhoods, travel abroad, completed their education in private costly schools, are bachelor and master degree holders. They are bilingual and multi-lingual; own luxurious cars and can afford many luxuries. Their income, family ties, neighborhoods where they live, education and professional careers, allow them an exposure to cosmopolitan life styles that permit a kind of social freedom, social mobility, and relative independence regarding finances and choices.

**THE INSTRUMENTS**

INTERVIEWS

"The validity of a great deal of what we believe to be true about human beings and the way we relate to one another hinges on the validity of the interview as a methodological strategy" (Briggs ,1986:67)

The field data of this study are based on in-depth person-centered interviews with 4 bachelorettes that consist of open and closed ended questions, but mostly of open ended questions. Interviews allow for the understanding of the subject's present, past and future outlook; that is, their lives as they see, interpret and experience it. Interviews elicit behaviors that are beyond determined roles, which enable one to locate and connect the underlying and existing patterns in the subjects' thoughts, behaviors and choices, which make the study more deep, meaningful and useful.

In depth person-centered interviews engage the subjects as 'respondents'; hence as a part of a systematic study and observation of themselves, allowing one to study how they behave in the interview setting, and how they react and respond to

self-presentation. In-depth person centered interviews are most relevant to studies that require complex accounts of behavior and narratives, and a mixture of open and closed ended questions are ideal to achieve that. Open ended questions can be employed to obtain information about behavior for they allow the respondents to use their own words, as well as express, analyze, narrate and reminisce, which are all crucial to the research. Closed ended questions are important to be asked when very specific answers are required, which assist in directing the interview questions and the final reflections. In depth interviews provide respondents with immediate psychological reward, they feel how deeply meaningful the interview is and that the study will be a reference to others.

INTERVIEW STRUCTURE

The interviews are semi-structured; questions are designed ahead of time but were modified as appropriate for each informant. The interviews started with a list of questions and a list of topics to be covered supplemented with a set of closed ended questions, probes and specifically tailored questions to each informant.

DATA RECORDING

Recording data is one of the most crucial steps in the research. It is the basis for a valid and complete analysis; therefore, all the interviews data were tape-recorded and were transcribed with selection, focusing on relevant issues. Substantive field notes have been kept for continuous and systematic recording of situations, events and conversations, as well methodological notes and journal entries containing one's personal reflections on the fieldwork (Burgess,1984: 167,172).

DATA PRESENTATION

The narratives of the subjects are presented in the form of separate narrative case studies, which present the investigated phenomenon within its real-life context, allowing for the deciphering of the subject's deeper causes behind choices and decisions. Each case is a single case, each conclusion from each case contributes to the whole study, each case remains separate entirely.

VALIDITY

According to Adler & Roger "Validity refers to how well a measurement strategy taps what it intends to measure". Predictive validity is particularly relevant to this study, for it allows one to create a measurement scheme and measure it with variable criteria that it should predict. In the case of this study the criteria is certain behaviors and conditions that are expected to lead to being a bachelorette, why the word spinster is used and why we need to change it?

ETHICS

All information that concerns the informants is held confidential, unless the interviewees waive that right. All recorded and written records as well as all personal information, such as names, address, emails, phone numbers and any other clear references that reveal the subjects' identities are kept discrete. Written accounts are matched with what the interviewee's see and feel as their realities.

Findings are classified and analyzed; the findings clarify why it is a "bachelorette" not a "spinster", why she is a pioneer, and clarify the underlying factors that lead to the increasing number of bachelorettes. Moreover, it gave insight to what the future marriage will be like.

This study is limited in the number of cases and to one class, gender and faith. Further studies should be done to compare findings to other classes, gender and religions, in Egypt as well as to other countries.

Chapter 2

## **"BACHELORETTE" NOT "SPINSTER"**

"Bachelorette" according to *Dictionary Reference.com* "bachelorette" means, "a young unmarried professional woman, is derived from the word bachelor, which means an unmarried man. ". The word "bachelorette" is not available in academic dictionaries, public discourse, or the media. "Bachelorette" is by no means a popular or a commonly used word, and is faintly present in a few recent popular novels and magazine interviews. However, it is often used in the media and many groups in society when a woman is getting married, she is a "bachelorette" a few days before her wedding day. It is in "bachelorette parties" that we hear and see the word "bachelorette" on T-shirts, banners, paper cups and plates, on things that are only worn and used on the "bachelorette" night. It is only one night before her wedding that a woman is addressed as a "bachelorette", and actually celebrates it and takes great pride in it!

In the Arabic language, the word "bachelorette" means " 'azba' ", a word rarely used, as well. So rare that in the early stages of the research one thought that there is no word equivalent to "bachelorette" that exists in the Arabic language, however, the term existed in the Arabic language. According to Lekhdir Treki, the term " 'azba' " is a term derived from nature, signifying purity, cleanliness and beauty. He further discusses that the term has positive and feminine connotations, it symbolizes ripe femininity, readiness for sexual and marital encounters, and is a pre-requisite to motherhood, whish is the most noble of roles (www.diwanalarab.com Aug 10).

The American Heritage College Dictionary defines "spinster" as "a single woman and a person whose occupation is spinning" It also defines single as " not

accompanied by other or others; solitary, unmarried, lacking a partner, relating to unmarried state, relating to celibacy". Unlike the word "bachelorette", the word "spinster" is explicitly present in the public discourse, in dictionaries, scholarly books and articles, magazines, movies, and talk shows. Historically, the "spinster" was a woman who lost her loved one to death. The term "spinster" came into common use during the early 19th century when the "thankless task of spinning cloth has been pushed off to unmarried women" (Mustard: 2000, 1).

The Arabic word for "spinster" is " 'anes", there are two definitions for the word "'anes", the first is the linguistic definition, which means a male or female who passed a certain age without ever being married, and the second is the popular definition " 'anes", that is a female who lives longer than she is "expected" to with her family without ever being married (http://arb3.maktoob.com), in popular belief the word "'anes" is also synonymous with the word "bayra", however the word "bayra" is not used among the educated of the upper and upper middle class. Moreover, El shah for Language and Science, Gomhour El Logha, and El Wagiz Arabic dictionary define it as a "callous she-camel, a woman who has stayed unmarried and lives at her family's home long after puberty".

Dr 'Azza Karim head of the family department in the National Institute for Social and Forensic Studies in Cairo, argues that the term " 'anes" is a strictly social term and not a scientific one, hence it is a construct that is fluid, changeable and is entirely dependent on social and cultural variables, it is adaptable to changes in social conditions, as well as modernity and other economic and political variables " 'anes" is age defined, the girl that would be called " 'anes" would be the female who has never married beyond the age that society or culture specify as "normal" and/or "natural"

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for a female to marry, that age is a construct and again changes with social variables, such as the economy, education and the political agenda (http://arb3.maktoob.com). According to Dr 'Azza, the " 'anes" differs from one society, culture or even family to another, in rural areas a female who reaches 25 years of age and is never married is considered " 'anes", in urban areas she can reach the age of 30 of 33 years, in Western societies females won't be regarded as " 'anes" or "spinsters" until the reach the age of 40 years old (http://arb3.maktoob.com).

Sheikh Mansour Saleh Al Manhali, head of the A'lw'aaz & A'l Irshad Insitute in U.A.E, states that the term " 'anes" is a strictly modern term, it resulted from the modern and materialistic times of today where there is a need to quantify everything around money and age, but in Islam there is nothing such as an appropriate or inappropriate age for marriage, for Islam never set an age for marriage. He further discusses that prophet Mohamed (PBUH) married Khadija (PBUH) who is 15 years older than him (http://arb3.maktoob.com).

The word " 'anes" is originally applicable to females and males who remained unmarried for longer than what is socially expected of them, but popular beliefs and tradition chose to attach the word " 'anes" to the females and not the males.

According to Mustrard the "spinster" is a "stereotype that served to embrace and isolate a group of women of vastly different dispositions, talents, situations, but whose common bond-never having become half of a pair-was enough to throw into question the rules and presumed priorities on which society was founded" (Mustard: 200, 2). The contemporary uses of the word spinster invokes mental images of a middle aged woman who is alone, depressed, childless and is longing to be "normal" like the rest of the women who are married. She also portrayed as usually alone or

with her extended family, compartmentalized as ill-fitting dressed, pail and plain, libido-less, helpless and can't have a meaningful public conversation, socially constipated and her presence just screams "spinster". Mustard further explains that there are several psychological characteristics associated with the spinster stereotype, which help define the mental images associated with the spinster that we call upon when meeting one in real life or even in film.  Some of these common characteristics are, abnormal, pitiful, unfulfilled, and suspect. According to Mustard, marriage and motherhood are considered to be a natural and normal part of a woman's life. Since spinsters are not married and don't have children they are considered abnormal. Something must be seriously wrong with a woman who doesn't get married and have children, or even does not want to. It is considered abnormal for a woman to reject a role that has been prescribed to her by the society; it is abnormal for her to violate the norm. Spinsters are viewed to be on the periphery of society "close but can't join", hence the "logical" conclusion that they are unfulfilled. It is thought that they must be unhappy without a husband and children; therefore, they become objects of pity of society.  It is thought that spinsters don't have what normal women have, a husband and children, and she must be in complete search and desperation for romance for a man and children to share her dull and lonely life, so she can get a sense of what life is really like. It is considered suspicious when a person remains in one stage too long, like a spinster being in a state of prolonged singleness and virginity (Mustard:200, 6).

Furthermore, married women fear the "spinster", thinking that she is a threat to their families, and she is after taking men from their families, because she is desperate and probably troubled by her prolonged singleness. She is considered a societal and a personal threat to the "wife".

**LANGUAGE AND THE "SPINSTER"**

The definitions above are inherent with linguistic asymmetry that exits between never married females and males. This asymmetry is an indication of linguistic discrimination that indicates gender discrimination, which is important to acknowledge while assessing female issues in general. The linguistic variations among genders generate variations and the social structure, and are undeniable precursor of social rules that are unwritten but deeply affects language, social structure, thinking and behavior. The female who never married is called "spinster" or " 'anes", which defines women by her sexuality, and the male who never married is "bachelor" or "azeb", which defines a man as generic. The mechanisms through which language influences human beings and societies is beyond the scope of this study, however, an awareness of how language majorly influences our thinking, behavior as well as choices, and its importance in the analysis of social relations is a first step to combat and reduce negativity, stigma and discrimination against never married females. This awareness can be made possible through discourse analysis of how the definition of "spinster" is used to represent the never married female.

**DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

According to Iulia, discourse analysis is important because it highlights how language impacts, contributes and reproduces social relations and structures, for through language we can know power at the level of the discourse, and on the discourse. It is through language that the "bachelorette" is stereotyped, as "spinster", language, is the vehicle that transports societal norms, stereotypes and condemnations. Discourse is shaped by power, and it is the battlefield of power relations and struggles between different polarities. The "spinster" label and construct is societies way of imposing

power and denying the "bachelorettes'" agency, and the coining of the term "bachelorette" is a reclaim and negotiation of that lost power and agency. Society and culture compose the discourse and at the same time are linked and influenced by the discourse. Discourse is a form of social behavior and social practice (Grad, 2006: 95).

According Iulia, Pauwel mentions that there is linguistic sexism and asymmetry, which is an "international phenomenon" that is present in several common features to all languages regarding the representation of men and women despite the differences between languages, this asymmetry is manifested in the following:

-Men are the norm, the benchmark for all human beings

-Women's' linguistic representation is always asymmetrical in comparison to men.

-Terms used to refer to women are gender specific, whereas term referring to men is gender specific and generic

-In the case of describing, "bachelorette-hood" the feminine terms are negative, loaded with negative connotation such as in the case of the word "spinster", while the masculine is positive such as in the case of eth word "bachelor".

The asymmetry is clearly manifested in the word "bachelor" and "spinster", for they both technically have the same definition, a person who is not married. Yet, the term "bachelor" doesn't have negative connotations, and it is a compliment sometimes, it communicates eligibility, ability and willingness, which are all positive, but the negative connotations and stigma inherit in the word "spinster" cannot be denied. According to Grad, Robin Lakoff gives an example of two sentences in order to demonstrate the difference between the words "spinster" and "bachelor": "Mary

hopes to meet an eligible bachelor" and "Fred hopes to meet an eligible spinster", the last sentence proves that it is abnormal to associate the word eligible with "spinster". The above statements connote that a "bachelor" chooses not to get married, it is an utter undoubted choice, but the "spinster" doesn't have the chance or possibility to get married. Another form of asymmetry is in the sexualizing of females is inherit in the addressing of women "Mrs." And "Miss", which an obligation of a declaration of not marital status but also sexual availability and a question of virginity, in the case of the Middle East. The addressing for men is "Mr." irrespective of their marital status. This asymmetry in defining words of never married females and males and their addressing titles are a testimony of the fact that men are the ones who have the power in naming and defining language, hence discourse (Grad, 2006: 98).

Discourse is a very important and central part of the media, for the media is the medium where language and society interplay. Discourse and language feed the media, and the media feeds thoughts, choices and actions, social relations and culture, which plays an undeniable role in constructing and shaping the "spinsterhood" stereotype

**MEDIA & GENDER REPRESENTATION**

The Media represents (re-presents), in other words it changes, re interprets, and constructs meaning about our worlds. If we take the words "male" and "female" they are just biological classifications until we start thinking about "masculine" and "feminine" characteristics, which are constructs, each category hold specific connotations of what is "natural behavior" for each gender, constructed by society as a certain 'truth' about what it is "right" for a female or male, leading to gender roles.

Gender roles are the roles that males and females are meant to behave in specific, recognizable, and stereotypical ways.

The media has played an undeniable role in constructing and embedding the current image and stigma of the "spinster" and "spinsterhood". There are more than ample media accounts that show stereotypical representation, bias and subjectivity against never married females. The Egyptian media in general, and the Arab media in particular still refer to "bachelorettes" as "spinsters" or " 'awanes". The negative image of the "spinster" is present in many of the popular Egyptian films, and many of the written media. The nature of that representation of the "spinster" is varied, some are advocates they call for more fair, positive and objective representation, some are attackers they call for retreat of women to the private arena and become more docile and domesticated. However, there are more positive voices, female and male that are emerging and counterfeiting the negative stigma of the "spinster", and the social maneuvers that attempt to degrade and misrepresent "bachelorettes" in particular and women in general. Almost the entire dominate discourse in the Egyptian media still regards "bachelorette-hood" in particular and "singlehood" as a problem, some will assume powerlessness and render it to fate, and other take full responsibility and blame it on the economic, political, and feminist endeavors, but hardly as a completely conscious and personal choice.

The Egyptian film industry has historically constructed the image of the spinster through three stereotypes: the "spinster" who is a joker, typified by the actress Zenat Sidky in the movie *Where is my life? or Ayna Omry?*, or as a social and economic burden on her family because she is staying at home and is unmarried as played Soad Hosni in *Ahl El Qema*, or a pitiful woman who is a disgrace played by Sanaa Gamil in *Bedayia We Nehaya*.

The Arabic film *Meraty Mudir 'Am* produces in 1960s is a comedy starring Salah

Zulfikar and Shadia. Zulfikar plays the role of an employee whose boss is his wife,

the movie end with hos acceptance of her superiority, but during the film she was

portrayed is devoid of feminine qualities. The Egyptian film is still disseminating this

image; the image of the woman who is a professional and busy pursuing a career is

blamed for all and any family and conjugal misfortune. In the film *Istiqalat Alemat*

*Zarra* starring Soheir El Bably playing the role of a respected nuclear physicist who

quit her job that she was successful at, because she discovered she is pregnant, and

felt that she needs to rethink her priorities and consequently starts neglecting and

losing interest in her job. This portrayal of professional women in the media derives

its legitimacy by referencing the "essentialist arguments" (Guenan & Wassif 199:34)

of the biological nature of women, and that they are off spring bearers, fragile.

Contemporary TV and written media are starting to positively counterfeit that

mis-representation of bachelorettes. Ghada Abdel Aal in her book *Awaza Atgwes* or *I*

*want to be a Bride* and Abeer Soliman in her book *Yawmeyat Anes or the Daily*

*Jounral of a Spinster* attempt to depict the current issues of bachelorettes and offer

real life challenge to the "spinsterhood" constructed stigma.

According to Guenena and Wassif, the media representation of the role of

women is indicative of their social reality, the norms and values that are embedded in

the Egyptian society. Women are always presented as wives, mothers, daughters,

mentally and physically fragile in need of protection, and guidance, hence, in need of

a man, because men are portrayed as wise, knowledgeable and strong, and to get what

she "needs" from him, she has to submit to male authority, that of a father, husband,

brother or uncle. If the women resents or rebels against this submission by attaining

success and independence she is referred to and treated as deviant. The accusation of

deviance stems from a culture that is skeptical about women's raising and success in male dominated planes. The media portrays working women as masculine, who deprive their husbands of "womanly" care, tenderness and warmth, and that a woman who is not working will give.

Ghada Abdel Aal, a 32-year-old "bachelorette", pharmacist, and author of a recent best seller book and TV series *Awza Atgwez, or I want to be a Bride*, which comically addresses her thoughts and feelings of each failed marriage proposal. The author declares that she speaks for her self and for the 15 million female between the ages of 25-35 in Egypt, who are pressured by society and their families everyday to marry everyday when it is completely out of their hands. Ghada Abdel Aal successfully and humorously depicts the turmoil that many Egyptians girls go through, not only because of the failed marriage proposals but also because of cultural notions that surround the whole culture and institution of marriage, "spinsterhood" and society.

Abber Soliman in her book *Yawmeyat Anes or the Daily Journal of a Spinster* also speaks of her "spinsterhood" humorously, mocking society, masculinity, virginity and the simplistic ways of society in dealing with marriage, sexuality, and "bachelorette-hood".

Ghada also advocates the elimination of the word "spinster", because it is inaccurate, painful, and insensitive, backing up her argumenst by enlisting all the names of the attractive Arab and Egyptian female celebrities such as Laila Olwi, Anoushka, and Latifa who are 40 years of age or above and never been married, arguing that no one heard any one calling them "spinsters" and if they did they just won't fit the stereotype. Abeer on the contrary uses the word "spinster" to refer to

herself and her "spinster" friends, her opening chapter *Anes We Eah Yaani!!* or

*Spinster, So What!!* declaring that it means nothing to her, she is a "spinster" and

doesn't care. The fact that Ghada's book *Awza Atgwez, or I want to be a Bride* is

turned into TV series, broadcasted in Ramadan 2010, the month with the highest

viewer rates in the year, and acted by the best actresses and actors in the Egyptian

film industry, is a declaration of an openness for a discourse for change, objectivity,

hence an attempt to accept and integrate the "bachelorette" identity.

Although the word spinster or " 'anes" is widely used in the media and the public

discourse, it is not as widely used in private conversations anymore. Many are

becoming culturally sensitive because the number of bachelorettes is increasing,

everyone knows or is related to one or more that are dearly cared about, hence, The

negativity embedded in that word is becoming personal. However, the state of

"spinsterhood" remains a considerable unspoken fear for many. Many would

sympathize and defend the bachelorette, but they secretly wish to not be one, as the

pressure, stigma and shame in being a "spinster" presists.

**CONCLUSION**

According to Metwally, the struggle for women in general to be viewed,

treated and portrayed fairly and objectively has been going on for decades on end, and

although there are positive shifts in the perception of the never married females, there

is still discomfort around her, because when the "spinster" steps out of her

constructed image she is independent and successful, which is still another source of

discomfort and suspicion. The media in all its forms still condemns this celebration of

independence as a consequence of abnormality and that if there is no man or child,

there is no fulfillment, which indirectly puts the "bachelorette" back in stigma. Using

the word "bachelorette" instead of "spinster" to describe a never married female will not be the end of her discrimination or stigma, but it is at least a change of one of the negative aspects that surround the never married female.

There have always been males who turned 40 years of age or more without ever being married, one didn't come across any material that indicate a media hype or stigma around that, no sign of a male "spinster" or " 'anes", he was always a bachelor and remains one!

Stereotyping the professional and the single woman by the media was very forceful, but the "bachelorettes" didn't identify or relate to these images, however, their efforts, creativity and interaction with society are influenced and hampered by these stereotypes. The "bachelorettes" of this study do not view themselves as "spinsters". Lara tells us that her family and friends " are a very moderate family, from both sides", and that all her close friends understand her situation. Yet, she does feel a little bit of stigma and negative labels from society, and she finds it very difficult to explain to everyone why she is a bachelorette and why she thinks that way. She further explains, " It is a lot of work, sometimes I feel like a stranger at home, but I learned that when one accepts oneself, people won't matter and they might come around". Lara is happy, content and enjoying herself as she has peace and accepts her status. Malak also says,"I need to get back into the mind frame that single is good, like I used to feel, because there are two things people have no control over, money and marriage, only God can control them.  I am currently nowhere near content that I am a bachelorette at 32 years old, and that is because I really miss my ex. However, I need to remind myself that keeping a relationship is a lot of work. Moreover, Egyptian men want the woman to succumb to their opinions, and control as they have double standards. I am open to all options, foreigners or not as long as they are Muslims, and not just Muslims on paper, believers in

Islam. I love my work and I am good at it, I want to do something that will help human beings.I want to get my PhD degree; I will keep on pursuing that, and in relationships, I am going to start all over again, that is my plan!"

Chapter 3

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMWORK & THEORY**

This study will be best analyzed under the light of Pierre Bourdieu's concepts habitus and capital from his theory Habitus and Field, as well as Blumberg's Gender Stratification Theory. Bourdieu's Habitus will assist in explaining how the the socialization of gender roles can become a source of conflict and hindrance to individual choice, such as the in the case of the "bachelorette", who is labeled as a "spinster" because she does not conform to the gender role prescribed by the Egyptian society. Bourdieu's concept of capital and Blumberg's Gender Stratification Theory explain how different types of capital, especially economic capital can empower the "bachelorette" giving her the agency over her identity that she was denied when called a "spinster".

The social world is liable to two ways of reading, structuralist and constructivist readings. The structuralist reading seeks "invisible relational patterns operating behind the backs of agents", which is objectivism; on the other hand the constructivist reading seeks "the common sense, perceptions and actions of the individual, which is subjectivism" (Wacquant, 2006:4). Thus, objectivism interprets social reality as a set of forces and relations that are beyond the consciousness and control of the individual, and subjectivism interprets social reality as the interpretation of numerous acts, which people use to collectively construct meaningful interactions. The objectivist lens disregards the subjective, which is the expression and practices that allow the agent to conserve or transform the objectivist reality, hence, constraining the agent. The deeply rooted tension between objectivism and subjectivism leads to the tension between agency and structure.

**AGENCY & STRUCTURE**

The debate of the primacy of either agency or structure over human behavior is highly contested. Agency is the capacity of the individual to make free choices and act autonomously, one's agency is determined by one's ability to act on one's will; this ability is affected by one's beliefs and perceptions, which one has formed throughout one's life and experiences, and which are also held and inflicted by society and embedded in the social structure. On the other hand, structure refers to the factors that limit and influence the choices of the individuals, and these factors are religion, culture, social class, customs, education, and ethnicity.

Theoretical systems argue for the primacy of structure over agency, explaining that the structure is the most essential ingredient to the survival of society, because society is emergent and its emergent aspects need a scientific structure to deal with it. Methodological holism theories argue that actors are socialized and embedded into the social structure and institutions that shape, enable and/or constrain the individual's dispositions and capacity for action, that being said, the structure is the most important. On the other hand, other theories that advocate the primacy of the human agency over structure, because the power that lies in the individuals as agents to construct and reconstruct reality. Methodological individualism theories argue that individuals are central to the social system and the social structure is a result and a consequence of individual actions and activities. Modern social theorists like Bourdieu attempt to find a point of balance between the two previously mentioned stances regarding agency and structure, a point were agency and structure, meet as two forces that compliment each other. This point is called the habitus.

**HABITUS**

Habitus is developed from Bourdieu's habitus and field theory; Habitus is the individuals' perception, dispositions, and common sense that are used to act. It is the enduring, exchangeable dispositions through which individuals preserve, assess and act in the world; habitus is acquired through repetitive exposure to specific social contexts, conditions, constraints, conditionings, and possibilities. In other words, habitus is a "set of structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (Pothegemony, 2007:1). Thus, habitus is embodied, unconscious and generative. It is embodied because it signifies how we bring a bodily system of expressions and dispositions to the world, such as our facial expressions and how we walk, as well as a set of subjective experiences. It is unconscious because the habitus characteristics are enacted without thinking, habitually, unthinkingly, a "modus operandi", and the individual has no control over it. Habitus is generative because it engenders limitations to practices in various fields these limitations generate other practices that generate other practices, forming a circle of agency and structure. Thus, habitus is a principal of social continuity, for by preserving, incarnating, and exporting social order across time and space, social continuity is ensured, but habitus can be modified and innovated in that process if it encounters any discrepancy or conflict, intra-habitus tensions, and incongruence's between dispositions and positions.

In this study, habitus is the gender role, the shared expectation of what is expected of a female. The socialization for that role starts from childhood with the family and continues into adulthood through institutions like education, curriculum, society, media, religion and politics; transmitted via peers, family, apprenticeship in several social spaces such as work. The gender role habitus indicates that females and

males have to behave in ways that are appropriate to their sex role. Women are expected to be passive, submissive, subtle and soft, she is expected to marry and have children, even if she is successful academically or professionally, it is still widely held that a woman's most aspired and "natural" role is to be "feminine", hence a wife and a mother, and she gets esteemed for it. The "bachelorette's" choice to remain single reflects an intellectual advancement and autonomy that defies the gender role habitus that works for the service of the hegemonic masculinity. Her "bachelorette-hood is regarded as "unnatural" and a defiance to the hegemonic discourse of the gender role habitus.

**MARRIAGE IN EGYPT**

The Egyptian society is organized around notions that females and males are different yet complimentary, they both have different natures, inclinations, tendencies and talents, and this difference is clearly emphasized in the socialization process and the definition of gender roles within the family. Women are believed to be more and better suited for remaining within the family; her primary place is the private sphere, caring for the home, children and husband. Marriage in the Egyptian society in the heart of the contemporary social life, it is point for enormous change in lives of females and males, followed by giving birth.

The division of labor is defined by gender as well as the Egyptian cultural practice and traditions, and the legal rights of wives and husbands are defined be the constitution, which is based of Islamic law. A Muslim marriage holds the husband responsible for fully supporting his wife and family, and gives the wife complete freedom of ownership and control of property and finances, in return it also gives the husband the right to control his wife's decisions, and mobility, meaning he has the

right to ban her from work and determine where she goes and whom she sees. Females are expected to be submissive, compromising and sensitive, or at least to pretend to be in the presence of men. Men are expected to be the controllers, dominators and breadwinners, and his main place is in the public sphere. For the female, education, career and success are not fully acceptable or celebrated, if she doesn't marry and have children, or at least want to. Her success and independence will be held against her, and it will be a curse not a blessing, for it will be viewed as the cause of deviant behavior, defying the "female" prescribed identity, and it is viewed as "unnatural" and masculine as well.

Thus, habitus of the gender role encourages females to remain invested in the "home" and no matter what she achieves she needs to have a house, a husband, and children to maintain her allegiance to society and adherence to her gender role. Lara, Malak, Yasmine and Marwa, the bachelorettes of this study, accept and embrace the habitus of the female gender role of a wife a mother as well as that of the "bachelorette".

Gender roles among many Egyptians are informed, perpetuated, and diffused by the religious and cultural norms that constantly advocate the importance of the family as a social structure and the importance of the female to fulfill her primary role in creating, upholding and maintaining that family. Among many Muslims in Egypt, gender roles derive their legitimacy from the Qur'an the primary source for Islamic belief, the hadith which secondary after the Quran, and the four Islamic schools and jurisdiction. The Quran mentions in several passages the unique characteristics of females, their nature, rights, and entitlement, and how they should be treated.

THE VERSES:

"O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your lord Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from the twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Be careful of your duty toward Allah in Whom ye claim (your rights) of one another" (Qur'an 4:1).

Some interpreters and individuals use this verse as evidence that women and men are considered and created equal in Islam, others however, point to another verse in the Qur'an to demonstrate the opposite, which is as follows:

"Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (to support women). So good women are the obedient" (Qur'an 4:34).

Contemporary scholarship has proven that the verses from the Qur'an are used when it comes to situations and conditions that concern women, for enforcing gender roles and sexuality (Sheriff, The international Encyclopedia of Sexulaity, Egypt). Although the Qur'an is central to the Islamic belief, the hadiths and Islamic jurisdiction are secondary to it, the Egyptian society has its own tradition and cultures that incorporated into the gender role habitus. The uses of the verses in the Qur'an and hadiths are considered empirical data in regards to the explanation for the gender role habitus, for they are often manipulated and selectively used in particular situations in order to legitimize gender hierarchy, hence the primacy of males over females. . The Qur'an never mentions any details regarding gender roles; it only presents guidelines through which the gender roles are in constant negotiation (Sheriff, The international Encyclopedia of Sexulaity, Egypt).

According to Islamic belief, marriage is the only accepted institution for sexual relations, having children and creating a family. It is a very powerful and sacred institution that offers inner peace and tranquility, enhances chastity and fidelity, as well as procreation for the longevity of the human kind to worship the Creator.  All Quranic verses, Prophetic sayings (hadith), and Islamic jurisprudence agree that marriage is most preferable condition for individuals, and is highly recommended but not obligatory, except in the case of failing to preserve chastity. It is stated in the Quran that individuals have the utter choice to marry or not, it is their right to not marry, it is clearly better for men and women to marry, but if one wishes to not to, they are to be chaste. In the prophetic hadiths prophet Mohammed says, " Do not make your daughters marry without their permission". There is a famous popular Islamic saying that goes "marriage is half the religion", indicating how important marriage is, that it constitutes half of the Islamic belief, the other half is the five pillars, and the rituals.

 It is also believed that According to Islam, sexual relations only belong in marriage, marriage is the only institution that can maintain a well structured and preserved, moral and sexually healthy society, thus, the female gender role within the family has tremendous social and political significance. Also, within many families in Egypt, the cultural, Islamic and legal understanding, is that the mother is the most important figure in her children's' lives, she is their first teacher, by instruction and by example, custodian and guardian.

The strong emphases on the importance of the female as a wife and a mother, and that marriage is the only legitimate channel for sexual relations in the Egyptian and Islamic culture, generates immense social pressure on the female to marry, in order to legitimately fulfill her sexuality and "main" role in life.

**SOCIAL PRESSURE**

There is immense social pressure to get married. People grow up indoctrinated into a heterosexual monogamous way of life. Marriage is the most talked about subject, most romanticized and capitalized on; the proposal, the white dress, the wedding and the honeymoon. Casler argues that:

Parents still raise their daughters with a view to marriage rather than to further her personal development. She sees so many advantages in it that she herself wishes to marry. Consequently, she is often less trained, less solidly grounded than her brothers; she is less deeply involved in her profession. In this way she dooms herself to remain in its lower levels, to be inferior; and the vicious circle is formed; this professional inferiority reinforces her desire to find a husband.

Simon de Beauvoir further emphasizes, " in a girl's search of a husband she is not responding to a masculine demand, she is trying to create one" (Casler 1974). For boys the pressure is a bit less, but the pressure is eventually extended to them too, alluring them into the instant maturity achieved through marriage. These social pressures force young people into marriage and emphasize certain characteristics in the chosen partner, characteristics that "society" regards as "good", exclusivity found in love, relationships, and a monogamous life style.

Casler further adds, that when parents pressure their children to marry, they are reflecting their concepts and society's insurmountable pressure to marry, for this pressure has historical roots and is international, cross-cultural, cross gender and cross religious. Pressure to marry is informed by parental concerns of sexual promiscuity, illegitimate children, disgrace, lightening up their economic situation by having their children move out of the home, having grand children, but mostly parents want to kill

their doubts of the adequacy and desirability of their children, which is remedied by an early marriage (Casler 1974). This explains why some people leave each other abruptly right before their official commitment, especially men; why some couples are profoundly unhappy, while agreeing on having more babies in order to distract and distant themselves from the reality of their marriage, and the hardships of getting a divorce. These pressures play a crucial and effective role in the majority of marriages despite the denial and unawareness of parents, society and individuals.

Social pressure towards marrying is indeed strong; it's manifested in the stigma against unwed motherhood, sexual promiscuity, illegitimate children, divorce and prolonged "bachelorhood", referred to as "spinsterhood. Social pressure focuses more on socializing the individuals of today and tomorrow to marry, and less on the individuals' preferences and plans for the future, and the social, sexual, moral and economic responsibility.  In Egypt, marriage is a normative practice and is deeply desired and pushed for. It is widely held to be *the* fundamental part of one's individual rights, for only through marriage, that one can attain full adult status, full personhood, womanhood or manhood, and autonomy. The family is also viewed to be one of the most socially dominant institutions in one's life that forms relations of solidarity, control and support to the individual. Many regard marriage as the channel through which religious injunctions, moral ideas, social expectations, are expressed; hence, there is a lot of social pressure to marry. "Social pressure and stigma are mostly religious in origin" (Casler,1974), and social pressures and marriage pushers have been mainstreamed, however, not everyone succumbs to pro-marriage pressures of parents and society. Malak shares how she feels about the pressure to marry,

"There are two types of pressures, and the pressure one gets from family and friends, and the pressure one puts on oneself", and "there is a lot of pressure in Cairo, from all sides, it is hard being single in Egypt, and being single and happy is incredibly hard work".

## "SPINSTERING" THE "BACHELORETTE"

The label "spinster" is a refusal by society and its institutions to give the "bachelorette" the agency over her own identity, which means that a female whose wants are different than those prescribed to her by the gender role habitus, which has been made the hegemonic normative gender identity, will be an accepted, stereotyped and excluded, discriminated against and stigmatized, by being called "spinster".

In the Egyptian society marriage is upheld and the "natural" and "normal" thing to do th33at "bachelorette-hood" in particular and singlehood in general are devalued, derogated and disapproved. This un-acceptance of "bachelorette-hood" is manifested in the social and psychological devaluation associated with the term "spinster". The "spinster" label is a threat and a pressure to the "bachelorette" to conform to the gender role habitus, hence, the marital norm, because if she want she will be stigmatized, which is not only a disregard to her choice but also a social punishment. This type of intolerance only generates pressure on the "bachelorette" invoking feelings of panic and self-doubt at times.

The reason why "bachelorettes" are regarded as problematic is because their lack of compliance to the gender role habitus disturbs the linear temporality of society, posing a threat to the continuation of the family and society, hence, a "spinster" image needs to be constructed to threaten and combat the "bachelorettes'" threat, as well as maintain the superiority of the normative reproductive gender role that of a wife and a mother. The gender role habitus equates femaleness with a

reproductive sexuality that is only legitimate through marriage. Marriage and reproduction are considered the "natural "destiny of an Egyptian female, and those whose desires and social roles form away from that function is viewed as challenging the normative productive sexuality, opting for a nominal non reproductive sexuality, which is regarded as a major obstruction to the gender role habitus that constructs female identity, which is for the most biological. The "bachelorette" is perceived as staggering the social context by refusing to comply to the gender role habitus and follow a "compulsory" femaleness that is only accepted and celebrated in marriage and motherhood; she is also refusing to perpetuate that gender role habitus with its maternal, and marital ideologies, as well as financial, emotional and sexual dependency.

Although there is a strong belief that marriage and children are written and are completely in the hands of God, if the gender role habitus is not fulfilled the female is denied agency over her own identity and is called a "spinster".

Thus, labeling the "bachelorette" as a "spinster" is a deprivation the never married female of her agency over her own identity. However, the "bachelorettes'" possession and control of various forms of capital, including economic, academic and corporeal will allow her to challenge the deprivation of agency over her identity and to regain that agency.

**CAPITAL**

According to Bourdieu " the structure of the social world is defined at every moment by the structure and distribution of the capital and profits characteristic of the different fields" (Torpe, 2009:293). Capital is crucial to the construction of social space, and its important to workout the correct hierarchy of different forms of capital,

for capital has various forms of power held by agents. The different forms of capital are economic wealth, social capital which is social connections and networks, corporeal which is physical attractiveness, as well as academic and linguistic. Agents acquire different forms of capital through the accumulation of various forms capital that are proportionate to their position in the social order.

**BLUMBERG'S GENDER STRATIFICATION THEORY**

Rae Lesser Blumberg developed a theory on the premise that the degree of control that women have over economic resources in relation to men, the more political, social, and ideological power they have, as well as the level of authority in the household and their personal lives. Hence, the more economic power women have in relation to men, the more political and social power they have, and the more control they have over their personal decisions and in the household. Blumberg developed her theory based on a vast body of empirical data of diverse society types, ranging from hunter and gatherer societies, through horticultural, agrarian and industrial societies, explaining women's' position in relation to men in all types of societies, from the earliest to the most complex societies of our time.

Blumberg's gender stratification theory proposes that the more economic resources women owned and controlled, in relation to men, the more control they have over their lives, their premarital, and marital relations, as well as marriage, divorce and fertility. The more economic and power possessed and controlled by women, in relations to men, the more access to sources of value they have access to, including prestige, social and ideological support for their rights. Blumberg argues that female-male inequalities are "nested" in households, which are nested in communities, and if these communities are controlled by a coercive state that imposes

class stratification, then females control and possession of economic power will grant them a higher and more powerful command in the social organization, hence, their lives. In other words, the more women have power on the macro-levels, the more likely the will have political power and support, influencing the micro-level as well, within the community and the household. Men tend to view the growth of women manifested in the increase of power and control over economic resources as a growing threat to them, hence, they will try to hindrance and repress that growth by hampering women's physical mobility, social and political ideology, as well as economic endeavors to gain equal power. For an increase in economic power will render women political and social support to change policies and ideologies, thus, discrimination, stereotyping and inequality towards women will recede, as well as male-supremacy.

The "bachelorettes' " education, cultural values, and careers provide them financial independence, social and corporeal capital, which  are sources of power that enables them to engage in the current discourse of "spinsterhood" as "bachelorettes", to influence this discourse, attempting to win the argument that they are "bachelorettes" who do not fit the "spinster" stereotype. This power derived form different sources of capital is manifested in the fact that they remain "bachelorettes" despite the attempts of hegemonic masculinity to hamper that to protect its own interest, and the number is increasing. The "bachelorettes'" access and allocation of power are a result of historical changes, efforts and struggles.

In Egypt, traditionally the man is breadwinner and the woman is nurturer and nest caretaker, that only the women who were needy or wealthy who were actually economically active (Guenena and Wassif, 1999:33). The 1952 Egyptian revolution has had a tremendous impact on the position of women, Nasser's state was anxious to win the support of liberal factions of society and focusing on empowering women was

a good way to achieve that goal. By that time there were women organizations already participating in the anti-colonial movement, and they were having more influence in strong national parties such as the Wafd, which as a consequence brought women as one of the most important political issues to readdress (Hoodfar, 1999).  Nasser's state gave weight to the importance of female and male education, and passed labor laws, facilitating and encouraging women's participation in the labor force, aiming at building the national economy. In 1954 more laws were passed that condemned any discrimination against women, enforcing their integration in the building of the nation, such as entitling women to 50 days of maternity leave with a paid 75 percent of their wages, and the establishment of nurseries in corporations of more than hundred workers, which in return helped women to have a role outside home. Furthermore, as Nasser's regime was experiencing hostility and economic pressure from the Western World, it adopted a socialist ideology which made the integration of women a crucial and integral element in the development and strength of Egypt (Hoodfar, 1999).  The National charter of 1962 reads, "Woman must be regarded as equal as man and *she must therefore shed the remaining shackles that impede her free movement*, so that she may play a constructive and profoundly important part in shaping the country" (Hoodfar, 1999). This revolutionary modernization of the country introduced new ideas and more options for women; hence, a new way of life and more tolerance in society.

The presidency of Anwar Sadat (1971-1981) has often been accused of being more conservative than Nasser particularly on the question pertaining women and labor market participation; however, women continued to secure more rights under his reign. In Sadat's era the role of Mrs Jihan Sadat is undeniable, especially towards women, to mention the least, in the late 70's, she played a key role in reforming

Egypt's civil rights law, often called "Jihan's Law", which granted women several privileges and rights in alimony and custody of children in the case of divorce. . Mrs Mubarak is also the technical advisor for the National Council for Motherhood and Childhood in Egypt, which is dedicated to improving women's' position and performance in society, as well as monitor and improve education and environmental conditions for children. Moreover, women started and joined the civil society, which aimed at improving society on various levels, particularly assisting women in becoming self-sufficient. Women continued to enjoy more privileges on all levels in the presidency of Hosny Mubarak especially with the enactment of the Personal Status Law. Moreover, Mrs Suzan Mubarak, Egypt's current first lady, has been taking continuous firm and bold steps towards the empowerment and improvement of the situation of Arab women and children in general and the Egyptian women and children in particular, regarding reproductive health, security and education.

However, women's professional and economic advancement are hindered by constant remainder of their "duties" in the private sphere, which restricts their mobility and their inability to pursue more and better financial education to enhance their economic advancement, hence there is always skepticism and disbelief in their skills and ability to be economically, and professionally successful (Guenana and Wassif, 1999:35). Also, the emphasize and perpetuation the importance of women's in role at "home" and that domesticity is what they are best at. Women who joined and succeeded the public sphere have been stigmatized and blamed for negligence and heedlessness of their "primary" roles in society.

According to Guenena and Wassif, the Egyptian women in the past century have struggled to have ample and equal presence to men in society. Women's increased participation in the public sphere was as a result of their own efforts and

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positive contribution to the social context, education, economic and national necessity, and self actualization, and they have contributed enormously to the advancement and the nation building endeavor that Egypt was and is still embarking on, yet, their demands and needs for gender equality are regarded as secondary to that of the state and the hegemonic masculinity. Thus, the public sphere contributions and gender role equality aspirations are delayed and is resisted by the majority of men and institutions that support the hegemonic masculinity (Guenana and Wassif: 1999, 31).

As a conclusion gender inequalities will exist as long as men control more resources than women, for they can prevent women from political, economic and social advancement, hence, power. Thus, the more women control economically, the more power they will have the social and political arenas, hence, the less gender inequality in society and at home. When Lara was asked why she remains a bachelorette, she said :

"First and foremost it is fate. Second, I lived abroad in an international community for 16 years. I was raised up differently, I am independent, educated, ambitious, not "your typical girl", such characteristics intimidates men in Egypt, they like to be better and more dominant. Men feel that I don't need them; my type of woman scares Egyptian men. In Egypt the girls are raised up to want to marry and to marry, however, I was raised to be myself. I am not worried, I might get married now, or when I am sixty or may be never, if it comes or if it doesn't it is also good."

Malak shares, "the pool we have to choose from here in Egypt is limited, and the older and more successful one gets, the harder it is to get married, especially women, as men get intimated".

The social context in Cairo is still weighted against "bachelorettes" and "bachelorette-hood" and their emanating ideology, that being mentioned, that is because "bachelorettes" haven't been objectively and clearly presented, for the diversity, logic and realty of "bachelorettes" contradicts the stereotypical images attached to them via the gender role habitus that constructed the label "spinster". The increasing number of "bachelorettes" in Cairo, and the heightened private and public discussion of the matter is a reflection of an ongoing gender discourse that aspires for change and of the validity of the "bachelorette" emerging ideology. Society constructs the spinster to make sure that the normative reproductive gender role survives.

Chapter 4

## "BACHELORETTE-HOOD": A CLOSER LOOK


The written media tackle the "bachelorette-hood" subject so differently from that of the "bachelorettes" themselves. The reasons presented by the scholars, religious clergy and "intellects" through the media are all more of filled with condemnations and stigmatization, it views and analyzes through the hegemonic masculinity and "popular Islamic" lens. These articles use the following words crisis, disaster, problem, calamity, "spinsterhood"and deviance to address the "bachelorette-hood" status:

The written media, such as Sayadaty, an Arabic monthly magazines, and it is one of the most read all over the Middle East, mostly by women, published an article in the June 2008 issue Titled *A controversy around the Age of the Spinster: Women are Accused for Spinstering Themselves*, and Yasmin Abouelhassan's article *Still Single?..Why?..How Come?..Then What?* Published in Just Divorced, an Egyptian Magazine, attempted to analyze and "solve" the "spinsterhood crisis", and surprisingly that all agree on the same reasons, the summation of which are excessive dowries and excessive cost of marriage, demanding a big house and that the husband should a good job, and "even his shape" *(What is the Solution to Spinsterhhod?)*. Girls are afraid to marry. There is competition between men and women in the work place, which has been limited to the man for many years, women want to prove themselves, and they take away the jobs from the men.Women want to prove their "existence" so they delay marriage and the marital life and their opportunities decrease. The youth are living in an unstable world, in an atmosphere of imaginary

wealth as they see in the media and western movies; the youth take the bad about the west. When they youth grow up and can't marry because of their beliefs they become frustrated adults and resent society, commit crimes and sins, destroying themselves and those around them. The Egyptian and western media are like brothels, and are a dangerous and influence on the "phenomenon of spinsterhood", it destroys Islamic values and morals, because it transmits Zionist and imperialistic plots to emphasize on material aspects, indifference of morals, excessive dowries, denial of polygamy, encouragement of women to prefer divorce and "spinsterhood" justify sin and family reason. Companies dealing with unlawful sex encourage spinsterhood. Last but not least, generally, men don't like to marry women who are richer, stronger, more successful than them, and it is a woman's duty to make sure she is not like that to marry; after all she is the intruder in the work force.

The solutions proposed to solve the "spinsterhood crisis" by the media are that Ulamas, psychologists, teachers and attorneys, should convince people of polygamy and how a husband can take four wives and treat them equally. Explaining morality and emphasizing modesty, chastity, acceptance of Gods will and fate and His determinations, and avoid selfishness and envy. To spread the missyar marriage among Sunni Muslims as well as the Shia marriage with legal conditions.Islam has promised great reward for the husbands who treat their wives well, with kindness and respect and attend to their needs and feel their suffering and help alleviate it. Islam is the religion of ease and it facilitates the procedures of marriage without difficulty, and preaches kindness and respect. The media and some Egyptian psychologists highlight that "spinsterhood" is very hazardous to the "female psyche, as well as social and physical health", she is said to experience depression, anxiety,other psychological and physical effects, and family disobedience.

The "bachelorettes" of the study have different reasons than those presented in the written media, which is the current hegemonic masculinity, the same masculinity that analyzed and stigmatized the "bachelorette" and constructed the "spinster". Marwa shares the following about her ex fiancé:

At first, before the engagement, he was perfect, except that he as tall as me. He was not well dressed, and made less money than I did, but these were minor things. The way he approached was just the way I wanted to be approached. He is an engineer as well as he works in a petroleum company. I am five years younger than him and I work in a multinational company and I have a higher position than him and I get a higher salary, but these were minor things. He was open minded, supportive of my life style and my work, moderate on his religious views, we were compatible for the most. We spoke about his out dated outfits and teeth and he agreed that after the engagement we will go shopping and get the teeth fixed, for he was waiting to fix his teeth after he gets committed.

We got engaged, and the real him started to emerge. He started to be extremist in his religious view, and very tight on money. Mothers' day was approaching and I asked him to accompany me so we can get gifts for our mothers. I planned to get a gift for his mother and wanted him to do the same for my mother. It is a tradition and this was our first mothers' day together, but he refused, saying that it is a sin to do, and that celebrating such a day is forbidden, haram[1]. Whenever, I asked him to go shopping for him, he would say that he didn't need new clothes, moreover, without guessing, he refused to get his teeth fixed. I would expect him to take me out but instead he would come over and stay with my family and me at home. He is a miser! I broke up with him after a month and the first thing that my family said was "why didn't you do it earlier than that". My Family didn't as well welcome such tie but didn't want to interfere.

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[1] The Arabic and Islamic word for forbidden.

I saw another suitor that day and he turned out to be a total jerk from the first five minutes, so my mother and I left him 45 minutes later. He is a doctor and comes from a good and well off family but he is such a square and so sure of himself, almost cocky, that he is irritating. I didn't like him neither did my mother. He called us to schedule another "meeting" but I refused. Finding a good match is not an easy thing for it requires not only luck but God's will.

Malak has just gotten out of a relationship that lasted two years, with an Egyptian man who lived in the West. He was 42, divorced and with two kids. Malak speaks in a frank way:

He lived under the pretence that he was a liberal open mind, accepting my strength of character and my career. However, at some point, we started clashing because he knew that I had very platonic friendships with other men. He would say " I don't like you having guy friends even if it is totally platonic, and you have to take permission from me before doing anything". On the surface, he wanted a liberal and strong woman to show off with but in reality he wants a woman who will yield to even irrational things, and if object it meant disrespect. The way that men define their masculinity can sometime be so bizarre. Although the guy traveled, cosmopolitan educated, comfortable in being intimate in relationships, they are still dominating, chauvinistic and demand to be the center of the universe. When a woman gets to that stage in a relationship, she feels a lot of pressure because she asks herself is that the price I am paying for my freedom? Should I just forget about marrying and Egyptian man and marry a foreigner all together? I talk to my friends about that and many of them recommend the foreigner option. That is also a lot of pressure. Mohamed was intellectual, well read, extensively traveled and exposed, generous, emotional and was very supportive of my career and goals. At some point, he asked me to change and told me "you are too independent I have kids to think about" and "may be I am more Egyptian than what I thought!". In retrospect, I think we had communication problems, I didn't know how to communicate things with him. I believe that it is all in the hands of a woman to make a

relationship run smooth and I never thought that I would actually say this one day. If we want things to work, we have to down play certain things and communicate things differently to men, especially Egyptian men. We can say I am thinking of doing so. I think that with becoming independent, we become inflexible. In the office I put a lot of effort to communicate well and I down play things all the time in order to be successful, but for some reason it is harder with men in a relationship. At the end a man's instinct is to protect and if he feels he is useless, it makes him feel small. We compromise everyday why can't we compromise in a relationship. I don't mind being married to a divorced person or even one who had kids, my ex had two kids a 10 and 8 year olds, and we were about to get married, but the only thing that would worry me about the situation is that if I will be able to love his kids as my own and the psychological burden from the previous relationships. I haven't been married, so it is hard for me to understand the extent of the scars. My family also doesn't mind a previously married man with kids. On the other hand my friends keep saying that divorced men are acceptable but with kids no. They say that I am not desperate and I shouldn't settle with a man who has kids, even if the kids live with their mother, like in my case with my ex. If the previous marriage didn't work out, there is no guarantee this marriage will workout. Companionship is what I really want; marriage is nothing but a natural ending to companionship.

Yasmine believes that Mr. Right should be very attentive to her needs, loving, caring, understanding; his utmost goal is to please her and to pamper her, treat her like a queen and to be fair to her, and of course she is more than willing and ready to do the very same thing for him, as long as she gets to keep her dreams, life and the space she needs. She believes that her Mr. Right should match her social, economic and social conditions or else none of them will be happy farther along. The success of a marriage, according to Yasmine, rests on the premise that there is a common goal, a life project that they both share and are willing to work on together logically, lovingly

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and with respect. Yasmine was engaged once and was less than a step away from tying the knot, and she still gets involved in a series of unsuccessful short relationships. Her reasons as to why she never got to the "I do" is that she deserves better than whatever she gets, that is to be loved, appreciated for whom she is, allowing her personal space, respect, honesty and reciprocity.

Yasmine explains in her own words:

My relationship with Mustafa lasted for 2 years, we spent one year dating and another year engaged, I was 28 years old at the time and he was my age too, however, we split one month before the wedding date. It was a difficult relationship, full of ups and downs, he was very moody and guilt ridden, I would come back home from my date with him so tired, for I always worked so hard for him, because he always gave me that poker face, which meant mystery, silence, and dry treatment, he always sucked my energy.

We met through common friends, and he lived in Alexandria while I lived in Cairo. He did everything possible to get my attention, to the extent that he used to come all the way from Alexandria, park by my house and spend the whole night in a car, waiting for me, trying to impress me. It took him a lot of similar acts to get my attention. Six months later, despite my attempts to block him out of my life because of me initial fear of being hurt, I yielded, and we started dating. Honestly, it was a nice feeling to have all this attention and admiration from someone that I actually liked. It was the first time for me to reciprocate. I had many suitors before him, but none of them was suitable, and the date would end before it started. But he was different, he is handsome, very successful, which was one of the main things that attracted me to him, he belongs to very decent family with very decent social and financial circumstances; and above all he really liked me or at least he expressed so. He came to see me every weekend and we would talk on the phone almost 4 times a day and even chat online. We talked a lot and started knowing each other on a deeper level, he would tell me many things about his life and I would do the same. Things took their course, slowly and supposedly surely, and nine month later we were engaged, his proposal made me so happy and I immediately agreed.

I had to put up with his poker face and his moodiness throughout the time we were dating and engaged. He would give me that poker face of his during the best of days, like his birthday for instance when I rented him a decorated yacht with catering and a candlelight dinner. He would disappear for days and not call, and when he emerges he asks me to quit my job, which I did! I held my cool for the most whenever he got into the poke face mode. I never failed to give him the benefit of the doubt, pampered him and even attempted to make him laugh, and still the poker face is all I got. I began to think that he is in another relationship, but not a very serious one and that his moodiness was a result of guilt and self-loathing, especially that I was completely the opposite of him. The reasons why I put up with all this for two years is because I was inexperience, that was the first relationship for me, I thought I loved him, thought that this is the "norm" and all the girls around have very similar problems, so I didn't want to make a fuzz out of things and went a long.

We shared our similarities and differences; we talked about everything since we almost got married. We had several major differences that might have affected the relationship. He had double standards, he would want me to wear a bathing suite and swim with him in public, something that I am not comfortable with, but not want me to wear a certain top for instance because he thought was revealing, which in reality won't be, at least not like a bikini. He wanted a bar at home, I wasn't comfortable with that. He would be sleeping when we should be having a date together. He was a closed vault, so mysterious and would hardly tell me what I need to know, and every time we get into any serious discussions I would get the poker face, and I still went a long, thinking that it was norm!

His family was very nice, they are very respectable people but they never really connected with me and family, they liked us a lot but were never too involved, it was very formal and very minimal. Our relationship with is family was restricted to rights and duties, and many times they fell short when it came to simple gesture like keeping in touch.

Days went by and the poker face kept reappearing more frequently, but we went ahead with all the arrangements, we bought the flat, the furniture, the rings, reserved the hotel, and even picked the invitations, and one months before the wedding we split. He said he can't go on; I didn't discuss it because at that point I felt the exact same, and it just happened. Consequently, we called off the wedding one-month away, and I also went a long!

Lara has been in more than one relationship, surprisingly, they suddenly broke up and never explained why. She would try to call and they just would not return the call or explain. She still thinks it will be interesting to hear from them and find out the reason.

The accounts of the "bachelorettes" of the study and that of the media as the "real" reasons for the "spinsterhood" crisis demonstrate the abyss between what is "thought" to be situation regarding never married female and what is "actually" keeping these "bachelorettes" from tying the knot.

Chapter 5

**FINDINGS**

**GENERAL FINDINGS**

The women of this study share similar multicultural backgrounds, Islamic belief, and area of living, jobs, income, and life style. They have all lived and traveled abroad, university graduates, hold or held high positions in reputable multinational companiesand live in upper middle class areas. On a personal level, they are all attractive, strong willed, ambitious, have a clear ideas of their goals, content with their marital status, productive, and have hopes and dreams for a family and a career. They are successful professionals and spire to be better, and they all want a companion, who will love, care, cuddle and support. They are not after economic dependency or support, prestige, social upgrade or the social privileges that of the "Mrs".

These women want to be loved, appreciated for who they are. They want companionship; someone they can laugh, share and have a conversation with. They don't want their lives and careers to cease. They don't desire to be housewives and mothers solely, only thinking about the kitchen, food and diapers, but to keep their careers, friends, dreams, vitality, and still have a companion and a family. They want egalitarianism, appreciation, and respect as career women, mothers and human beings in addition to the home and children.

The bachelorettes and their families have mixed feelings about not being married, however, they believe that marriage is in God's hands, yet the fact that they aren't married worries them, still thinking that a woman is only safe with a husband and children, however, they are convinced that there is nothing they can do about it.

They are fatalistic in words, but in reality they battle with fear of stigma and insecurity. Although they hear how unsafe a woman can be with a husband, they still hold tightly to the hope that they will be the exception.

The bachelorettes of this study are advancing in their careers and are far away from being unhappy, slouchy, miserable, pitiful or plain. They are vibrant, stylish, successful, attractive, fun, and have a positive aura about them. They are confident, active, successful, and plan to continue being so in whatever endeavors they pursue. The bachelorettes simply want it all, they want the career, the self-fulfillment, the physical, social, financial and psychological growth, but are hindered by the current neo-patriarchy and the hegemonic masculinity which keep dictating that a woman has to marry and be held captive to the husband or else she will be a "spinster" for life.

None of the "bachelorettes" in this study considers living with someone without marriage, because of their Islamic values. They all date, but are clear about abstaining from premarital sex. Dating and marrying foreign men is always an option, provided that they convert. They are explicitly or implicitly convinced that the hegemonic masculinity is quite similar all over the world, so, what they want is a different type of masculinity rather than a different nationality. The bachelorettes of the study are fully aware of the limitations of the hegemonic masculinity they are facing,  they know exactly who the want to marry and have children and why they are skeptical about it.

They are all willing to adjust to the lives and dreams for marriage and a family, however, they demand  maintaining a life style that allows for personal, career and social growth, may be in a slower pace, they all object to completely refute work and extra curricular activities. Motherhood is of importance to all of them, except for

one, but none of are primarily motivated to marry to have children, it is companionship. They all like to be mothers, but only if the fathers are the right people, other than that they will prefer to just wait. But there are no compromises. All the "bachelorettes" of the study view their duration of their "bachelorette-hood" as undecided and unknown, since they believe that marriage is in the hands of God, however, they haven't given up on finding the right person or marrying and starting a family. Non of them refute marriage all together. They take pride in themselves and who they are.

Yamine Shares,

"If God doesn't want it for me then it is definitely what is best, so why should I trouble myself over something that will be harmful. I can have ten children, nothing is impossible for God, but will I be able to raise them properly, will I be a good mother, do I have the skills to raise many children. I could have children that are sick, or simply bad seeds, who knows! Many people have children, and many people talk and want things, but in practice things are really different. However, I really wish for children, or one child to be realistic, a child to focus on, that would be the real lifetime project, your children are just yours, they are from you, they are something you can leave behind. I will make sure that this child travels and attends summer schools abroad, from an early age, I will give everything I longed for and wanted to learn, to recite the Holy Quran, it won't be like the children you see now a days. But if I end up not having children, I will still be fine, for if you knew the future you will choose your present!".

Lara who is the oldest "bachelorette" of 47 years old is only person who expressed unconditional content, acceptance and satisfaction of her "bachelorette-hood". with no trace of any regret for being a "bachelorette". The younger the "bachelorettes" the more ager and anxious they are about their prolonged "bachelorette-hood".

Malak shares the following:

I need to get back into the mind frame that single is good, like I used to feel, because there are two things people have no control over, money and marriage, only God can control them. I am currently nowhere near content that I am a bachelorette at 32 years old, and that is because I really miss my ex. However, I need to remind myself that keeping a relationship is a lot of work. Moreover, Egyptian men want the woman to succumb to their opinions, and control as they have double standards. I am open to all options, foreigners or not as long as they are Muslims, and not just Muslims on paper, believers in Islam. I love my work and I am good at it, I want to do something that will help human beings. I want to get my PhD degree; I will keep on pursuing that, and in relationships, I am going to start all over again, that is my plan!

All the "bachelorettes" and their families are fatalistic; they believe that marriage is in the hands of God. The concept of fatalism is a traditional belief yet the understanding of the concept needs to be re-visited, for the bachelorettes have the ability and the power to control their choices and attitudes.

**ANALYSIS**

"SPINSTER" VS "THE BACHELORETTE"

Spinsterhood is more than a word; it is a perception and a condition, which is still present in society even if it is not verbalized. It is a construct of society, a construct that is heavily laden with negativity and humiliation, just as much as marriage is a construct of being whole, happy and fulfilled. The spinster image is the shackles put on the modern woman in the age of information technology, women liberation, and globalization. Spinsterhood is constructed to be a condition that is strongly feared, and controls many of the behaviors and emotions of women. Some

overcome it by marrying, which partially explains the great pride of the achieved status of womanhood among newly wedded women, and some wait, accept it and make the best out of their single status, while others are caught in the middle, and they are unhappy to wait but can't go through with marriage for their own valid reasons.

Single women deserve to be bachelorettes; they deserve to choose their marital status, not because they have to, but because they actually choose to. It is time that the media stops using the word "spinster" to sell, may be the word "bachelorette" will sell more! It is about time that the people around the bachelorette stop making her feel that she is too good to be single, and too good not to be a mother; the "bachelorette" is too good for her own good, and that should be celebrated in itself. The definition of the word bachelor, in dictionaries, its popular meaning, imply choice, non-judgment, it is just treated as a status. Although, culturally, bachelors are urged to marry, and they might have a reputation of being unable to commit among other things, but none of the bachelors will be stigmatized with labels that carry negative connotations.

**HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY**

The discourse on "spinsterhood" in Egypt has a very predominant feature, which is blaming the woman. The woman is blamed for being well educated, well paid, and advanced intellectually, and according to the media this is the real issue behind spinsterhood, because men don't like women or wives who are better than they are, or at least threaten to be better, it hurts their pride or "ego". Also, in the culture of Egypt, in casual conversations one always hears that if a woman is smart and strong, she will not be married, because men don't like it, I have been personally advised to not talk about my studies or work with men, especially my suitors because

it intimidates them, and if they get intimidated they will leave. Now a day, "bachelorette-hood", or in society's reality "spinsterhood" is always associated with strong willed, educated and successful women. In the eyes of society it is a vice to become so, because men don't like it, hence it will lead you to "spinsterhood".

The media, not in any accounts that one is aware of has condemned or attempted to critically examine the role of the hegemonic masculinity regarding "bachelorette-hood" in Cairo, when all the "bachelorettes'" accounts indicate that their decision to remain "bachelorettes" is because they can't seem to find the "right" man or "masculinity". The fact that society and the media didn't recognize the existing condition and reasons of "bachelorettes" it even attempt to objectively study them, is the strongest evidence, infiltration and manifestation of hegemonic masculinity. It is the hegemonic masculinity is naturalized and internalized, that matters are filtered through its lens unthinkingly.

The "spinster" stigma is a way by a masculine society to halter women's advancement, and exercise control over their labor, choices and bodies; because for long this control is what defined and maintained the hegemony of masculinity. Personally, I believe that "bachelorette-hood" a strongest threat, for the bachelorettes demand agency over their own identity, matters, threatens the existing patriarchy that has been empowered by marriage for long. That is why the "spinster" became a construct, society's construct, like the chastity belt and the corset, full of negativity and stigma; for to stigmatize the woman is to hinder her. Society stigmatizes the bachelorette to strip away her strength, but what needs to be dismantled is society's perception of marriage, inflexibility in accepting alternative lifestyles, and depriving women of the freedom to choose.

I can't help but think of what exactly does society and the media expect of the "bachelorette" when they stigmatize her as "spinster". Is she expected to panic or agree on the first man who knocks her door, become docile and submissive, marry and have kids, and live confused or miserably ever after? Is that the kind of marriage society wants? Is it just marriage for the sake for marriage? And if not, is the "spinsterhood" stigma and intolerance for alternatives, leading to the type of marriage society envisions? If marriage is such an important pillar and institution in society, and woman and men form that institution, why is the woman the only one to blame and stigmatize? If society and the media where as critical with masculinity, may be the number of "bachelorettes" wouldn't be so high, or perhaps the never wedded woman would have been a "bachelorette" not a "spinster". May be she would have be accepted for who she is, an active and positive member of society.

One can propose that the existence of "bachelorettes" and the increasing number of "bachelorettes" now a day is because they hold different ideals about masculinity, marriage and identity than that of society. The "bachelorettes'" economic, intellectual and social capital allows them a place of relative power within the social context and a different perspective of matters, which allows them agency over their own identity that is why they remain as "bachelorettes" and by being so, they are role models to other never married females to follow. Their possession of various types of capital also influences how they relate to men and masculinity and marriage, which is different from that mainstreamed in the social context, and this is where the discrepancy is. The "bachelorettes" share:

Marwa doesn't fear any stigma of being single because, there are so many bachelorettes around that it is almost becoming the norm " All my co-workers who are foreigners and most of my friends are bachelorettes", she says. Being a

bachelorette is not a pressure on her because her life is full and she simply doesn't want to be married for the sake of being married. She wants a marriage that will make her happy and is worth sacrificing her freedom " "I will have to give up a lot, so I would rather be with someone who is worth it", she said. "My brother trying to convince me to get married, and asked me if he should wait for me to get married first" She says. However, she herself is helping him to find a future bride. Marwa further displays her feeling and conditions:

Marwa wants her match would be of a similar social standard or better, well educated and having a good position. The most important thing is that he has to be tender but at the same time a leader as she herself a strong woman and a leader, and she even declared the following, "I would much like a handsome man with a sex appeal, for at the end of the day what are men for? They are for sexual activity and pampering". Then she spoke of his family, "last but not least the family, but if he is socially acceptable than probably his family will be good and respectable people, but family is also a very important factor in choosing my partner". The problem is to find the right person; there are a lot of good guys out there but there are no channels of communication, as tradition doesn't allow us to contact them; they have to start.

Yasmine is very content to be a bachelorette and doesn't mind remaining so forever, but she will be happier if dreams of a Mr. Right, family, home, husband, love, security, a wedding, a honeymoon. "I will not stop my life just because marriage is not happening, I have to keep my self busy and focus on my life. There are a lot of activities to be done and many places to see", she said. She is happy with her life as a bachelorette, after all there are many bachelorettes who can't enjoy their lives as she does or have the interests, options, means and freedom she does. Her life now is the closest to perfect, she has exactly what she wants, she takes great pride and joy in all

she does, and she appreciates her space and freedom. The secret of her peace and content is her conviction that marriage is a matter of fate, "simply God doesn't want it and if he doesn't want it now, or ever, then it is definitely the best thing for me", she said. Yasmine further explains:

With all the blessings I have got, I sometimes feel that I am missing something, I am missing a husband, a home, children, I miss being cuddled, having someone who is not family or a friend to share with and talk to and to have my back. I too have needs! It is true that I feel I am missing a few things, but I am not upset because I am convinced that God only gives the best to everyone, whatever it is what I can I say, I have to be strong I believe it is for the best. My family is away, I practically live alone, I do everything alone, and at that point the most important thing to me is my job and my interests in life. I think about the uncertainty of the future and wonder if I lose my job or get sick, or something happens to my family or myself, whom will I turn to, who will be bound to help and be there, as my own? I get anxious when I think like that, but I don't want to indulge in negative thoughts as I told you. Even if I have no family at home for solace, I distract myself and hope for the best. There are advantages and disadvantages of being a bachelorette, I like to focus on the positive and enjoy it. The advantages are in the freedom I have, I have no one to interfere or control me or my space, my time, my mood and my finances. I wake up and sleep when I want, I go out when I want, I spend what I like when I was. I have a married friend who can't do anything without her husband, can't go out , traveling or even spending without referring back to him. I once called her and she was crying because she had a fight with her husband because he had a rough day at work. Therefore, I am happy I am not living like that way. On the other hand, it would be nice to have a man to add some spice to my life, to make me feel like a female not a robot, because my life is a little robotic at that point; I work, go out, sleep et cetera! It is nice to have someone to talk to if I can't sleep or go with him to a weekend getaway, just the two of us for a nice time. I believe that there is nothing good about marriage more than that, and honestly I lost the ability to put up with misery, moodiness and control that usually come with husbands, I can't compromise anymore. So I am very content being a bachelorette, and if marriage is not going to make my life any better and happier than it is now, then I think I will not get married. I would rather stay as I am, a "bachelorette".

Yasmine believes that Mr. Right should be very attentive to her needs, loving, caring, understanding; his utmost goal is to please her and to pamper her, treat her like a queen and to be fair to her, and of course she is more than willing and ready to do the very same thing for him, as long as she gets to keep her dreams, life and the space she needs. She believes that her Mr. Right should match her social, economic and social conditions or else none of them will be happy farther along. The success of a marriage, according to Yasmine, rests on the premise that there is a common goal, a life project that they both share and are willing to work on together logically, lovingly and with respect.

Yasmine finds an abyss between her own ideas and expectation of marriage and what she actually encounters, observes and witnesses in real life makes her so appreciative of her bachelorette status that is her independence, space and freedom. Her space is a very important issue and one of the main reasons why she is a bachelorette, because she can't succumb to domination, mood swings and control. Yasmine shares the following:

I met a friend of mine by accident at the hair dresser, she was with me in college and is younger than me, she asked me if I got married and I answered in the negative, and she surprised me with the following, "lucky you, you are blessed, trust me, those who got married early are the ones who were fooled, marriage is not a rescue, you think when you marry that your life will be happier and it will expand. You think you will have more freedom and travel more, and get to know more people, you think you will do all what you couldn't do when you were single, but it is the complete opposite my friend !"

Lara also Shares, "I dream of a man who can be my companion, my best friend and my husband. I want someone that I can talk to and do things with; someone to make me laugh. Of course, he has to be kind, and educated. I am looking for mutual

respect, reasonable intelligence, common and shared interests, good communicator, companionship, someone to compliment me". Then she sighed and said,

I wasn't raised here, and honestly, the guys in Egypt are disappointing; very few men are truly open-minded and value women and their friendship. They think it is their duty to get married and have children to keep up a façade and fulfill their social duty. On the other side, they are unfaithful and unappreciative of the marital bond of their families.   Men here will never marry their girlfriends or the girls they really loved; they will marry the one that their mother chooses and eventually discover that it was not fit and start cheating on her with someone else. To me this is dysfunctional, disappointing and doesn't work for me." She collected her self then continued,

"I am open to marrying a foreigner, however, and men are men everywhere. The only difference with a foreigner would treat the woman more equally.  I don't consider living with someone without marriage, an option because I have been brought up conservatively".

The "bachelorettes" of the study are unmarried not because they refute marriage, motherhood, starting a family or put their careers first, they are unmarried because they are not in accord with the current hegemonic masculinity. They are not against the institution of marriage, and according to general conversations with married women, it is actually the married women who are. It is the hegemonic masculinity and the institutions it infiltrated that created the "spinster" and stereotyped her, turned away from objectively looking at her as a "bachelorette", and that is not recognized or seen. "Bachelorettes" uphold different ideals the different from that upheld from society and society, and recognition of the mal functioning of the hegemonic masculinity and how it taints perception when dealing with the "bachelorette".

I personally believe that "bachelorettes" will have an impact on society, given their agency in society, and they will transform the social context regarding "bachelorette hood", "spinsterhood", masculinity, marriage as well as the family.

**CONCLUSION**

In Conclusion, this is just a trial to bring voice to "bachelorettes" in the open, in order to be accepted and valued objectively personally by the society. Negative stereotyping affects those who are stereotyped; it threatens performance and self-concept, even to those who don't actually believe in that stereotype. The threat of being identified with a negative stereotype that can be ever existent causes discomfort and a fear of scrutiny. The word "spinster" should be replaced by the "bachelorette" to give a positive connotation. With the education, liberation and emancipation of women, such phenomenon of "bachelorettes" emerged. In addition, the failure of couples to marry for plausible reasons and to keep the family intact has led many, such as the bachelorettes to reconsider the concept of marriage. The interviews done have shown that the society doesn't accept the idea of companionship or any other alternative, enforcing heterosexual marital life as the only acceptable and "right" way for two people to be together, which has led to inappropriate choices committing to marriage; hence there was skepticism of marrying by the "bachelorettes".

In a transitional period to the global world, it is time for the women in Egypt to have more freedom of choice and not to be pressured by the society or the family to marry. The media can play a role in changing these concepts; this could be accomplished through role models of "bachelorettes" who pursue a successful life talk shows, serials and movies, which are effective means of reinforcing a positive image of the "bachelorette". The "bachelorette" deserves the right to choose between single

life and marital life, and to enjoy her "bachelorette-hood" away from pressure condemnation and stigma.

**Appendices**

## CASE#1

### HE IS A MISER

Marwa is a 29-year-old civil engineer, graduated from one of the old national universities, went to a French school, and takes pride in wearing the Islamic headscarf. She lived in Algeria for two years and went to one of the international French schools, which had a great influence on her style of life. She works in the field of petroleum in one of the big British company in a senior post. Moreover, she gives workshops in photo reading and business writing. She is busy between her 9 to 5 job, and has extracurricular activities and very active social and family life.

Marwa has a happy and positive vibe, always smiling and thinks deeply about life, society, her life and what she wants for herself and out of life. One of the most impressive things Marwa shared with me is a graph that she invented to track her mood swings. She keeps a diary, and refers to her notes every week and puts them in a graph and analyses her feelings as well as her ups and downs. "People are busy, and friends never listen well, so I invented this to vent and to get to know myself better", she told me.  To her, single life has its pros and cons. The pros are that a woman is completely free to do whatever she wants whenever she wants with her time or money. There is no control what so ever, no responsibilities.  " I am a visitor at home, I don't get to do anything and enjoy all my freedom, I control my own time and money with no responsibilities, it is a perfect life, I love it", she says. However, the sweet is mixed with the sour. The cons are that every now and then one longs for companionship, moral support, and emotional fulfillment, which come only from a man. She would like to feel like a woman, she would like to have kids; she fears the

future without her parents.  She considers moving out but simply wouldn't like to live alone. She is very happy and content with life with her family for they are completely supportive and open-minded. They agree to traveling, working for a while abroad, they give her complete freedom of mobility and control of her finances.  She believes it is very difficult for her to give up all the privileges to be in a mediocre relationship or marriage, "I can stay home for the person I love if he will compensate and if he really deserves it", she says.

Marwa doesn't face a lot of pressure from her family directly; she indirectly feels a little bit of pressure when there is a suitor. Her parents feel happy and have hope that he might be one, and they would like her to accept. Her family believes that marriage is in the hands of God, and no one can do anything about it but him. Marwa's family has their own standards. They wouldn't want her to marry a man with children. A divorced man is acceptable but without children. Marrying a man with children is not accepted by the society. Marwa doesn't fear any stigma of being single because, there are so many bachelorettes around that it is almost becoming the norm " All my co-workers who are foreigners and most of my friends are bachelorettes", she says. Being a bachelorette is not a pressure on her because her life is full and she simply doesn't want to be married for the sake of being married. She wants a marriage that will make her happy and is worth sacrificing her freedom " "I will have to give up a lot, so I would rather be with someone who is worth it", she said.  "My brother trying to convince me to get married, and asked me if he should wait for me to get married first" She says. However, she herself is helping him to find a future bride. Marwa further displays her feeling and conditions:

Marwa wants her match would be of a similar social standard or better, well educated and having a good position. The most important thing is that he has to be tender but at the same

time a leader as she herself a strong woman and a leader, and she even declared the following, "I would much like a handsome man with a sex appeal, for at the end of the day what are men for? They are for sexual activity and pampering". Then she spoke of his family, "last but not least the family, but if he is socially acceptable than probably his family will be good and respectable people, but family is also a very important factor in choosing my partner". The problem is to find the right person; there are a lot of good guys out there but there are no channels of communication, as tradition doesn't allow us to contact them; they have to start. It is God's will or "nasseb"[2] and there is nothing one can do about it, she is not crazy about marriage, her life is very busy. There are woman who turned forty and still single, they are ok. She wants to get married for three reasons, sexual activity, to please her family and have children. She is not counting on a man for a good life; She is planning to buy a house of her own, even if he has one for both of them. She recognizes that she can get divorced, and when she wants a cushion to land on, this cushion would be her house, her job, her money and her kids. Divorce is a very high probability, couples expect too much of marriage and become bored.  She is not ready to compromise and if her future husband gets on her nerves, she is ready to say bye. Therefore, she is prepared for such a moment.

Marwa mentions that there is a phenomenon of married men who approach single woman like herself, and not willing to divorce their first wives because of many reasons, but they want to have a second wife. She personally doesn't mind it, "it is even better for me, as long as there are no kids involved, I would have definitely done if I was in the west".

Marwa had always longed to be a young mother. She wanted to have children by the age 22 or 23, in order for them to be close to her in age. However, now she is very content with how things turned out to be saying,  "blessings are equally distributed among human beings, but we humans are greedy".

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[2] The Arabic word for fate

Marwa shares the following about her ex fiancé:

At first, before the engagement, he was perfect, except that he as tall as me. He was not well dressed, and made less money than I did, but these were minor things. The way he approached was just the way I wanted to be approached. He is an engineer as well as he works in a petroleum company. I am five years younger than him and I work in a multinational company and I have a higher position than him and I get a higher salary, but these were minor things. He was open minded, supportive of my life style and my work, moderate on his religious views, we were compatible for the most. We spoke about his out dated outfits and teeth and he agreed that after the engagement we will go shopping and get the teeth fixed, for he was waiting to fix his teeth after he gets committed.

We got engaged, and the real him started to emerge. He started to be extremist in his religious view, and very tight on money. Mothers' day was approaching and I asked him to accompany me so we can get gifts for our mothers. I planned to get a gift for his mother and wanted him to do the same for my mother. It is a tradition and this was our first mothers' day together, but he refused, saying that it is a sin to do, and that celebrating such a day is forbidden, haram[3]. Whenever, I asked him to go shopping for him, he would say that he didn't need new clothes, moreover, without guessing, he refused to get his teeth fixed. I would expect him to take me out but instead he would come over and stay with my family and me at home. He is a miser! I broke up with him after a month and the first thing that my family said was "why didn't you do it earlier than that". My Family didn't as well welcome such tie but didn't want to interfere.

I saw another suitor that day and he turned out to be a total jerk from the first five minutes, so my mother and I left him 45 minutes later. He is a doctor and comes from a good and well off family but he is such a square and so sure of himself, almost cocky, that he is irritating. I didn't like him neither did my mother. He called us to schedule another "meeting" but I

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[3] The Arabic and Islamic word for forbidden.

refused.  Finding a good match is not an easy thing for it requires not only luck but God's
will.

Case #2

**HE HAS DOUBLE STANDARDS**

Malak is 32, has a bachelor degree in political Science and a Masters degree in development from a reputable and multicultural liberal arts university in Cairo. She currently holds a prestigious and influential post in one of the strong development, research, and policymaking institutions in Cairo, and is hoping to start her own consultancy firm and get her PhDs in the future. Malak is an independent thinker who has a clear idea of what she wants in life, and very articulate and a deep thinker of her life and goals.

Although Malak lives with her parents at the moment, she is independent in character and finance. Her job requires her to travel a lot and for long periods. The last of them was spending a whole year in Dubai. She comments:

Egyptian women in Egypt are only independent to a certain extent. One can be successful, , know what one wants and financially independent and still lives with one's parents. Egyptian women in Dubai are different from Egyptian women in Egypt; in Dubai women are a hundred percent independent, which adds another dimensions to life. However, in Egypt independence is very limited. Although I am successful and make a good living, as well as I know what I want, but I still live within the framework of the family. When I lived in Dubai, I didn't care when I would return home at night for instance, However, here I have to consider my family's feelings and answer their questions, especially the questions about getting married, and the requests to see and consider suitors.

As a single strong independent woman, Malak still faces tremendous pressure as long as she is around her family. They keep reminding her that they want to be grandparents, aunts and uncles, and she is always told not to focus on her career, but

rather think about her life. Malak believes that there are three types of pressures, the pressure one gets from family, friends and the pressure one puts on oneself. She says "there is a lot of pressure in Cairo, from all sides, it is hard being single in Egypt, and being single and happy is incredibly hard work". Malak believes that it is a natural instinct to want and need companionship, a companionship that has no domination or control, and to accept her as she is.

Malak comes from a liberal family, a family that emphasizes Arab Islamic values, education, career, success, independence, marriage and children. She has an older brother and sister, both are single but are all pro marriage, children and family life but they all believe that "the pool we have to choose from here in Egypt is limited, and the older and more successful one gets, the harder it is to get married, especially women, as men get intimated".

Malak has just gotten out of a relationship that lasted two years, with an Egyptian man who lived in the West. He was 42, divorced and with two kids. Miss S speaks in a frank way:

He lived under the pretence that he was a liberal open mind, accepting my strength of character and my career. However, at some point, we started clashing because he knew that I had very platonic friendships with other men. He would say " I don't like you having guy friends even if it is totally platonic, and you have to take permission from me before doing anything". On the surface, he wanted a liberal and strong woman to show off with but in reality he wants a woman who will yield to even irrational things, and if object it meant disrespect. The way that men define their masculinity can sometime be so bizarre. Although the guy traveled, cosmopolitan educated, comfortable in being intimate in relationships, they are still dominating, chauvinistic and demand to be the center of the universe. When a woman gets to that stage in a relationship, she feels a lot of pressure because she asks herself

is that the price I am paying for my freedom? Should I just forget about marrying and Egyptian man and marry a foreigner all together? I talk to my friends about that and many of them recommend the foreigner option. That is a also a lot of pressure. Ahmed was intellectual, well read, extensively traveled and exposed, generous, emotional and was very supportive of my career and goals. At some point, he asked me to change and told me "you are too independent I have kids to think about" and "may be I am more Egyptian than what I thought!". In retrospect, I think we had communication problems, I didn't know how to communicate things with him. I believe that it is all in the hands of a woman to make a relationship run smooth and I never thought that I would actually say this one day. If we want things to work, we have to down play certain things and communicate things differently to men, especially Egyptian men. We can say I am thinking of doing so. I think that with becoming independent, we become inflexible. In the office I put a lot of effort to communicate well and I down play things all the time in order to be successful, but for some reason it is harder with men in a relationship. At the end a man's instinct is to protect and if he feels he is useless, it makes him feel small. We compromise everyday why can't we compromise in a relationship. I don't mind being married to a divorced person or even one who had kids, my ex had two kids a 10 and 8 year olds, and we were about to get married, but the only thing that would worry me about the situation is that if I will be able to love his kids as my own and the psychological burden from the previous relationships. I haven't been married, so it is hard for me to understand the extent of the scars. My family also doesn't mind a previously married man with kids. On the other hand my friends keep saying that divorced men are acceptable but with kids no. They say that I am not desperate and I shouldn't settle with a man who has kids, even if the kids live with their mother, like in my case with my ex. If the previous marriage didn't work out, there is no guarantee this marriage will workout. Companionship is what I really want; marriage is nothing but a natural ending to companionship.

When I asked Malak about the biological clock her answer was "I can hear it tick tock, tick tock, and laughed. One of her biggest worries when she broke up with her ex is that she is too old to start all over again, and that she was too close to settling down and stating her own family. She is not very happy with the pressure she puts on herself and thinks that is all because of lack of faith. It is only after D.S turned thirty that she started thinking of wanting children, before she couldn't stand the idea of their noise and responsibility. It is precisely when she got close to her ex's children that she felt how rewarding motherhood could be, it is fulfilling because one can experience unconditional love on both sides.

Malak is not that happy with her life at the moment, because she is trying to get over her ex relationship and she needs time to do so. Her plan was to be married and take some time off from work, start her PhD program, then go back again to work. She wanted to devote time to the relationship and the family, she planned to take care of her family and to work as well as her mother was doing all her life, and she balanced it out just great. At this point in her life, she is ready for something new, a family, commitment, she is ready to reduce her working hours and start a different life. She will still be going for a senior position, but she doesn't want to feel that she is successful in one sector and lacking in another important one. For Malak, being in a relationship is fulfilling, it fills a void inside and adds a whole new dimension to one's life. That is the feeling to be loved, accepted and special.

Malak life as a bachelorette was more active than after she got into a relationship and certainly after she broke up, in terms of sports, work, travel, and social life. She felt that she never missed anything. She traveled and sometimes worked late; work doesn't reduce time with her family and friends. When Malak met her ex, the pace of her life slowed down immediately, she wouldn't leave work on

time, hardly work late, didn't see her family and friends as she used to. She invested all the time she got in the relationship, and at that time of having a relationship; she felt that she missed many things.  Malak shares the following:

I need to get back into the mind frame that single is good, like I used to feel, because there are two things people have no control over, money and marriage, only God can control them.  I am currently nowhere near content that I am a bachelorette at 32 years old, and that is because I really miss my ex. However, I need to remind myself that keeping a relationship is a lot of work. Moreover, Egyptian men want the woman to succumb to their opinions, and control as they have double standards. I am open to all options, foreigners or not as long as they are Muslims, and not just Muslims on paper, believers in Islam. I love my work and I am good at it, I want to do something that will help human beings.I want to get my PhD degree; I will keep on pursuing that, and in relationships, I am going to start all over again, that is my plan!

Although Malak plans to pursue her life, as she wants, she would love to have a companion who loves her and a family of her own.

**HIS POKER FACE**

Yasmine is a 37-year-old bachelorette, living in Cairo, graduated from the Faculty of Arts, working in the Field of Media and Advertising in an executive position, in a reputable company. Her job and bubbly character allow her a wide base of social networks and a highly active social agenda, and an interest in the arts, dance, adventure and sports. Moreover, She is applying to be a radio shows hostess and a cartoon vocalist. Yasmine grew up in Kuwait with her parents and siblings; she is the youngest of three. Her parents are in Kuwait and still enjoying their marriage life, her brother and sister are also married with children and each live in different

Yasmine is very content to be a bachelorette and doesn't mind remaining so forever, but she will be happier if dreams of a Mr. Right, family, home, husband, love, security, a wedding, a honeymoon. "I will not stop my life just because marriage is not happening, I have to keep my self busy and focus on my life. There are a lot of activities to be done and many places to see", she said. She is happy with her life as a bachelorette, after all there are many bachelorettes who can't enjoy their lives as she does or have the interests, options, means and freedom she does. Her life now is the closest to perfect, she has exactly what she wants, she takes great pride and joy in all she does, and she appreciates her space and freedom. The secret of her peace and content is her conviction that marriage is a matter of fate, "simply God doesn't want it and if he doesn't want it now, or ever, then it is definitely the best thing for me", she said.

Yasmine further explains:

With all the blessings I have got, I sometimes feel that I am missing something, I am missing a husband, a home, children, I miss being cuddled, having someone who is not family or a friend to share with and talk to and to have my back. I too have needs! It is true that I feel I am missing a few things, but I am not upset because I am convinced that God only gives the best to everyone, whatever it is what I can I say, I have to be strong I believe it is for the best. My family is away, I practically live alone, I do everything alone, and at that point the most important thing to me is my job and my interests in life. I think about the uncertainty of the future and wonder if I lose my job or get sick, or something happens to my family or myself, whom will I turn to, who will be bound to help and be there, as my own? I get anxious when I think like that, but I don't want to indulge in negative thoughts as I told you. Even if I have no family at home for solace, I distract myself and hope for the best. There are advantages and disadvantages of being a bachelorette, I like to focus on the positive and enjoy it. The advantages are in the freedom I have, I have no one to interfere or control me or my space, my time, my mood and my finances. I wake up and sleep when I want, I go out when I want, I spend what I like when I was. I have a married friend who can't do anything without her husband, can't go out , traveling or even spending without referring back to him. I once called her and she was crying because she had a fight with her husband because he had a rough day at work. Therefore, I am happy I am not living like that way. On the other hand, it would be nice to have a man to add some spice to my life, to make me feel like a female not a robot, because my life is a little robotic at that point; I work, go out, sleep et cetera! It is nice to have someone to talk to if I can't sleep or go with him to a weekend getaway, just the two of us for a nice time. I believe that there is nothing good about marriage more than that, and honestly I lost the ability to put up with misery, moodiness and control that usually come with husbands, I can't compromise anymore. So I am very content being a bachelorette, and if marriage is not going to make my life any better and happier than it is now, then I think I will not get married. I would rather stay as I am, a "bachelorette".

Yasmine's parents are her role models. When it come to relationships they are still together, and that is because they had a common goal that they both succeeded in, keeping the family intact. Yasmine parents gave her trust and freedom that she is indeed using very wisely, and that explains her independence and success. Her

parents accept the fact that she is a bachelorette and orate the same fatalistic words but many times they express mixed emotions of eagerness and disappointment associated with Yasmine marriage, and they remind her of how unpredictable life can be and how difficult it *will* be through the years if she remains a bachelorette. Yasmine parents are convinced that life without a husband is definitely difficult. This belief is conveyed in the very famous Egyptian proverb "the shadow of a man is better than the shadow of a wall", or "del ragel wala del heta". Yasmine gets a lot of support from her siblings to remain a bachelorette and that she should marry whenever she is ready to do so and if she never does then it is fine, as long as she is happy.

Yasmine teenage years were very smooth, she was always more mature than the girls her age, as she says, "I have always been know to be a very logical person, I never let my feelings control me, it is always my logic, and that is why I never did anything crazy or anything to regret, my friends used call me the mother ". Yasmine has pride and it is very difficult for her to accept being yelled at or humiliated by her parents or anyone else for that matter. She was also very convinced with her mother's principals regarding emotions, and that one should not put herself in a situation where her feelings will be hurt, that is why Yasmine never got into a serious romantic relationship as teenager or as a young adult with someone that she knows and won't be able to marry, even if she had a major crush. Her conviction that she was too young to marry at that time made it easy for her to keep a tight lid on her teenage crushes. That conviction remained with her throughout her adulthood, which led her to be independent and more protective of her feelings; hence, she is very selective of her partner. Most of her friends got married, and she almost did herself. Her

experience as well as those of the ones around her have taught her plenty about relationships, which all contribute to her strength to remain a bachelorette.

Yasmine has a vivid idea of her Mr. Right, "I know what I want in a man, I want him to be older than I am and mature; someone who knows what he wants in life and in a woman. His life and feelings are stable, well accomplished, and is able to understand me and know my worth and treat me accordingly", she said.

Yasmine believes that Mr. Right should be very attentive to her needs, loving, caring, understanding; his utmost goal is to please her and to pamper her, treat her like a queen and to be fair to her, and of course she is more than willing and ready to do the very same thing for him, as long as she gets to keep her dreams, life and the space she needs. She believes that her Mr. Right should match her social, economic and social conditions or else none of them will be happy farther along. The success of a marriage, according to H.E, rests on the premise that there is a common goal, a life project that they both share and are willing to work on together logically, lovingly and with respect.

Yasmine finds an abyss between her own ideas and expectation of marriage and what she actually encounters, observes and witnesses in real life makes her so appreciative of her bachelorette status that is her independence, space and freedom. Her space is a very important issue and one of the main reasons why she is a bachelorette, because she can't succumb to domination, mood swings and control. Yasmine shares the following:

I met a friend of mine by accident at the hair dresser, she was with me in college and is younger than me, she asked me if I got married and I answered in the negative, and she surprised me with the following, "lucky you, you are blessed, trust me, those who got married early are the ones who

were fooled, marriage is not a rescue, you think when you marry that your life will be happier and it will expand. You think you will have more freedom and travel more, and get to know more people, you think you will do all what you couldn't do when you were single, but it is the complete opposite my friend !"

Yasmine was engaged once and was less than a step away from tying the knot, and she still gets involved in a series of unsuccessful short relationships. Her reasons as to why she never got to the "I do" is that she deserves better than whatever she gets, that is to be loved, appreciated for whom she is, allowing her personal space, respect, honesty and reciprocity.

Yasmine explains in her own words:

My relationship with Mustafa lasted for 2 years, we spent one year dating and another year engaged, I was 28 years old at the time and he was my age too, however, we split one month before the wedding date. It was a difficult relationship, full of ups and downs, he was very moody and guilt ridden, I would come back home from my date with him so tired, for I always worked so hard for him, because he always gave me that poker face, which meant mystery, silence, and dry treatment, he always sucked my energy.

We met through common friends, and he lived in Alexandria while I lived in Cairo. He did everything possible to get my attention, to the extent that he used to come all the way from Alexandria, park by my house and spend the whole night in a car, waiting for me, trying to impress me. It took him a lot of similar acts to get my attention. Six months later, despite my attempts to block him out of my life because of me initial fear of being hurt, I yielded, and we started dating. Honestly, it was a nice feeling to have all this attention and admiration from someone that I actually liked. It was the first time for me to reciprocate. I had many suitors before him, but none of them was suitable, and the date would end before it started. But he was different, he is handsome, very successful, which was one of the main things that attracted me to him, he belongs to very decent family with very decent social and financial circumstances; and above all he really liked me or at least he expressed so. He came to see me every weekend and we would talk on the phone almost 4 times a day and even chat online. We talked a lot

and started knowing each other on a deeper level, he would tell me many things about his life and I would do the same. Things took their course, slowly and supposedly surely, and nine month later we were engaged, his proposal made me so happy and I immediately agreed.

I had to put up with his poker face and his moodiness throughout the time we were dating and engaged. He would give me that poker face of his during the best of days, like his birthday for instance when I rented him a decorated yacht with catering and a candlelight dinner. He would disappear for days and not call, and when he emerges he asks me to quit my job, which I did! I held my cool for the most whenever he got into the poke face mode. I never failed to give him the benefit of the doubt, pampered him and even attempted to make him laugh, and still the poker face is all I got. I began to think that he is in another relationship, but not a very serious one and that his moodiness was a result of guilt and self-loathing, especially that I was completely the opposite of him. The reasons why I put up with all this for two years is because I was inexperience, that was the first relationship for me, I thought I loved him, thought that this is the "norm" and all the girls around have very similar problems, so I didn't want to make a fuzz out of things and went a long.

We shared our similarities and differences; we talked about everything since we almost got married. We had several major differences that might have affected the relationship. He had double standards, he would want me to wear a bathing suite and swim with him in public, something that I am not comfortable with, but not want me to wear a certain top for instance because he thought was revealing, which in reality won't be, at least not like a bikini. He wanted a bar at home, I wasn't comfortable with that. He would be sleeping when we should be having a date together. He was a closed vault, so mysterious and would hardly tell me what I need to know, and every time we get into any serious discussions I would get the poker face, and I still went a long, thinking that it was norm!

His family was very nice, they are very respectable people but they never really connected with me and family, they liked us a lot but were never too involved, it was very formal and very minimal. Our relationship with is family was restricted to rights and duties, and many times they fell short when it came to simple gesture like keeping in touch.

Days went by and the poker face kept reappearing more frequently, but we went ahead with all the arrangements, we bought the flat, the furniture, the rings, reserved the hotel, and even picked the invitations, and one months before the wedding we split. He said he can't go on; I didn't discuss it

because at that point I felt the exact same, and it just happened. Consequently, we called off the wedding one-month away, and I also went a long!

Motherhood to Yasmine is the least of her worries, "let me find the man first and then worry about children", she told me. She seems to be aware and prepared that there is a possibility that by the time she finds Mr. Right it will be difficult for her to conceive, but she mentions that it is logical that she hopes for one child only at that point. She is convinced that:

If God doesn't want it for me then it is definitely what is best, so why should I trouble myself over something that will be harmful. I can have ten children, nothing is impossible for God, but will I be able to raise them properly, will I be a good mother, do I have the skills to raise many children. I could have children that are sick, or simply bad seeds, who knows! Many people have children, and many people talk and want things, but in practice things are really different. However, I really wish for children, or one child to be realistic, a child to focus on, that would be the real lifetime project, your children are just yours, they are from you, they are something you can leave behind. I will make sure that this child travels and attends summer schools abroad, from an early age, I will give everything I longed for and wanted to learn,  to recite the Holy Quran, it won't be like the children you see now a days. But if I end up not having children, I will still be fine, for if you knew the future you will choose your present!

Yasmine concludes by explaining to me how a practical a person she is, and how she always relied on her logic, "my logic is my protection", she said, her feelings never ruled and will never do. She is a bachelorette and has hopes and dreams that she will find Mr. Right, to start a home, a family, and a private business with, with no challenges or too much stress, a business that is not necessarily lucrative but pleasurable, I would want to sell products that will sell themselves, something like flowers or antiques. I want a job that will make me feel alive and have my husband as

my business partner to help out in order to reduce any stress there is.  Yasmine simply

wants to retire into a married life!

Case #4

## THESE MEN JUST VANISH

Born to a professional family and having two siblings, Lara is 47 years old, she was given a high quality education in Economics from the most prestigious liberal arts university in Cairo, after spending her whole childhood and youth years in Kuwait studying in an international British school. After graduation she pursued a career in finance until she reached the highest position in the field business. She has two master degrees and right now she is dedicated to fitness and translation.

Lara is a well composed, versed in different subject matters, calm and takes matters to a healthy depth, which gives life a simple yet interesting and logical frame, a frame on which she certainly operates.  She grew up to be the responsible reliable one. She is a person who loves books and reading, music, theatre, movies, travel, not only that but she has a taste in fashion and an active social and travel agenda. Moreover, She is also very close to her family, not only her parents and siblings but also her extended kin. She has a high sense of social duty with a strong human touch. She has always been independent, quiet, family oriented, good at whatever she does and focused, but little less shy though.

Lara's Parents are still together, they themselves married rather late, according to the age of marriage at that time. Her father was 33 and her mother was 32. They both founded the main hospitals of pediatrics and psychotherapy in Kuwait. They were the pioneers and the leaders; they offered their children a great example of leadership, logic, hard work and independence. All of the above facts explain why Lara's parents are very understanding of he bachelorette status, as well as her two siblings.

When Lara was asked why she remains a bachelorette, she said

"First and foremost it is fate. Second, I lived abroad in an international community for 16 years. I was raised up differently, I am independent, educated, and ambitious, not "your typical girl", such characteristics intimidates men in Egypt, they like to be better and more dominant. Men feel that I don't need them; my type of woman scares Egyptian men. In Egypt the girls are raised up to want to marry and to marry, however, I was raised to be myself. I am not worried, I might get married now, or when I am sixty or may be never, if it comes or if it doesn't it is also good."

"I dream of a man who can be my companion, my best friend and my husband. I want someone that I can talk to and do things with; someone to make me laugh. Of course, he has to be kind, and educated.  I am looking for mutual respect, reasonable intelligence, common and shared interests, good communicator, companionship, someone to compliment me". Then she sighed and said,

I wasn't raised here, and honestly, the guys in Egypt are disappointing; very few men are truly open-minded and value women and their friendship. They think it is their duty to get married and have children to keep up a façade and fulfill their social duty. On the other side, they are unfaithful and unappreciative of the marital bond of their families.   Men here will never marry their girlfriends or the girls they really loved; they will marry the one that their mother chooses and eventually discover that it was not fit and start cheating on her with someone else. To me this is dysfunctional, disappointing and doesn't work for me." She collected her self then continued,

"I am open to marrying a foreigner, however, and men are men everywhere. The only difference with a foreigner would treat the woman more equally.  I don't consider living with someone without marriage, an option because I have been brought up conservatively.  "

Lara's parents are like all parents, they would love her and her siblings to get married, but they believe that marriage is in the hands of God, and that there is nothing that they can do about it. Her mother has approached her during her university year to see some potential husbands, but she refused and made it clear that she doesn't like such a salon-arranged marriage. The subject has been opened only once after that. Lara's father has never talked about it. They both would like to see their daughter married and they are even happy and pleasant when she brings someone home, but they never apply pressure or discuss the subject at all. According to Lara, their only concern and fear is that when they pass away, there will be no one with their daughter to take care of her.

Lara's has been in more than one relationship, surprisingly, they suddenly broke up and never explained why. She would try to call and they just would not return the call or explain.  She still thinks it will be interesting to hear from them and find out the reason.

Motherhood and the biological clock is not something that really concerns Lara. She is very accepting and content about her current situation. She explains that she doesn't regret not having children; however, she wouldn't try to have children even if she married.  She doesn't consider adoption, but can take remote responsibility for an orphan.

Her family and friends accept her bachelorette status, "they are a very moderate family, from both sides", says Lara. All her close friends understand her situation. She does feel a little bit of stigma and negative labels from society, and she finds it very difficult to explain to everyone why she is a bachelorette and why she thinks that way. She further explains, " It is a lot of work, sometimes I feel like a

stranger at home, but I learned that when one accepts oneself, people won't matter and they might come around." Lara is happy, content and enjoying herself as she has peace and accepts her status.

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