URBANIZING INTIMACY: THE EFFECT OF URBANIZATION ON MARRIAGE, DATING, AND SEXUALITY IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY AMMAN

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This thesis establishes a framework for understanding contemporary dating habits, marriage trends, and sexual behaviors among a sample of youth in Amman, and the factors that have facilitated and influenced this change. Capturing contemporary social trends and habits requires a nuanced approach dependent upon multiple narratives. I accomplish this through the use of the ethnographic life interview. The narratives recorded enable us to capture the scope of the on-ground changes to marriage, dating, and sexuality in twenty-first century Amman. This thesis asks two questions: 1) How do both young men and women in “west Amman” adapt to social changes regarding dating and marriage and 2) what are the current perspectives on sexuality? This thesis attempts to understand how youth today negotiate the traditional societal values of previous generations within the current era of rapid urbanization and economic challenges. My work unpacks the trends that have emerged, arguing that the marriage crisis lies within youth unemployment and low wages, as my interlocutors point out. Moreover, this thesis lays out a foundation for understanding today’s dating trends in Amman and how they have been influenced by a milieu of urban, economic, and social change that rattle the internal fabric of society. Finally, I maintain throughout the thesis, that the level of exposure to urbanization, neoliberal urban public spaces, social media platforms, and socioeconomic background, determine and shape an individual’s moral negotiations and lifestyle regarding dating, marriage, and sexuality.
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The idea for this thesis began in March 2016. Throughout the journey, a countless number of individuals have helped support me along the way. Words here cannot and will not accurately present my gratitude. However, it is through these words I can forever engrave my appreciation.

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Upon my return from Fulbright, Dr. LaKisha Simmons, a mentor from undergrad, was the first to hear about my thesis idea. Concerned the topic would not be “academic enough,” it was she who reassured me of its uniqueness, motivating me to proceed forward with the idea.

In writing this thesis, I feared any possible backlash I would face for choosing such dense topics. Sensitive in nature, the themes in this thesis are not the easiest to openly discuss. It was my younger sister, Ashwaq Asfour, who pushed me through this worry. She reminded me of the importance and need to discuss these topics in present day, especially researching a community of my own. I ultimately chose to write about these topics as a way to give agency back to the voices in our Arab society. We can and should feel empowered to have “homegrown” discussions on the themes presented. We must recognize that a space is needed to talk about these ideas in our society without judgment.

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Finally, this thesis is in dedication to my angel mother who recognized my love of writing and learning as a child. She reinforced education, helping to sustain and encourage my passion for years, instilling in me grit, ambition, and strength to attain all my dreams and goals. Thank you, Yama. You will be forever missed.
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INTRODUCTION

* * * *

Mai and Jubran picked me up one July evening from the valet entrance of the typically busy Taj Mall. The upscale mall is three minutes away from the American Embassy in Jordan, located in Abdoun, an affluent neighborhood in Amman. I greeted them with the Starbucks drinks in hand I had just purchased inside the mall, before driving off with them down Airport Road. Mai and Jubran are a 26 and 27-year-old dating couple. They invited me to their newly purchased home for their future life together. The Christian Orthodox couple, born and raised in Amman, had been officially dating for a little over a year by the time I sat down to interview them. They met at a youth group back in 2011, but did not actually start their relationship until November 2015. Their story, and the proceeding stories in this thesis illustrate the ever-changing social milieu of a twenty-first century urban city in the Middle East, and the implications youth encounter as they attempt to navigate through new styles of dating habits and marriage trends that differ from their parents’ generation and the generations before.

“What's very funny is that we knew each other for six years, but we never really spoke,” Mai revealed as we sat outside on their private veranda, enjoying our drinks as the summer night sky calmly approached. When they first met, Jubran was in a serious four-year relationship with
someone else; however, he had felt for a while that relationship was not going to work. “It wasn’t working throughout the relationship. Our minds just don’t go together, we think differently.” For Jubran it was simple, they were not compatible. Hurt by the breakup, Jubran turned to Mai for solace.

I didn’t know why I approached Mai. I felt like she was the most appropriate one who can maybe give me some relief. I wasn't aiming for any other relationship at the time. I just needed someone to talk to.

For the next six months, the two continued to talk everyday. It was this stage of just talking that brought them closer together. “We started talking about general things like music, what we like to do. She used to like to read a lot and still does,” Jubran noted.

I liked other things like technology, video games, and things like that. It just started normally, and then when we got into details, we got to know each other; we told each other about our history, personal life, and things like that.

Mai echoed a similar story. “He was talking to me everyday, and he was talking to me about deep stuff that he doesn’t talk to anyone else about, and I saw it in his eyes that he loved me.”

The meaning behind the names Mai and Jubran symbolizes the way their relationship began. Their names are reminiscent of the legendary love story of 20th century Arab poets, Jubran Khalil Jubran and Mai Ziyadah. The two poets never actually met in person; instead they fell in love through letters they would send each other. “They fell in love with each other’s writing,” Mai explained, “through the soul and not the appearance.” And for them, that’s exactly how their love story developed too, through conversation.

Unlike the historic figures, Mai and Jubran have a surprisingly contemporary twist to their love story. For starters, the couple and I were sitting in the future home they had purchased, even though they were not yet engaged. Although the two still lived at home with their parents, purchasing a home together before being engaged would not have been common just ten years
ago. I asked if their families had known about their relationship, and both of their families did. In fact, Jubran’s parents helped him find the house. “They both know we are heading somewhere like this” Jubran tells, “even now my parents know that I love this girl and that I want to take more steps.” For Jubran, more steps forward meant buying a house.

Most people buy the house after they get married or engaged. I actually have this theory that I should be in a more stable situation before I go into that. So I decided. It wasn’t an easy decision to make; it was something I needed to do, with the mortgage.

Mai, aware of Jubran’s intentions to buy their future home, was hesitant at first.

I asked him: ‘shouldn’t we wait until we get engaged?’ But he said no; he wants to have a house before talking to my dad. He wants to tell him that he is taking his daughter to a house; he is not taking me to some random place.

After realizing Jubran’s rationale, Mai agreed. “I was like okay, I support you. He used to spend hours looking and then he would take me to the best apartments.” Mai and Jubran represent the new generation of couples in Amman, dating stories with a contemporary twist, yet simultaneously upholding certain traditional aspects of marriage. However, not everyone in Amman shares Mai and Jubran’s story. For example, Sandy’s relationship with her boyfriend is a secret. As a 25-year-old Christian, dating her 26-year-old Muslim boyfriend is not something she feels comfortable enough sharing with her family. The two met at a mutual friend’s party and had been dating for a year. However, starting the relationship was a bit difficult. It forced them to have what she calls an “emotional conversation” after three months of talking, on where their relationship would go.

We were very into each other and had a deep feeling; the chemistry was undeniable. We decided that if we’re going to do this something is going to be in the way. First of all, he just graduated. He’s a doctor and it takes seven years to become a doctor and he wants to join the doctors abroad thing, so he wants to travel. He wants to specialize outside of Jordan, so that was one part, the other part is the religion part, he's Muslim and I’m Christian.
This is not the first time Sandy has dated outside her religion; when she lived in Europe for a year, she met and dated a Muslim Syrian; yet, she has not told her family about either relationship. According to Sandy, her family knows of him as a friend, not her boyfriend. Sandy is certain her family would not accept the situation. “None of them knew because he’s Muslim and if they knew that I was in a relationship with a Muslim, they would be against it. They wouldn’t even allow me to do it.”, Sandy however, is not against the idea of marrying a Muslim. In her opinion, religion is not an aspect married couples argue about, but rather, other external factors cause issues between couples.

Here in Amman, especially the Christians since we are the minority, four percent of entire Jordan, it’s very hard to find a Christian guy, Muslims are more available. So the probability that you find someone who is Muslim that you completely have chemistry with, is higher than finding a Christian guy. To me personally, religion does not matter, because if we both believe in God, that’s all you need. At the end of the day, when you guys fight it’s not going to be about religion, it’s going to be about character, it’s going to be about money, it’s going to be about stuff that has nothing to do with religion. So at the end of the day, religion is just a religion, and as long as we both believe in God, and we love each other, that’s all you need.

Despite her opinion, Sandy and Hashem know that eventually one day their relationship will come to an end, especially when Hashem leaves to complete his medical residency in Europe.

We're going to stay together until then. And we have an agreement, we both know, it’s our motto actually. We both know that it's going to end, but we want to live the moment...you don’t know what’s going to happen tomorrow. What if I go home now and I die, what difference would it make if I was in a relationship with a Muslim? As long as I'm with a guy who makes me happy, who is really good to me, and I’m not doing anything wrong, and I’m just going with my emotions, I’m good.

Like many other youth his age, Ahmad’s story embodies the newest trends of dating in Amman. The 25-year-old Muslim finds Tinder, an online dating application, to be the best platform for meeting single women.

Currently, people are meeting each other in pubs, in places, through mutual friends, or through online dating, like Tinder. It depends on your interests; it depends on what you're
looking for. You can just pick whatever you're looking for and go for that online, it's a very open thing. It's very popular and it's really working everywhere.

Ahmad learned about Tinder a year and half ago and now uses it quite often for casual dating with both foreigners and Jordanians. Yet, there’s a difference in his opinion on the two groups; “Most foreigners I met only stay for two months or three months, we only hang out, coffee, stuff like that. Most of them are expats, so not in actual relationship or an actual dating thing.” He then describes the Arab women on Tinder in two different categories. “There are extremes. Or maybe the ones I’ve met. It's either too open, they're not looking for a relationship; they're only looking for a hookup or a one-time thing. Some people are just so open and I respect that.” He added, “What they want and what they don't want, they just make it super clear from the first conversation, and some people never say and you just discover that once you see them in person, so it depends.” The other extreme, Ahmad asserts are “really conservative” women, “They don't even want to meet you, they just want to chat and I’m not really into texting and cyber relationships. They just want to chat and text and that's it, have a cyber relationship.” Even though Ahmad does not always ask about religion, he has gone on Tinder dates with both, Muslims and Christians.

In total, Ahmad has met ten different girls on Tinder, and is currently talking to a Palestinian-Jordanian he met on the social dating application. Although the relationship is new, he feels there is a possibility their relationship will develop and flourish into something more.

I mean a spark is developing with us with time, I am liking that, but I don’t know where it is going yet. I don’t know if it's going to develop or if it's going to fade, but what’s different with this girl than the other girls for me is that I am a very emotional person, I start liking with my heart more, even if my brain is telling me no, even if my brain is telling me it's not right for you. This time, it's the opposite, my brain is telling yes, but my heart is a bit, I don’t know!
Although Ahmad’s story highlights individuality and freedom of choice, not all Jordanians have the ability to choose whom they wish to eventually marry, even amongst the wealthier informants. I discovered this through a casual and unplanned conversation with 30-year-old Laith, a businessman who runs and operates his family’s well-known restaurant chain throughout Amman. I met Laith through his cousin, Momen, a friend of mine who was visiting his family in Amman for the summer. The three of us met at a popular French café called Kepi on Paris Circle in Jabal Lweibdeh. Laith’s Ralph Lauren navy blue polo matched his boat shoes, and his jeans were a crisp white. These ostentatious signs were rather telling; Laith came from money. As I explained to Momen my reason for doing research he chuckled and said, “Hey, you should interview Laith, he’s got a great story.” Eager to learn more, I turned to Laith and asked him if he would share. He agreed and warned that his story did not have a happy ending. Prideful, Laith began by telling me he had dated a total of fifty women. I asked, “Laith, out of those fifty, how many where actual serious relationships?” He confidently replied “about four to six.” Irritated by the answer, I asked, “Well how many did you actually love?” “One.” he replied.

When Laith was 19 years old, he fell in love with 15-year-old Amna, the only woman he would ever love to this day. Over the years, their relationship flourished as they both hoped they would eventually marry. Unfortunately, his parents refused to allow this. Not only was she from a lower social class, she was also pure Jordanian, and his parents, wealthy Palestinians in Amman, forbade Laith from ever seeing her again. In order to prove his family wrong for denying her, Amna not only finished high school, she continued on to pursue higher education and is currently completing her PhD. More than a decade after the break-up, I asked Laith if he would ever defy his parents, and simply marry her without their consent. The answer was no. As
it turns out, Laith is currently married and has a toddler. In order to forget about his first love, Laith’s parents forced him to marry a wealthy Palestinian. However, Laith explained that he does not love her, nor has he ever loved her. Instead, Amna would always be in his heart.

ASKING THE QUESTIONS

The four stories above are representative of the level of diversity in the narratives on dating from my fieldwork in Jordan during the summer of 2017. While first living in Amman from 2015 to 2016 on a Fulbright teaching assignment, I connected with diverse groups of Jordanians from various levels of society: Jordanians in the workforce both private and public, individuals from all socioeconomic backgrounds, secular and religious, college students and young children, and families as well. I became familiar with their daily habits, rituals, opinions, struggles, and fears. Through this experience, I came to recognize a reoccurring theme in everyday conversations, namely discussions on dating, marriage, and sexuality. I also realized that not only was this a topic of discussion for both males and females, but also for Muslims and Christians of a variety of class levels and of both Palestinian and Jordanian decent. Despite intersectional differences among them, urbanization, social media, and delayed marriages were common factors that shaped their current dating habits, a style intrinsically different from the generations of their parents and grandparents.¹

Intrigued by the conversations and observations I was having in Amman, I wanted to unpack what was happening to a society that had traditionally married much younger than today.² Thus, I sat with many individuals and diverse groups to discuss this in informal settings and to gauge whether this could be a phenomenon worth researching. Increasingly I wondered

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¹ For more on the concept of intersectionality, see Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins.” Crenshaw discusses “identity politics” and how different facets of identity such as: race, culture, gender, and class, create divisions in societies.

about what was causing delays in marriage, but more captivatingly have ‘coupling’ and ‘dating’ become acceptable facets in Jordanian society to reconcile the delay? In certain relationships, I noticed that within the context of their dating and coupling habits, certain aspects of tradition were upheld, such as waiting to have sex or living apart until marriage. Capturing contemporary social trends and habits requires a nuanced approach that draws upon multiple narratives and ideas. The current perspectives on sexuality, and how young men and women in “west Amman” adapted to social changes regarding dating and marriage, were intriguing.\(^3\) In this thesis I explore how youth today negotiate traditional societal values from previous generations through a current era of rapid urbanization and economic challenges. Eventually, I ask: \textit{how have urbanization, neoliberal economic developments, and social media shaped contemporary dating structures? And what are the contemporary dating and marriage habits and sexuality trends among youth in Amman?}

Dating and love relationships have existed in Jordan for a while; Anthropologist Fida Adely reaffirms this in a piece on love and compatibility, though not as visible in the public eye compared to today.\(^4\) Labeling contemporary dating, marriage, and sexuality trends as a ‘crisis’ is a common motif throughout the current social literature on 20th and 21\(^{st}\) century MENA region.\(^5\) Frances Hasso delves into the perceived family and youth crises in Egypt and the UAE, highlighting state efforts to produce certain educational programs to improve the behavior of family members in the hopes of recreating an authentic national family.\(^6\) An entire section of the Fall 2016 edition of the \textit{Arab Studies Journal} was dedicated to examining present day love and

\(^3\) The term “west Amman” is used in everyday conversations. This is not strictly defined by geography, but rather it goes beyond physical boarders, capturing socioeconomic class and urbanization as well. More on the definition of “west Amman” is available in chapter two.


romance in the Arab world. 7 Two questions come to mind in reading this literature; first is there really a marriage crisis? And second, are local people labeling their lived experiences as a crisis or is the outside too quick to label their habits and trends so?

Unpacking this “marriage crisis” and the trends that have emerged, this ethnographic work this highlights an alternative crisis, one shaped by the economic situation, specifically high youth unemployment, and an education system that fails to adequately teach about sex, reproductive health, and staying safe on social media. Students are not taught when it’s actually right, wrong, or harmful to have sex, as in stories I recorded of young teenage boys pressured to engage in sexual intercourse by their families’ housekeepers, as revealed by two interviews. Shinning light on these problems is the heart of Urbanizing Intimacies. By sharing these individual recorded stories, this ethnographic work allows youth in Amman to voice their opinions, concerns, and perceptions on how they navigate relationships and marriage in a swiftly changing social context. The goal is to lay a foundation for understanding today’s dating trends in Amman and how they have been influenced by a milieu of urban, economic, and social change that rattle the internal fabric of society. I argue throughout this thesis that the socioeconomic class of my participants is a variable that shaped their beliefs and practices surrounding an individual’s moral compass, as well as their level of exposure to urbanization, neoliberal urban public spaces, and social media platforms: these I found determine an individual’s moral negotiations and concessions in dating, marriage, and sexuality.

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

Writing Against Binaries in Culture: My Role as the Researcher

Cultural analysis, the core anthropological method, is often loaded with power hierarchies that are difficult to escape. In “Writing Against Culture,” Lila Abu-Lughod critiques certain aspects of anthropology, arguing that the discipline is historically fashioned on the division of the “West and the non-West”, and the “self and other”, respectively. She goes on to explain that the concept of culture has been laden with these hierarchical binaries. Postfeminist thought, as mentioned by Abu-Lughod, addresses these hierarchical binaries in the global arena the non-Westerner continues to be viewed as “other”, while the Western examinee enjoys the title of “self.” This dichotomy ignores the ways in which the self and other are embedded in a “power divide.”

Being an Arab woman, of the same age as most of my research participants, played a significant role. It connected me to my interlocutors on multiple levels. Not only did I relate to their frustrations, they were also able to express certain aspects of their lives in a manner that did not need much articulation. Being of Arab decent allowed me to comprehend origins of some traditional aspects, without confusion. Prior to fieldwork, I originally thought the men would be more reserved around me throughout the interview, however this was not the case. The men discussed aspects of their private lives rather openly. At times, I noted that it was the women who were reserved, and not willing to openly engage as much as their male counterparts. Some women, possibly out of fear for their own reputations, revealed less about their sexual experiences, while the men discussed their sexuality in more detail than I anticipated. During a

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9 Ibid., p. 467.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
few interviews, I had to negotiate my position between researcher, friend, and counselor, as I heard stories about sexual abuse and manipulation, and also financial woes. Regardless, being in the same age group as my sample made for easy discussion with both groups.

Despite being a “halfie,” a person whose “national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage,” I came with many of my own stereotypes. My research helped to breakdown my assumptions regarding Arab youth. For example, to my surprise I found that the majority of men I encountered were progressive, rebutting the negative image of the Arab man held in the minds of many in the world through their enlightened opinions and actions. The ambitious and determined women I interviewed saw the value not only in their education and their labor participation, but also the value in themselves as human beings, not simply objects of desire and lust. Out of admiration for them all, my greatest worry is my adequacy in representing their stories fairly. Since the audience of my ethnographic work will vary, I reflected carefully here on how to represent certain perspectives of my interlocutors due to the reader’s knowledge level, a challenge Abu-Lughod mentions when writing against culture. I write this thesis keeping in mind older generations and policy makers in Jordan, western audiences not familiar with the contemporary social behaviors of MENA urban cities, and more prominently, I write this ethnography keeping my participants in mind. Throughout my fieldwork, I wished I could have brought everyone together for a group discussion on dating, marriage and sexuality, providing them a platform to discuss and listen to each other’s worries, perspectives on sexuality and love, and their requirements in a future spouse, in the hopes to reveal that they all share similar wants and needs.

12 Lughod, p. 466 Abu-Lughod borrows this term by Kirin Narayan.
13 Ibid., p. 470
Throughout writing this thesis, I had to personally overcome certain fears regarding my own reputation. Often times I wondered, how would people perceive me if I openly choose to write about such sensitive topics, especially sitting in a café and talking about sexuality with men I had never met before. This fear actually deepened my connection to my female participants, allowing me to pinpoint the double consciousness we share. Paradoxically, I came to realize the hypocrisy in my endeavors. How could I possibly attempt to alter societal taboos and influence my participants, if I too carried around the burden of reputation and honor? We need to freely discuss these topics. In writing this ethnography, I also empowered myself to do.

**Why Ethnographies?**

The contemporary dating habits of youth in west Amman is a subject in need of further study. Often, ethnographies are used to complicate mainstream beliefs and stereotypes of certain cultures. Emotionally charged and often false descriptions of marginalized groups are imposed on society through “media coverage, security concerns, international governance, immigration policies, military intervention, and even feminist advocacy.”14 Abu-Lughod posits that ethnographies are the most effective tool for disrupting “hegemonic representations and political formations,” by providing us with alternative narratives that convey reality of an event or subject through individual lived experiences. It is these precise lived experiences that interject in and ultimately dismantle the present day socio-political debates.15 Through ethnographic narratives, we can pinpoint the effect of the political process, policies and laws on people’s everyday lives, which Abu-Lughod believes is the “heart” of this type of method.16 Not only do they help

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15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., p. 567.
challenge generalizations, engaged anthropology through the use of ethnographies acts as a “political critique” go far beyond an academic audience.\(^\text{17}\)

Ethnographies enable us to answer questions about society, providing the lens needed to capture the scope of on-ground changes to marriage, dating and sexuality in twenty-first century Amman. The current literature on dating, marriage, and sexuality depends on the ethnographic method to write against binaries in culture. Frances Hasso, Shereen El Feki, Lara Deeb and Mona Harb, and Fida Adely, conduct ethnographic research as a technique to feature lived experiences of youth in Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan, respectively.\(^\text{18}\) To fill gaps mainly in time and place, I follow suit adding a particular focus on sexual relations, knowledge on urban space, and contemporary attitudes regarding traditional marriage. Though not a full ethnography, the short time I spent in Amman over the summer conducting research and hearing stories adds value to the prominent work of those before me. The backdrop of this ethnography provides an alternative lens, one that sets its foundations in a particular time, location, and generation, and class level in Jordan. I relied on multiple methods to gather data that I will describe in proceeding section.

**Methods and Data Collection**

In the summer of 2017, I conducted fieldwork in Amman, Jordan over a period of three months. My research methodology consisted primarily of three forms of data collection: ethnographic life interviews, participant observations, and free lists. Ethnographic life interviews are recorded personal testimonies given in an oral form that provide the researcher with “intimate knowledge” and a personal perspective of another culture and lived experiences; given the

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\(^{17}\) Abu-Lughod., p. 567, 595 & 604.

subject of my research this mainly explored perspectives on sexuality, dating, and marriage habits. The in-depth interview provides the participant a platform to, “convey details, to provide information, and to reflect.” Through these semi-structured ethnographic life interviews, I was able to gather information on people’s personal backgrounds, dating histories, their current dating habits, and perspectives on sexuality.

Conducting active participant observations allowed me to learn about “cultural rules for behavior” as explained by James Spradley. It also provided me with insight that might not come up in formal interviews. Participants feel less pressure to answer correctly. This kind of observational and conversational data captures the essence of a person’s daily life without intentional filtering. Ultimately I collected sixteen different casual and unrecorded conversations about dating, marriage, and sexuality in a journal throughout my fieldwork with Jordanians from all different backgrounds and ages as a supplement to the semi-structured ethnographic life interviews.

I also sought to grasp a basic understanding of space, particularly public and private spaces of dating. I accomplished this through a systematic and structured collection of free lists: a method in which each informant was given five minutes after their interview to write down as many public and private places youth utilize for dating in west Amman, a method in which each informant was given five minutes after their interview to write down as many public and private places youth utilize for dating in west Amman. These lists are a compilation of words pertaining to my question of place and space. The more participants I gathered, the “more stable”

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20 Ibid., p. 35.
23 Ibid., p. 6 &12. A weakness of this method would be asking yes or no questions, and unclear responses. Each respondent must “clarify their responses;” for example if they wrote “café” as a place where people date in Amman, I asked them to be more specific and list which cafes.
and accurate the lists became.\textsuperscript{24} Throughout the ethnography, I analyze, compare and contrast, and interpret the data, pinpointing the most popular places to go out, and whether or not these dating spaces can be linked to urbanization of the capital. From the free lists I collected, I was able to learn about: the places came up most frequently based on popularity, and the places considered better-known or more important, taking into account when on the list they were mentioned. This method illuminates the breadth of new spaces and the spaces people share in the public sphere for dating and other social outings under the era of urbanization.

\textit{Limits of the Method}

Informant accuracy is a setback of self-reported data particularly in structured and semi-structured interviews.\textsuperscript{25} The problem or weakness of personal interviews is tied to the accuracy of the informant when narrating past events, behavior, and circumstances. Unintentionally, my participants may have changed or altered their accounts of dating habits based off of memory, or perhaps how they wish to be perceived. Additionally, given the sensitivity surrounding such a controversial personal topic in a conservative society, interlocutors may at times have withheld certain personal information in these semi-structured life interviews out of fear of being judged. I attempted to deter anxieties my participants had by ensuring their comfort and complete anonymity, providing everyone with a pseudonym.

On the other hand, being able to recognize where in the interview a person withheld information is a critical skill of the researcher. It is these precise moments of ambiguity during an interview that allow me to recognize the double consciousness a person lives their life with based on cultural norms and taboos. In other words, what people choose to report and how they choose to speak about themselves are both relevant sources of information. It provides me with a

\textsuperscript{24} Weller, p. 11.

frame of the outward image they wish to portray. Reading in between the lines of personal comments adds valuable knowledge on how an interlocutor chooses to present him or herself and sometimes why. With all this in mind, the data I collected through ethnographic life interviews, participant observations, and free lists, provided me with a general idea of dating habits and trends under “neoliberal urbanism” in twenty-first century west Amman, and within my sample demographic.

Sample Selection

My sample included Jordanians ages 23-33 residing or working in west Amman. I use the term ‘youth’ to describe this generation. I conducted interviews in English, Levantine Arabic, or a combination of both, depending on the participant, and then translated and transcribed my interviews. Living in the capital, this particular generation directly experiences the effects of neoliberal urbanism, unemployment, and generational income disparities. Not only is this age group the most educated, they are encountering the highest levels of unemployment compared to generations before (see chapter one). I interviewed and recorded a total of 32 participants, providing me with a sufficient amount of data to produce a “saturation” of themes.26 I interviewed sixteen single men and sixteen single women all currently residing and/or working in Amman alone or with family.27

Within the male/female groups, I interviewed eight Muslim men and eight Christian men, and eight Muslim women and eight Christian women. While my sample was evenly divided by religion, it’s important to note that Jordanian Christians only represent three to five percent of the population.28 However, reflecting this ratio in my sample did not seem as

27 I use the term ‘single’ here to describe someone who is not married. Although my research participants were not married (nor ever had been married), quite a few in my sample were dating, and one was engaged.
28 http://dosweb.dos.gov.jo
significant as originally assumed since my research is focused on capturing individual stories and lived experiences of a particular group of people and their lifestyle. It does not reflect on Amman’s society as a whole. Instead, what these recorded interviews capture is the diversity of Amman’s population irrespective of religious background. My research demonstrates that there exists no single story or narrative in west Amman regarding dating and marriage, and that despite similarities and repeated trends, no two stories are alike.

Moreover, even though prior to starting my fieldwork I anticipated that religion would play a role in dating trends, on the contrary, I found that religion is not a determining variable that could fully explain dating habits or premarital sex in west Amman. Religion did however, play a dominant role for two things: choosing a future spouse to marry and how each religious group perceived the other’s dating and marriage habits. Although quite of few of my interlocutors have dated or were then dating outside their religion, the overwhelming majority expressed that when it was time to marry, they’d prefer to marry someone from the same religion. Of the eight Muslim girls four wore a hijab, and it was in fact the Christian part of my sample that expressed or highlighted adherence to their faith more than the Muslim part of my sample.

The sample was intentionally limited to those whom have already completed undergraduate study. The participants are alumni from various universities around Jordan such as: German-Jordan University and the University of Jordan, while a few traveled to the U.S. and Canada for their bachelor’s degrees. Furthermore, their areas of specialization and current employment positions differ as well. The 32 participants represent a diverse range of occupations in Amman, including: business owners, engineers, architects, teachers, bank tellers, pharmacists,
financial analysts, risk consultants, telecom employees, NGO Officers, accountants, free-lance journalists, musicians, youth-group leaders, doctors, and previous management consultants.

**Interview Structure**

To give some context to participants’ lived experiences, I asked background questions to determine family origin and socio-economic status. For primary and secondary school, the interlocutors go to either public or private schools depending on family income levels. My participants’ socioeconomic background is best categorized as middle-class Jordanians, however I found that even within the middle class, their level of access still varied a bit. After asking certain questions about family background I was able to categorize whether a participant belonged to the upper-middle, middle-middle, or lower-middle class since parents’ education and employment varied. For example, while some parents only have high school degrees, others have masters and PhDs. Whether a person has traveled outside Jordan was another factor I used in determining class level. Many of participants had travel experiences vacationing, studying, and even living abroad all over Europe, the Middle East and North America. Parents’ education level, combined with the town in west Amman they live, and previous travel experiences, allowed me to rationalize my categorizations regarding the participant’s socioeconomic background. Others directly told me the class they believed to be in. My original assumption prior to fieldwork was that class could in fact determine attitudes on dating and premarital sex. While my sample is not representative of all classes, the class level of my sample illustrated that this particular group of individuals who share socioeconomic similarities, uphold perceptions on dating possibly influenced by their class advantages and peers. These individuals are from a self-selected group that already subscribes to a certain lifestyle, one possibly molded by their class background. This was evident in the cafes, pubs, and bars they mentioned, the universities they
attended, and the neighborhoods where they lived. However, these factors do not exclusively determine their lifestyle; through participant observations I noticed that other families in similar class categories did not always subscribe to this lifestyle. The attitude of my participants demonstrates that class privileges did in fact influence their lifestyle. This dominant self-selected lifestyle shown in my data is a product of snowball sampling from one network I describe below.

I began with ethnographic life interviews from the network I had in Amman, this included seven acquaintances I made throughout the year I first lived in Amman on a Fulbright teaching assignment. Then, I acquired more interviews through snowball sampling from my network, and two other snowball interviews from outside my network. My sample selection was inspired by previous anthropological studies conducted by Adely and historian Stephanie Latte Abdallah as will be described in the proceeding chapters. I mostly conducted interviews in cafes located in Jabal Lweibdeh and Abdoun, in my apartment, and in a few situations, at the interviewee’s home. Interviews lasted between 40 minutes to an hour and a half. While the majority of the interlocutors were in fact currently single, quite a few were dating, some previously dated, some were previously engaged, one was engaged, and a few had never been in relationships. My interview questions were semi-structured with a list of general questions I asked everyone. These questions can be grouped into three categories: the first set were geared towards understanding personal and family background, the second set was to understand their general perspectives on dating, marriage, and sexuality habits and trends in Amman; and, the final set of questions were intended at understanding the individual’s personal experiences with

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29 I met and interviewed a pharmacist that summer who recommended two of her friends for interviews. The three all worked in different stores inside Abdali Mall.
the topic and their thoughts on marriage in the future. In the following section, I provide a brief synopsis of my research findings and an overview of each chapter and its highlighted themes.

CHAPTER SYNOPSIS

The idea of contemporary hetero-social coupling relationships is not a new phenomenon to the region, but before I can analyze and observe the present day situation, we must first understand how Palestinians and Jordanians in Amman met their significant others in previous generations. This ethnography will be divided into three sections primarily building off of previous research conducted on the subject matter. In the first chapter, I begin with a brief theoretical background of kinship and a historical analysis of marriage patterns in 20th century Amman. This is pertinent to our understanding of generational shifts in marriage patterns we see today. Surveying the literature meets two goals. The first is to understand traditional marriage structures and their tie to strengthening kinship bonds. Understanding the features of traditional marriage structures of the twentieth century will lead to the second goal of understanding the factors that shaped contemporary coupling and dating patterns over time. This comparison is vital, allowing us to understand contemporary perspectives on traditional marriage.

After contextualizing traditional marriage structures within kinship bonds, I then assess the factors that altered these structures, thus influencing delayed marriages. These factors include: greater access to education, women’s labor participation, and economic liberalism. These developments have shaped the contemporary dating habits we see today. Ryan Brown et al. and Navteg Dhillon and Tariq Yousef highlight the terms of delayed marriage and

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30 The list of questions I used for the interviews is found in Appendix 1 at the end.
31 Ryan Andrew Brown, Louay Constant, Peter Glick, and Audra K. Grant. *Youth in Jordan: Transitions from Education to Employment*. (Santa Monica, Calif: RAND Corporation, 2014).
32 Dhillon and Yousef.
waithood, and argue that increased access to education and employment issues provoke delayed marriages. Similar to Brown and Dhillon, Linda Layne and Ann Marie Baylouny also speak to the changing economic structures in Jordan during the late 20th century and the effects it had on delayed marriages. These authors in addition to Daniele Cantini34 illuminate for us how higher education acquisition delayed marriage and how it either opens or closes the coupling pool and marriage market. What the literature also provides us with is an understanding of how access to higher education affects the marriage rates of men and women differently in some contexts as articulated by Alisa Lewin.35 Recognizing the gaps in the literature is a critical step proceeding forward. In this first chapter I attempt to establish three links; the first is connecting kinship bonds to traditional marriage structures, the second is to link economic changes with delayed marriages, while the third link connects delayed marriages to present day dating trends, a nexus not fully established in the literature.

Despite the surplus of knowledge on the presumed causes of current delayed marriages, the scholarship lacks engagement with the effects of urbanization on society, particular dating and marriage trends. Thus, in chapter two I underscore and link neoliberal urbanism theory with dating trends.

As the capital progressively urbanizes and multinational pubs, cafes, and restaurants line the street of Amman, how has this given youth increasing access to new spaces in the public sphere? Secondly, I consider how contemporary attitudes on interreligious dating and dating within the workforce have shifted alongside the changing spatial realities. Additionally, this

chapter goes beyond physical space, analyzing the role of information and communication technologies and social media access play as dating platforms.

Finally, chapter three will address the perceived changes in sexual behavior, attitudes on virginity, and the consumption of pornography. In the current literature, contemporary notions on virginity and sexuality in west Amman are seldom addressed. The stories I share exhibit the ways in which youth in Amman navigate between their own sexual desires and the behaviors prescribed to them by society, similar to the works of Frances Hasso and Shereen el Feki. Chapter three captures stories that illustrate a wide variety of sexual habits, trends, and perceptions. These recorded lived experiences demonstrate that certain youth from my sample not only experiment with premarital sex, negotiate and compromise intimate desires, many in my sample mentioned being quite accepting of those who have experimented with premarital sex. It is in this section I attempt to highlight the gendered disconnect between youth themselves. Throughout these interviews I captured gendered dynamics and contradictions between what I found and what my participants believed. Other areas of disconnect involve gendered divides on virginity, that will be addressed in chapter three. Ultimately I ask, *are youth in Amman sexually active and what are current perceptions of virginity?* These are some questions I hope to address throughout this ethnographic work.

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CHAPTER ONE
Changing Attitudes: On Kinship and Traditional Marriage

In a society where kinship is supremely important, loyalties to kin supersede all other loyalties.

Robin Fox, Kinship and Marriage (1967)

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Theories of kinship bonds help characterize traditional marriage structures, or in Arabic, zawaj taqlidi, in 20th century Amman. This chapter explains how and why kinship bonds formed, and how they impact marriage in Jordanian society. Historically, marriage ties have been critical to socioeconomic security; however, changing political and socioeconomic contexts have in many respects changed the socioeconomic foundations of marriage and other kinship bonds. The comparison between attitudes on traditional marriage structures of the 20th and 21st century, will ultimately explain how rapid urbanization altered kinship bonds and marriage formation. Prior to highlighting the attitudes of youth today on traditional marriage, the historical approach will provide insight as to why kinship involvement in marriage superseded all other loyalties. The section on Jordan’s political economy will identify the ways in which economic stagnation and low-wages altered marriage trends. The chapter will also contrast the literature on 20th century
Amman with the contemporary attitudes of youth regarding traditional marriage structures, love, and current marriage trends such as attitudes on age of first marriage.

HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING OF KINSHIP

Throughout human history, societies lived and relied mostly on their “kinship-based groups.” Anthropologist Robin Fox explains that connections with kin and ancestors produced all social class structures, however, it was the rise of industrialization as he points out, that has led to a new social order that shaped people’s lives, and demanded “impersonal, bureaucratic” and new “rational social-structure.” Despite industrialization, Fox believes certain characteristics of kinship persisted in some societies longer than others. Historically in Mediterranean countries, kinship ties were sustained over time and, as Fox argues, actually ran in opposition to the “demands of an expanding industrial society.” According to Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, kinship is strictly cultural and not biological, which helps explain why marriage in certain Arab societies was vital to kinship bonds. Fox also asserts that kinship is a mechanism of social structure with legal roots linking “inheritance, succession and marriage,” a method of organizing marriage relationships between groups. Since they simply represent “alternative ways of doing things,” societies still operating under kinship systems or kinship bonds should not necessarily be seen in opposition to industrialization. Before the academic work of Levi-Strauss, marriage was considered as a method to recruit additional kin, as way to “replenish” the group with offspring. However, the Levi-Straussian approach views kinship

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38 Ibid., p. 13 & 15.
39 Ibid., p15.
41 Fox. p. 16; p. 2.
42 Ibid., p. 18.
43 Ibid., p. 23.
groups as “units in a system of alliances, made or expressed by marriage,” therefore not just for procreation but also to gain kin from and within other groups.44 Here, groups “moved women around the system in marriage.”45 Marshall Sahlins notes that “kinship fashioned sociologically” may be the same in substance as “kinship figured genealogically,” thus creating close kinsmen and distant kinsmen, depending on if they were created by blood or marriage.46 For Sahlins, socially constructed kinship functions as a “necessary complement of sexual reproduction.”47 Thus, there are many forms of kinship, presented in “various degrees and forms” such as “performative” or “made kinships” or in simpler terms kinship by marriage, as well as ones built on “procreation”, or kinship by blood.48 The distinctive character of the Arab family has been built on this tribal kinship structure or as Arab intellectual and historian Hisham Sharabi labels, notions of the “clan community.”49 However, parallel to Fox’s conception of the role of industrialization, Sharabi posits that the change in kinship from “clan family” to “nuclear family” is a “fairly recent development,” provoked by urbanization, “class stratification,” and motivated by economic transformations.50 Some Arab cities experienced urbanization’s effect on family life earlier than others. For example, according to Mary Ann Fay, the “monogamous nuclear family” was a norm that characterized elite twentieth-century households in Egypt.51 Fay then posits that these “Western-style nuclear families” were not only a natural product of social and economic

44 Fox. p. 23.
45 Ibid.
48 Ibid., p. 62.
50 Ibid.
transformations that swept Egypt throughout the course 1900s, but that they also developed through elite feminist movements.⁵²

Jordanian society in the 1900s was centered on the family and kin-based relations. The social system was largely kinship based in order to reconcile with the lack of central power until the late Ottoman period and British mandate established the “nation.”⁵³ In this context, marriages were primarily a family affair. Decisions about marriage were largely made by kinship tribes and often were aimed at maintaining patrilineal alliances. Richard Antoun analyzes the role of tribes in Jordanian society, arguing that they serve as institutions that merge “trust, cooperation, and social control at the local level in the morals and behaviors of the community.”⁵⁴ This idea of “tribal conflict resolution” resonated deep within the context of marriage as well; mayors and pashas, according to Antoun served as intermediaries who helped implement “harmonious solution[s]” in the process.⁵⁵ The weakening of these kinship ties through the development of different social statuses, as Antoun addresses, mitigated tribal conflict resolution.⁵⁶ It is the “new expression of individual interest” regarding the conjugal or nuclear family over the “consanguine” or extended family, that destabilized the norms of old society based on kinship and community membership.⁵⁷

DEFINING TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE STRUCTURES

Drawing on my personal knowledge about the local culture, as well as the perspectives of my interlocutors, I define 21st century traditional marriage structures as a method undertaken

⁵² Fay, p. 77&93-4.
⁵³ Ibid.
⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 450.
⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 452.
⁵⁷ Ibid. p.458.
mainly by the mother, who connects with other mothers and families she knows in order to find her son, or daughter in some instances, a spouse through these kinship networks. I also draw on the research by anthropologist Fida Adely, political scientist and historian Stephanie Latte-Abdallah and gender studies scholar, Julia Droeber. Adely defines traditional marriage as a “process of matchmaking and personal connections;” when a man or his family hear about a potential bride they inquire about the family from people who know them and then plan to make a potential visit. Traditional marriage varies by community and time, and a universal definition cannot be applied in every situation. Nevertheless, this structure generally emphasizes the role of kinship bonds and solidifies respect for the father and male relatives of the bride. This definition is rather common in the works of academics who write about early marriage patterns and traditional marriage structures in the Middle East.

In her article, Abdallah assesses the styles and patterns of marriage transformations among the Palestinians who fled to Jordan. She evaluates four generations and places them in four different categories starting from women born around 1920 until 1984. She categorized, labeled, and described the four distinct generations as follows: the “Generation of Palestine” born before 1938, “Daughters of The Catastrophe” born between 1939-1953, the “Saudi Generation” born between 1954-1968, and finally the “TV Generation” born between 1969-1983. The significance of kinship bonds, she argues, was quite prevalent in the first generation, the Generation of Palestine. This generation of women was equated with the ideas of “familial

61 Abdallah, p.48. Abdallah conducts the majority of her interviews in two camps, the Jabal Hussein camp in Amman and the Gaza Camp in Jerash, a town to the north of Amman. She emphasizes how traditional family bonds, economic issues, Palestinian nationalism, and uprisings affected marriage trends.
love” which Abdallah suggests is the love of siblings and family.\(^{62}\) This love of family she emphasizes was more vital than love of spouse since kinship bonds were highly valued. Abdallah also suggests that the majority of the spouses for women in this generation were chosen by their fathers, brothers, or uncles and that some brides “had not seen their husband before the wedding.”\(^{63}\)

Dhillon and Yousef also analyze the role of kinship bonds in their book, and provide a similar view to that of Abdallah. In their description of the “traditional life course,” families assisted individuals in the transition from childhood to adulthood.\(^{64}\) Kin marriages, they argue, “were common and families shared resources” because dowry and the cost of marriage between the two families acted as a form of resource exchange.\(^{65}\) Resource sharing and maintaining wealth and resources within the family was the main goal of marriage, and practices such as cousin marriage and the practice of badil marriages, helped to achieve this goal.\(^{66}\) In 1950, nearly 85 percent of the population in Jordan lived in rural towns where the “traditional life course” aided in the persistence of kinship bonds through marriages with a main prerogative of resource sharing between kinship groups.\(^{67}\) Jordanian laws recognized the responsibility of the husband in financially supporting his wife. According to Middle East historian, Amira Sonbol, this financial support includes: food, clothing, housing and medical needs, all agreed upon through the marriage contract.\(^{68}\)

Sociologist Alisa Lewin also focuses on kinship bonds and marriage. However, unlike the previous scholars, her study involves analyzing religion as a method to reinforce the kinship

\(^{62}\) Abdallah. p.50.
\(^{63}\) Ibid. p.48. Abdallah also claims that 2/3 the women she interviewed from this first generation married before the age of 15.
\(^{64}\) Dhillon and Yousef, p.13.
\(^{65}\) Ibid., p. 32.
\(^{66}\) Badil marriage is when two families exchange a son and a daughter, or two children for marriage with another family.
\(^{67}\) Dhillon and Yousef, p. 13.
bond. Lewin emphasizes that Palestinian Muslim, Christian, and Druze did not often intermarry and that they actually “operate on three completely distinct marriage markets.” Lewin’s theory of separate marriage markets based on religion is valuable; it sheds light on the desire of families to keep their children’s marriages within the same religion, a method of strengthening and maintaining the kinship bond. Lewin notes that families arranged marriages to cousins in order to decrease the number of offspring who never marry. The fear in dissolving these separate marriage markets is associated with the loss of kin, not only children but also grandchildren, to other kinship groups. Focusing on religion as a facet of strengthening the kinship bond helps add another layer to our understanding of traditional marriage structures. Additionally, the legal structure has historically discouraged inter-religious marriages. In Jordanian law, civil and secular marriage contracts did not exist, making it nearly impossible to marry without converting.

Due to changes during the later half of the 20th century in class structures, access to education, structural adjustment policies, and urbanization, marriage patterns began to change. Traditional marriage structures served to protect and strengthen kinship bonds and to ensure economic security for daughters. However, changing economic realities have inevitably altered kinship and its connection to marriage formation. In the proceeding section, we begin to see how a changing political economy in Jordan and access to education throughout the late 20th century shaped and shifted traditional marriage structures, particularly in the increasingly urbanized and industrialized capital, Amman.

—Lewin, p. 361. Grounding her data solely on Palestinian women in Israel, Lewin provides us with an extensive look at marriage patterns during the mid and late 20th century and the changes in age of first marriage throughout that time period.

—Ibid., p. 365-7 The affects of the Arab-Israeli conflict altered boarders, therefore the marriage market of certain religions and groups decreased severely. This strengthened marriages within families, yet again solidifying kinship.


—Sonbol, p. 22.
CHANGING POLITICAL ECONOMY

As previously explained, kinship in Jordan has historically played a prominent role in marriage formations; families often organized marriages to ensure economic security and resources, to retain wealth in families, or forge political and economic alliances. Nevertheless, this changed once women and girls were involved in the public labor force, and increased their school enrollment. Dhillon and Yousef, Paul Rivlin, Ann Marie Baylouny, and Brown et al., analyze the changes to kinship and marriage in Jordan and assess the level at which welfare cuts and increased female employment delayed and altered the traditional marriage structures previously explained. In this section, I provide a detailed account of Jordan’s changing political economy up until present day to help illustrate how these economic shifts directly and indirectly altered kinship and traditional marriage.

The 1970s

According to Dhillon and Yousef, the generation living and married before and in the 1970s, labeled as the “welfare life course,” benefited from government assistance and free public education, public sector employment, and state supported subsidies.73 The generation of the 1970s lived in a time when the government created institutions for financial assistance. In this welfare life course, “marriages outside kinship became more common, education and job security emerged as critical signals of future earnings.”74 It was the generation of the late 60s and 70s, labeled by Abdallah as the Saudi Generation where female school enrollment increased with the creation of the United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA).75 Education through UNRWA offered dignity and self-esteem to the refugee population, opening the door to

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73 Dhillon and Yousef, p. 13-14.
74 Ibid., p. 33.
75 Abdallah, p. 53. This generation was born between the years of 1954-1968, during an increase in Palestinian nationalism. Changes to normative social structures were questioned and women often married later, mainly after the age of 20, and 10 percent of this generation married after the age of 30.
individual “women’s choices and life path.”\textsuperscript{76} Sharabi points to access to education and labor participation as “preconditions” that not only led to economic independence but also to the “emancipation of women.”\textsuperscript{77} Linda Layne also assesses this increasing trend in female education. The literacy rate for women in 1976, according to Layne, reached 59 percent, and women made up 37 percent of those in higher education.\textsuperscript{78} In a similar vein, Alisa Lewin also highlights the correlation between increased school enrollment and decreasing rates in marriage and fertility, contending that educated individuals were able to afford waiting to find a spouse until after they complete their studies.\textsuperscript{79}

During the economic boom of the 1970s, Ann Marie Baylouny posits that domestic unemployment rates dropped and the need for workers increased.\textsuperscript{80} In 1973, emigration from Jordan to the Gulf increased with the oil boom, which Francois de Bel-Air claims was considered a method of “exchanging assets” with Arab-oil producing countries.\textsuperscript{81} However, this migration regressed in 1979 when relatively expensive Arab labor was replaced by increased access to South Asian labor. More relevant to this is the forced return of Palestinians to Jordan during the 1990 Gulf War.\textsuperscript{82} Throughout this labor shortage, preference was given to urban Jordanian women over rural men and foreigners.\textsuperscript{83} Since women were earning their own income, new financial independence, as Layne’s data indicates, transformed traditional marriage structures. The effects of structural adjustment policies and the increase of women’s labor participation during the mid-late 1900s, provided women with more input in marriage choices. Alternatively, Brown et al. believe that these young women “downplayed” the importance of marriage.

\textsuperscript{76} Abdallah, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{77} Sharabi, p.32.
\textsuperscript{78} Layne. p. 20.
\textsuperscript{79} Lewin. p. 361-2.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid. , p.140.
\textsuperscript{83} Layne , p. 19.
substituting it with a perceived desire to work instead. Abdallah and Adely argue in favor of these conclusions since women ultimately preferred getting married regardless of their ability to work. Although women were content and determined to work for financial freedom, Abdallah asserts that the idea of never marrying or even delaying marriage for too long frightened women, especially since “celibacy is dreaded.” Adely speaks on this assumption as well; stating, “fears about not getting married” dominated the discourse of women’s lives. Therefore, even though women in Jordan were earning their own incomes and enrolling in school, women generally wanted to marry.

Layne’s data on women in the workforce in Jordan during the 1970s reveals that working women were typically single. The Labor of Ministry in Jordan created a department for Women’s Affairs and in 1977 conducted interviews in 20 small factories. Of these women, 88 percent were single and of those single women 43 percent were between the ages of 15-20; fourteen percent were in between the ages of 20-25; and nineteen percent were in between the ages of 25-30. Additionally, forty percent of women in 1977 had jobs in non-agriculture occupations. These statistics speak to my larger argument about how changes in labor participation at the professional level broadened women’s social relations and their potential pool of partners. These larger social relations pinpoint the changes in traditional marriage structures. Unfortunately, this brief era of economic development came to a halt with stagnation in Jordan’s economy, unemployment, inability to sustain welfare for a growing population, and

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84 Brown et al., p. 21.
85 Abdallah, p. 58. This was a common thought amongst the TV Generation.
87 Layne, p. 21.
88 Ibid., p. 20.
the abandonment of these welfare institutions due to structural adjustment policies of the 1980s.\textsuperscript{89}

\textbf{The 1980s and 1990s}

The golden age of economic security in the 1970s changed with liberalization policies. According to Paul Rivlin, economic liberalization and the period of structural adjustment shifted Jordan’s economic stagnation into an economic crisis in the late 1980s.\textsuperscript{90} The Gulf War of 1990 also had major implications for the Jordanian economy. Remittances, a rent the economy relied on, decreased and over 300,000 Gulf employed Jordanians and Palestinians laborers returned home.\textsuperscript{91} These laborers played a critical role in the economy; the capital from them totaled one billion USD, which was used in part to open small businesses in Jordan, thus creating a new commerce sector.\textsuperscript{92} However, the return from the Gulf and reduction in public sector employment increased the unemployment rate of the professional class.\textsuperscript{93} As a result, in the mid-1980s, one-third of the population in Jordan was living in poverty; this rose to 20 percent by 1991.\textsuperscript{94} The highest rates of those living in poverty according to Baylouny resided in Mafraq, Karak, Balqa, Irbid, Ta’leh, and Ma’an.\textsuperscript{95}

Not only did labor participation alter traditional marriage structures, unemployment and economic liberalization also caused the delays in marriages. The golden age of economic security in the 1970s shifted with the adoption of liberalization policies. While we can argue that economic stability delays the need for early marriages, economic instability causes delays as well.

\textsuperscript{89} Dhillon and Yousef, p. 14 and Abdallah, p. 57.
\textsuperscript{91} Baylouny, 2008 p. 293.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., p. 293-4.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., p. 295.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., p. 296.
due to an inability to pay for marriage.\textsuperscript{96} The repercussions of the economic crisis meant that youth were unable to afford marriage, married life, or independent living. According to Baylouny, this directly influenced the resurgence of kinship bonds as a method to cope with the lack of economic security.\textsuperscript{97} In her work, Baylouny assesses how the increase in kin-based associations reflected the economic changes caused by liberalization. Baylouny argues that economic liberation in Jordan altered not only social welfare programs, but helped solidify kinship bonds between families. “Kin solidarities have been reorganized, formalized, and registered as nongovernmental organizations” as an effort to cope with the elimination of basic social welfare state programs.\textsuperscript{98} Economic liberalization policies institutionalized the “economic salience of family relationships” with nearly 60 percent of kinship institutions formalized between the years of 1989-1999.\textsuperscript{99} The changes in kinship patterns caused by economic liberalization allow us to understand why unemployment and economic instability affected marriage patterns.

\textit{The 2000s}

Jordan implemented many of the reforms demanded by the World Bank and IMF, resulting in economic growth and “millions of dollars in industrial exports.”\textsuperscript{100} However, they failed to alter the unemployment rate, instead creating “more jobs for foreigners than for Jordanians” therefore explaining why the unemployment rate remains high today, and created low-wage and low-skilled jobs for Jordanians.\textsuperscript{101} A decrease in public services, and a push to privatize also transpired throughout the 2000s, alongside many accusations of corruption. This

\textsuperscript{96} Lewin, p. 367. Lewin actually points to the high cost of marriage and the inability to find marriageable men as a reason for delayed marriages.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., p. 349.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., p. 347-9 Rural and urban kinships differ greatly, the elite were able to form a cliental of employees. These new kinship organizations could “furnish social welfare in the current economy” while previous kinship organizing could not.
\textsuperscript{100} Rivlin. p.173.
\textsuperscript{101} Rivlin. p. 158 &173.
generation of youth in the 2000s is currently living under transitions that instigate “waithood,” or basic dependency on family. In this life course, “marriage contracts continue to place high emphasis on economic security, particularly for the bride” and men are asked to pay “up-front marriage costs as a screening device of grooms” a method to gauge their economic stability. High divorce mahr is set in place to prevent men from gaining “unilateral divorce,” leaving consequential ramifications for divorced women.

In 2005, Jordan had an estimated population of 5.7 million, 3.6 million of which are categorized in the working age group, ages 15-64. The reason for the rapid increase in the labor force, Rivlin explains, is mainly due to the growth of the working age population. The other factor that contributed to this growth, he argues, is the increase of female participation in the work force. The rates of female labor participation increased from 14.8 percent in 1980 to 17.7 percent in 1990, and then to 30.3 percent in 2003. Despite the economic growth rate in the early 2000s, the unemployment rate reached as high as 15.7 percent in 2005. According to Rivlin, economic growth was “not fast enough and was not of the right kind to reduce unemployment.” Feelings of instability in the community grew during the 2008 global economic crisis and then again post-2011 Arab uprising. However, it is critical to note that employment rates fluctuate for different groups of people. For instance, in 2015, over 60 percent of single university educated women were active in the labor force.

102 Dhillon and Yousef, p. 15-6.  
103 Ibid., p. 33.  
104 Ibid.  
105 Ibid., p. 157.  
106 Ibid.  
107 Ibid.  
108 Ibid.  
109 Ibid., p. 159.  
110 Fargues and Venturini, p.137.  
Jordan’s political economy from the 1970s to present day provides a basic understanding of how changing economic policies can directly and indirectly influences lives of youth. The following section situates personal testimonies from my fieldwork regarding traditional marriage, within the current economic era in the attempts to illustrate the link between the two ideas.

CONTEMPORARY PERCEPTIONS ON TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE

Youth’s dating and marriage patterns are affected today by generational transformations in the political economy, unemployment, and education. Unemployment and the high costs of living make it difficult for youth ages 23-33 to marry. Economic instability and employment fluctuations have altered traditional marriage structures and kinship bonds, as previously addressed. More research on the transformation of traditional marriage structures, dating styles, and attitudes on spousal compatibility, should be examined. I fill this void with the fieldwork I conducted. How does the current generation of youth, those experiencing this era of unemployment and low-wages, define and understand traditional marriage structures and how have economic and educational changes altered marriage habits generally in Amman? My participants expressed distinct opinions on traditional marriage structures. Not only do men feel uncomfortable with the idea of visiting a woman at her family’s home, women no longer accept to see the female relatives without the potential groom being present as well. Both men and women are less accepting of family visits without a pre-emptive meeting or short term dating. The data collected in my interviews also support this trend.

Zaid, a 26-year-old, Palestinian Christian engineer, born and raised in Amman explained to me his understanding traditional marriage structures came from and how they work:

The family goes to see the girl. The family that has all the daughters, they usually show the oldest daughter. The younger ones they don’t let the visiting family see them. It’s typically the oldest daughter; they want her to marry, even though the other girls are pretty. If the family doesn’t like the oldest daughter for example, the second daughter brings the coffee, so they can see her.

Zaid believes that marriage described above is “a tradition not in religion but in the country” for both Muslims and Christians. Zaid respects his parents and believes their experiences help him learn. “I really love my parents’ opinions a lot, they have a nice perspective about everything and they have a lot of experience. They understand more than us, they see stuff that we don’t see.” Despite respecting his parents’ opinions, Zaid would not consider marrying the traditional way. His apprehension about the idea carried throughout the interview. For Zaid, there needs to be some adjustments to the courting style in order for him to contemplate marrying in this fashion.

Maybe my family would tell me that there is this girl. It would be a traditional way but with a modern twist. The modern twist would be that they come to our home, my mom invites them over for lunch and then they become friends. In this modern twist the families would be open-minded and from the same background, so they would be more tolerant.

Regardless of the way he meets someone, Zaid explains to me that marriage for Christians is difficult because divorce is unacceptable in his community. "There is a lot of commitment in the topic,” he clarifies. “We don’t have divorce in Christianity so you have to make sure before you get married, you have to know each other for a long time." Zaid was previously in a relationship in high school with a Muslim girl. Although both families knew, and hers were accepting of the idea, his family was not. They ultimately prefer to see their son with a Christian. For now, Zaid is no longer interested in casual dating; he wants a serious relationship. "At my age I am not into doing dating and relationships, now I am thinking about something serious [and] stability.”
Subhi is a 28-year old financial analyst supervising the sub-department of a finance company. His perspective on the definition of traditional marriage echoes the other male participants his age:

What happens is that the man’s mom just looks for a girl through friends, family and the family of the family. It goes deep, there's a network here in Jordan. The mom will keep on calling people saying: ‘yeah I am looking for a girl for my son, he wants to get married, do you know anyone?’

“I hate traditional marriage,” Subhi continues to say. He considers it a risk. “It is called gambling with me and I won’t gamble. This is a crucial decision of my life and I am not going to gamble with it.” Not only is he against it for himself, he does not want it for his sister:

For example a couple of months ago, my mom wanted to introduce a guy to my sister and me and my brother stood up and said, no it is not acceptable and if you want her to get married she is going to bring you her husband, you're not going to bring her a husband. So that's the mindset of our family.

Subhi’s relatives, however, all married the traditional way. “My aunt is an expert with that. I don’t know how she does it.” When I asked him how his aunt manages to do this, he replied:

What happens for example, she calls my mom, and she's says ‘I am looking for someone for my son to marry.’ So my mom knows someone. She calls her mom and she says “this, this, this, and that. Are you okay with it?” If she is okay with it, my aunt will go to their house with her son, they all go as a family, just the mom and the dad and the son. And they go to the girl's house and they just look at each other. They don’t talk they don’t do anything. It's awkward.

Despite this, Subhi believes traditional marriages at times develop into a successful marriage. “It's still working now, but in the Amman area, west Amman, it’s less, like Abdoun, Sweifieh, Deir Ghbar, and Rabia. In these areas it doesn’t work as much.” Curious to understand more, I asked why he thought this about west Amman. “Why I don’t know,” he replied, “maybe we are more open minded. It might be that and maybe we are convinced about getting to know the person more before.”
Lama, a 27-year old architect living in Abdoun gives insight on her perception of traditional marriage structures. Even though she claims, “some of them work,” she does not see herself marrying in that manner. “You don’t meet that person alone by yourself, someone sets this for you, your [immediate] family or someone from your [extended] family.” She goes on to add that the initiation of this courting process is “typically from the male's side.” At times, she continues to say the man does not even know this is happening, his mom wants to introduce him to someone through a visit. According to Lama her father tried to set her up three or four times, but she refused. Lama explained to me that traditional marriage structures are still quite prevalent in Amman among all religions and socioeconomic backgrounds. She tells a courting story about a male friend of hers who is an engineer at a prominent company in Amman, explaining that even with his highly respected occupation and his sufficient salary, and the fact that he is not religious, he still chose to involve family in the marriage process:

I know two people, one from Dar el Hendaseh, he is a friend of friend. He explained to me how he met the person; he went to a home of a friend. He just saw a girl go by so he turned his head to look at her. I don’t know how but he wanted her after that, he didn’t know anything about her. So he said I want my family to speak with her family, and then he went out with her and proposed to her after a very short time.

Lama believes no particular religious group in Amman uphold these traditional marriage structures, “It doesn’t matter because there are people who are not even religious and they do this [traditional marriage].” She then went on to say that the perception is linked to Muslims rather than Christians.

In general, the impression [is that traditional marriage] is a part of religion; this is more in Islam, than Christianity, because it's very little that you see traditions with us. We do not have this idea of shame if a girl goes out with a guy you rarely find it. I’m not saying we do not have it, but it is less compared to [Muslim] families.
Ultimately, Lama does not see herself meeting someone or marring through traditional marriage structures. “For me no. I do not involve the families. If they said they want to introduce me to someone, I will go out with him on a date.”

Emad, a 29-year-old Muslim, software engineer by day, musician at night, who considers himself “a free-thinker,” asserts that if his mother wanted to introduce him to a woman who matches exactly what he is looking for in a spouse, he would still never agree to the arrangement. “No, I don’t think this would work at all to be honest with you,” he says. Wanting the kinship practice to end, Emad answered, “Listen it is impossible. I couldn't know the person in front of me from just a visit and sit and stare and just go out on two dates with her. The subject is bigger than this honestly.” According to Emad, traditional marriages were successful for previous generations because the reliance on kinship bonds was needed as basic survival in order to live. He relates this idea of marriage survival to a plane crashing on a deserted island;

Their time isn’t our time, its different. The time is different. A long time ago life was simple, things were very simple to the point that for example, my grandma and grandpa left Palestine, they compromised on a lot in marriage in order to survive, like survival mode...for example if the plane crashed and landed in an island.

Echoing a similar response against traditional marriage structures, Lujain will marry someone she loves and meets on her own, even if her parents disapprove of him. Some families in Amman are in fact against the idea of traditional marriage structures. The 25-year-old is living in Abdoun with her family who is against this style of marriage. “No, my dad would refuse” she declares. “He doesn’t think that is the way it should be done; but if a man he wants to suggest really likes me, he can come and talk to me and if I like him maybe we can hang out, maybe we can meet each other.” Lujain would go as far as to even marry someone her parents disapprove:

I would ask them why do you think that, of course and if they gave me good reasons, I might consider them. But if I really love him and I think that he is a good person, because I would never fall in love with someone without knowing everything about him; I would
talk to them and know why and stuff, but if I really like him and I want him, I would take him.

Lujain’s attitude on her parents’ disapproval of spouse choice stems from a story she shared regarding her older sister’s marriage and how she married someone at 25 the family did not originally approve of.

It actually happened to my sister before she got married. We all said no. [She met him] at the hospital. She is a doctor and he is a doctor too. She actually used to work with his father and his father introduced them to each other. I like his father and his father is really nice and everything but they had to get married in a short period of time and we were against it.

Due to a family illness on her brother-in-law’s side, Lujain’s sister had to rush the wedding, leaving no time for Lujain’s family to know him better.

We didn’t get to know him that well. We only saw him three times before the wedding and that was hard for us because we are a very open minded family and we like to meet people and he wasn’t like that because he never had time. He had to stay with his mom all the time. We didn’t know him, the real him, how he is, so it was hard for us to say yes, we needed to know him.

Despite her family’s apprehension, Lujain’s sister proceeded with the wedding. “My sister said ‘it is my life’ and we were like ‘fine since it’s your life its fine with us, we will go with you’.”

Lujain said her sister and husband have now been married for over a year and expecting their first child. After familiarizing herself with him, Lujain says her brother-in-law is amazing and that her parents like him a lot. Samira has a similar perspective as Lujain, wanting to meet someone on her own.

I feel like the man whose mother decides for him has no personality. That's my opinion because why do you have to let your mother do this thing for you, why do you let her pick your partner?

The 25-year-old believes people often times present a certain deceptive view of who they are; making Samira uncomfortable with the traditional route.
I am not into that because when he comes right to my family, he is pretending to be perfect, and that’s why I don’t like it. I like to know this person for real, and not what he pretends to be. I would love to meet this person and be friends with him first and then fall in love, because love comes from respect not from attraction because the looks just fade away and then what remains is the respect.

Suaad studied marketing at Balq’a University and graduated in 2014. She lives with her two brothers in Amman while her parents work and reside in Dubai. Now, the 24-year-old is a bank manager at a local branch in Abdali. For her, only half of traditional marriages actually succeed. “In the future it’s 50 percent that you will understand each other and agree and then the other 50 percent is that you don't agree and for me I see that as a big risk.” Suaad’s mother has allowed potential suitors to meet her daughter at home. However, Suaad knows that she will never approve of any of the men that come to her house.

I'll tell her yes, but I'd already put it in my mind that he is not the one and I've done this a lot. I’ll say to my mom: ‘okay whatever you want,’ and I act excited, but I know from the beginning it's a no.

After potential suitors leave, Suaad then tells her mother that she didn't see herself with the man or she didn't feel comfortable, just to show her mom she is trying traditional marriage.

25-year-old Aya lives in Abdoun and is currently engaged. She met her fiancé during their university years at the German Jordanian University. She originally did not approve of him, but over time their relationship finally flourished and he proposed. The two have been long distance for three years now sense he works in the Gulf. After they marry, she plans on moving there to join him. According to Aya, her relationship really influenced her mom’s decision on dating and traditional marriage:

My family, they prefer that you meet the guy by yourself you know, even my mom. From before I think she used to think differently but after I brought him home and they saw him and they saw his family, my family changed. He started to come to our house a lot and sit with us and we would watch movies in the house and my family would come and sit with us, they got used to him…they liked him a lot because he is very respectful and he takes care of me.
Aya helped change her parent’s perspective on dating; now they believe that “it’s better that a person picks for herself.” She goes on to say:

It’s better because we have other family members, I have cousins, guys who are 30 and they haven’t found anyone yet and they know a lot of girls but they’re not dating anyone. They start saying ‘mamma get me a bride’ and my mom replies, ‘no, you are 30 years old, you go get a bride yourself.’

The idea of finding your own spouse was a common theme throughout the interviews with my sample. My participants disclosed that not only they, but also their families now have a more accepting perspectives on different styles of marriage. Despite the apprehension about pursuing traditional marriage structures in the 21st century, my participants disclosed to me that there are other pressing factors that determine whether or not a person is ready to marry. Love and economic stability were the most common variables in determining whether someone was ready for marriage or not.

**LOVE, COMPATIBILITY, AND FACTORS TO CONSIDER BEFORE MARRIAGE**

This section explores the idea of love before marriage and how it has changed throughout the generations from being an internal desire and deemed inappropriate, to something publically present and desired in a marriage. In addition to love and compatibility, my interlocutors highlight other desired factors they look for in a future spouse such as career ambitions, their attitudes on age and religion, and even physical traits. Financial stability and maturity level were also prevalent factors that appeared within the sample.

Modernizing the marriage institution was a goal of many of the 20th century social reform projects. Reformers believed that marriage should be more about compatibility and even love. According to Abdallah, it is perceived that the Generation of Palestine experienced no love of

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spouse before marriage, instead she found that love for the hamula, or clan, was actually deemed more significant in society.\textsuperscript{114} Abdallah states that women from this generation often times edited love out from their life stories because it was a taboo deemed shameful.\textsuperscript{115}

The question of compatibility and individual choice in married life eventually gained precedence since more women wanted to know their spouse. This idea of compatibility mentioned by Abdallah is analyzed in Adely’s recent article “A Different Kind of Love.” The current ‘marriage crisis’ and difficulties in finding a suitable mate solidified the importance of insijam, or compatibility for young single Jordanians looking for marriage partners in her sample. Through her research, Adely underscores the varied meanings of knowing a potential spouse and explains that compatibility is framed through cultural, classed, and personal identities.\textsuperscript{116} Financial stability, families getting along, and expectations for marriage held precedence over finding love, to many of those she interviewed; however if love did exist, it was considered a “luxury.”\textsuperscript{117} Adely asserts that the literature on this subject is limited in scope, restrictively highlighting marriage as a vehicle of resource transfers to strengthen kinship ties, and the economic burden of marriage.\textsuperscript{118} These problematic notions paint marriage practices in the Middle East as being antagonistic to love.\textsuperscript{119} This is critical to our understanding of current dating trends and habits.

The desire for compatibility in a marriage and the lack of employment opportunities shapes current dating habits. Negotiating between conjugal love and kinship bonds possibly explains why women in Amman were afraid to publicly date. The threat of detrimental economic and social risks, and the lack of family protection and support deterred women from publicly

\textsuperscript{114} Abdallah, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., p.103.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., p. 110.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., p.105.
engaging in romantic relationship with other men. Having for love and compatibility highlights why my sample actively dates. The following stories reveal precisely how couples negotiate a space between conjugal love and kinship bonds, and form their own opinions on traditional marriage.

Ghada, a 24-year-old, like many others her age, regardless of religion or class, is not fully supportive of traditional marriage structures, especially at this point of her life.

I don't think I view it as something that is negative as much as I view it as something that I don't want to venture into yet. It's basically when you want to get married and you do not have a circle big enough where you could meet someone. You don't have friends that are capable of connecting you to other girls, or you've never met someone at work or at university. That's where people come in and say: ‘Hey! I know a friend who has a daughter who is really cool.’ When some people ask what are you looking for? They describe looks, white with green eyes!

When looking for a potential bride, it is this description of desired physical traits that trouble Ghada with the idea of traditional marriage structures. “They are window shopping,” she says blatantly.

My brother wants a girl with darker skin and with big curls. This is who he finds attractive. Other people say ‘no, I think for a girl to be attractive it'll be better if she was white, thin, and so on.’ And that's annoying! I fear the idea of someone referring me based on my looks. I am not just my looks! There is so much more to it.

Although she is not venturing into traditional marriage yet, believing it is still solely based on physical attraction, Ghada argues that now the idea of an "ideal girl" is changing and that men in Amman are looking for someone ambitious:

If you ask a guy who is engaging in traditional marriage and you ask him what are you looking for in a girl, the amount of guys asking about looks is decreasing! More people are now into ‘no I want her ambitious, I want her to have a job and really good ethics’ and so on.

This transformation, according to Ghada, is why she might accept the idea in the future. Despite this, she is still not willing to accept anyone through the traditional method. Her mother is also
allowing her to find someone on her own. "She is giving me my space until I come to her and say I am okay with seeing people through traditional marriage.” For now, it is easier to meet people on your own in Amman, Ghada claims:

Basically now people can meet whenever they want. If they want to meet, they are going to meet, if they are in high school and want to date, they are going to find guys to date. And that is becoming more and more acceptable.

Ghada’s belief that men in Amman are now looking for a more “ambitious” working woman was evident throughout my interviews with male participants. Fayez is a 27 year-old engineer living in Abdoun. He has been employed at a design management and consultancy group located in Jabal Amman, since December 2013. In his opinion, the average age for a man to marry is 25-26, and for a woman 23-24. “People are bugging me to get married. It’s time” he added, “I don’t really abide by the pressure really.” Before feeling ready to marry, Fayez believes that certain economic factors must be in place from both parties.

Financial stability is quite important I think. You need to be mature because a lot of people are immature. You think oh I want to meet as many girls as possible, live my youth. That was me. I'd like to think I’m over that because that was early 20s, up and coming one-night stands.

In addition to financial stability, Fayez wants to love the person before they marry, “I think love is important.” Fayez is also adamant about having a working ambitious wife, as Ghada had mentioned. He refuses to marry a woman who wants to stay at home.

I don’t think I'd be able to be with someone like that because she has to have something on the side. If you're not busy with anything, if all you're busy with is me, then I think that's a recipe for disaster. She needs to have her own life. She needs to do something with her free time. I don’t want to be her free time.

In addition to a working woman, Fayez would prefer to be with an Arab woman, “Recently I’m leaning towards someone from a similar culture,” although he has dated outside his ethnicity.
before while studying in the United Kingdom. Surprisingly, religion and age are not important factors to him.

Age and religion is irrelevant for me. I’d marry someone who is Christian if she is up for it. And age, well I just confessed to a girl who is 30 that I liked her, not long ago. So age is not an issue for me, it’s an issue for a lot of girls though, but for me personally it is not an issue. Personality, honestly someone who is open minded, someone who doesn’t want me to be someone I am not and someone I don’t want them to be not themselves around me. I like genuine people in general.

Hoping to be married by 30 or 31, Fayez believes that finding a wife is something he would like to do on his own, “I think it's quite a personal thing, I don’t know if my mom has the same idea as me, even if I tell her what I am looking for.” Fayez, although apprehensive, says that he might try traditional marriage. “I mean I’d give it a shot, I think. I don’t know because I haven’t been in that situation. I am not looking for anything right now, but I am open to things.”

Anter is 25-year-old Muslim biomedical engineer who comes from a well-off family that spends their time between Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Anter shares a similar perspective as Fayez. For him, the most important aspect is to experience love, especially since his father has already purchased him a home. “I am trying to find the perfect girl, the one I fall in love with.” However, he is feeling the pressure from his parents who bring up the topic of marriage often and want to find their son a potential future spouse. Anter’s father discusses the topic of marriage with him, asking his son, “Find a job so we can marry you." This did not please Anter. “I told my mom the other day, I prefer to be single for 45 years, rather than marrying a girl you introduce me to.” Anter mother’s started to laugh after hearing this from her son and then said to him “You are still too young for this type of talk.” Anter’s response to his mother epitomizes the sentiment of my participant; “I said I want to fall in love, I want to fall in love.”
After graduating from college in 2015, Anter decided to stay in Jordan instead of moving to Saudi Arabia with his family, revealing that all his friends there are now engaged through traditional marriage structures.

I am the type that hates traditional marriage. A lot of my uncles got married this way. ‘Okay we are two families that know each other; you have a daughter like this, we want to come see her, okay?’ I hate this.

Anter told his parents he does not want that, “I want to gain wisdom through a love story,” They laughed at their son and told him, “After marriage there is no love.” Ultimately Anter does not want his mother involved in finding him a future wife instead he prefers to date.

I don’t want someone that pleases my mom and she goes talks to her mom and says okay I have a son. I am against it. I am going to live with her not you. If she tells me about her and then us only go out, okay. But to go see her in the house, and immediately the intention is marriage? That's bad. Even for my sisters, I won’t agree because she is not a product in a catalogue...go have fun and date.

Anter’s father continuously expresses a belief that it is best to marry someone from the same socioeconomic background. "It's business, marriage is just business. My father told me with marriage you're opening a house in the same way you're opening a company.” Despite his father’s opinion, Anter would in fact marry a girl from different socioeconomic class, only if he loved her. “There are some families who say that the couple should be from the same social class level, the same education level, the same level of economic class. For me I don’t mind, but my father would.”

During my interview with Petrous, the idea of personal finances and socioeconomic background was also present when discussing qualities of a future wife. For the 30-year-old engineer living in a neighborhood called Um Uthaina, the idea of physical looks that Ghada described, did not appear on his list of traits. However, being loyal and a Christian did matter, as well as an intellectual and mature woman.
Number one: mature. She has to be fully developed in almost all levels of her life; personally, socially, financially; she knows how to be responsible, she knows what her good side and her bad side is. She knows how to handle stress. I see a lot of people under pressure and they just panic. You're not supposed to be married if you're not mature. For a man he has to be a husband and a father and for a woman she has to be a wife and a mother so you have to be mature enough to handle all that, or else you're just playing a role and you're not there yet. Number two she has to be intellectual: I'm a person who uses my mind so she has to.

Petrous explains to me that the most important factor individuals consider before deciding to marry is finances. This is especially true of the current economic era, as alluded to in the contemporary scholarship on Jordan’s political economy

These days it's mostly financial, if you can support a family according to the community, you can get married. I don't consider a marriage happening now a real marriage or people ready to get married. Marriage is supposed to be between a man and a woman, a lot of them are still boys and girls. And a lot of them are getting married for not the best reasons. Looking around to be honest most of it is sexual. That's why there's divorces and unethical people on the streets, it's because they're parents and they aren't ready and they started a family.

Being serious, ready, and mature, are factors Samira considers before marrying. Moreover, she prefers to truly know the other person well and build a relationship on friendship first before she tells her parents. In her mind, these are signs of a serious relationship between two people who are mature enough for marriage in her mind.

I am 25, so I think if I would be in a relationship I would tell them after really knowing the person, because I am a serious kind of person, who wants a serious relationship, so when I get into this relationship, I would love to experience it first with this person. And then when I feel okay or I really feel I want to be with this person then I can tell my parents.

Samira believes that knowing the person and then falling in love will guarantee a happy marriage. According to Samira, time is a critical component in forming this friendship before love. “You need to experience this person. You need to be friends first before falling in love. This way you can see this person without trying to play how cool you are or how good he is. Just be you.”
As the above narratives from my data reveal, previous notions on marriage are in fact changing, and evidently so in the group of individuals I sampled. Although love and compatibility are relevant aspects, financial stability outweighed other factors. Choosing a potential spouse based on physical looks is no longer at the forefront of young people’s minds, nor should it be according to my participants; instead many are looking towards maturity and education level instead. And, although many claim they would like to find a spouse on their own, not everyone was opposed to traditional marriage per se, and some thought that they might eventually go that route. Yet as we see in the next section, traditional marriage remains a viable option for most young Jordanians in Amman especially since some believe it has taken on a contemporary form, where mother’s use social media and other technologies to find spouses for their children.

A LOOK AT CONTEMPORARY TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE

Not only are some of the youth in west Amman looking to fall in love through dating and meeting people on their own, some participants provided insight on how traditional marriage structures are shifting to adapt to the new social demands. Parents are recognizing the role social media and new information and communication technologies play in their children’s lives. Khalil and Leila told me about the way their mothers also adopted these new habits, in the hopes to ensure their children eventually marry.

Khalil is a busy 32-year-old. As an industrial management engineer working full time, his schedule prevents him from having a relationship. His friends and parents are trying to persuade him to settle down as soon as he can. “Right now they say: ‘Khalil, you are very busy with work and you’re very stressed with life and time is eating you.’” According to Khalil’s perspectives,
there are two kinds of traditional marriages that are happening in his community. He juxtaposes the previous version with a new one. “Traditional marriage back then is different than traditional marriage now,” he expounds.

Traditional marriage back then would be me and mom going to visit her family and we would sit and meet them, ask for permission to see her, you don’t know her nor seen her before. After that they can start talking to each other and after that they do a little bit of dating and then your father must come to her father and start talking seriously after that and engagement and then marriage.

Now, however, Khalil says mothers use Facebook to let the potential bride know they are interested in meeting her; or, mothers would talk to other mothers on Facebook asking for the permission to allow the two children to talk on social media. This is the new version of traditional marriage, he asserts. Nowadays, Khalil’s mother comes to her son and says, “Look at her, add her on Facebook, I’ll talk to her mom, let’s fix this up for you.” According to Khalil, families do not really go to each other’s homes anymore asking to meet daughters. Instead, Facebook has replaced this tradition. “They don't really go to the houses anymore,” he says. “The mom says to the other mom: ‘Excuse me, can they talk to each other over message on Facebook?’” This has become the new definition of traditional marriage for Khalil; mother’s utilizing social media and new information and communication technologies to make sure their children meet a potential spouse.

Likewise, Leila shares a similar view. “My mom is trying to get me married,” she says. The 25-year-old, who will not marry through traditional marriage, finds this new approach rather amusing.

Mom does this thing where she joins Whatsapp groups, she goes to events, and tries to know people to get me married. There are Whatsapp groups with forms, the first thing they post is a form: name, age, and nationality. My mom joined it, and I check it every now and then to see. It's funny you know. I don’t find it appealing. Its normal, it’s interesting, it’s just like Tinder but without pictures, without anything just information about individuals who are single, and it’s normal you check it.
Leila’s mother and Khalil’s mother, and other mothers like them, simply want to make sure their children do not end up alone. “Nobody wants their children to stay single forever, their parents think that they will eventually die, and their lonely daughter will be alone her whole life, it’s sad, no?” Leila’s mother has even gone as far as to give her daughter’s cellphone number to men and families she meets.

My mom still gives my number to some families; they call me. The guy would say, okay your mom gave me your number. I tried to message back once and I didn’t like it. It’s funny we agreed to meet somewhere.

She never followed through with meeting him. Although Leila’s mother has registered her daughter into the Whatsapp group for singles, and gives her daughter’s number out, she does not push her daughter. Seeing other family members Leila’s age and younger married, does however motivate her mother to do this.

She doesn’t push. My mom never pushes. My mom doesn’t care, but the fact [is] that they are a bit worried. The main problem is that all my cousins are married; all of them, and most of them have kids.

Although Leila asserted she is not feeling the pressure to marry, she eventually would like to marry. “I want to get married at some point,” Leila reveals, “but the problem is that I am not into Jordanians at all. No Arabs, because the number one problem I have with Arabs is the double standards.”

Leila is not interested in being with an Arab man, and her parents know this. However her mother still tries to help her daughter find someone, wanting her to give Jordanian men a chance. “They want me to give them the chance, that's the point, my mom just wants me to give them a chance.” Previously, Leila allowed two potential suitors to come to the house to introduce themselves to her; however, doing so made her feel uncomfortable.
There have been some who come to the house. I tried it twice I think, but I didn’t like it. They ask you questions that make you feel uncomfortable, like how much do you earn at work. Questions as if they want to hire you, not to marry you.

This experience solidified Leila’s conviction to not marry a Jordanian man, “Every time I give it a chance, I just get a confirmation that I don’t want to marry a Jordanian.” Leila is currently in a relationship with a foreigner she met at work. Although he is not Jordanian, she believes eventually this relationship won’t work for her either.

While Khalil and Leila shared what they believe are new forms of traditional marriage, Petrous believes they cannot be labeled as such. When asking him about whether his mother does anything similar using new information and communication technologies, he replied, “I never really believe that’s actually traditional.” For Petrous traditional actually means following up with families in their homes:

Traditional is when your parents say: ‘oh by the way we're going to go visit this person so we can meet their daughter.’ So the families know the whole point of this visit is to introduce the kids to each other and parents are there from day one so if you want to talk to her you have to make it somewhat official.

The changes to traditional marriage reveal that its structures are changing, are dynamic, and mold to the experiences of each generation. Data from fieldwork has also pointed the perception that people are marrying earlier. To juxtapose the literature mentioned earlier regarding delayed marriage and waithood, quite a few research participants mentioned a new trend they believe is emerging. The perception that people are marrying young was often mentioned. This discrepancy between actual marriage statistics and perceptions about the age of first marriage in Amman need further analysis to understand these beliefs.
PERCEPTIONS ON AGE OF FIRST MARRIAGE

The research of Brown et al. reveals that the mean ages of marriage for Jordan in 2004 for men and women were 29 and 25, respectively. In 1979, 65 percent of men in Jordan ages 25-29 were married; that number decreased to 56 percent in 1994, and finally to 43 percent in 2004; these statistics reflect not only the concept of waithood but also “modernization and changing social expectations, as well as increased duration of schooling.” According to Petrous however, his colleagues at work are marring younger than he is:

I'm looking at colleagues at work most of them are getting married. Traditionally they work for two to three years and then their mom starts nagging them ‘come on get married,’ suddenly he's 25 or 26 and he's going to get engaged.

Petrous explained that almost five different colleagues at work “got engaged” younger than he is by four to five years. However in Petrous’s family, this was not the case:

My sister got married at 31. She's turning 32. Her husband is turning 37. See it depends, you got people that marry late some people marry early, but the trend to marry early still exists. The guy who got engaged was born in 92 he’s only 25. I see older people getting married; everybody has their time, that's what I personally think.

Amelia’s perception on the average age of marriage for Jordanian men in Amman echoed a similar response to Petrous. “I'd say for a man maybe in their early 30.” For a woman’s average age of first marriage, Amelia humorously explained, “I would like to say in their early 30s because I am 27, but for most girls they are in their 20s. Some girls get married straight out of school, straight out of university.” She does not agree with this notion.

I think if you studied and you made choices to go to university…I don’t understand why you have to be married right away. You can wait a couple of years, grow and become a person before you move from your family to a different family, live a little.

Natalie, 24-year-old whose family is originally from Karak, a governorate south of Amman, also points to this reemerging trend of marrying younger as well. She believes that the

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120 Brown et al., p. 21.
average age of marriage for a woman is around 21 to 23. “Right now everyone is getting married at 23 max.” Conversely, according to her, just five years ago the average age was later than 23 and even 10 years back the average age for a woman to marry was 26, articulating that the change occurred just a “couple of years ago.” Although she is not certain where this trend is coming from, she insists that people in her social circle are marrying more. “You can see that from the amount of weddings that you're having to go to,” she states. “All my classmates they have a second baby now, some of them are going to have a second baby, first baby, pregnant, getting married, getting engaged.” The life events in her social circle greatly influence Natalie’s perspective.

The perception that people are marrying young was also mentioned in Lama’s interview. Her 23-year-old sister Jude, a senior in college, had plans to graduate and marry by the end of the summer when we sat down to talk. “She is still at university and she has one more semester left, this one. In July she graduates, and right after she finishes she will get married August 17th.” According to Lama, the average “Just now it became very young, like 22, 23, and 21.” For her, this change started occurring three years ago.

Three years ago, this talk of marrying young was not present. Girls in general were 26, 27, 28, 29, and 30, marrying in those ages; but now this year and the past year a lot have married, you will never imagine how many!

Lama described to me that her sister and her sister’s friends are all marrying and they are younger than her.

The friends of my sister, who are younger than me, her best friend for example, is married and pregnant she is 23. This year and in the past three to four years what came back is girls getting married at a young age. It’s coming back. I feel like it's a style. I started to feel it's like this, because there are people who do not even agree even after the engagement and there are people that I know that got married and then divorced just after two months.
Lama concludes that marrying young is not due to elements such as religion, class, nor education level. These she argues are irrelevant factors; she shares two stories that help express her sentiment on the matter. The first is about an educated university classmate of hers who married early:

I told you one of the girls was my friend at university, we are the same age and she married and got divorced and she married again and has three kids and she is my age. She's 27 and has three kids in the best ages of her life.

The other story Lama shared is about a 22-year-old woman from a wealthy family who married after university as well:

It’s not a money thing no; it just became something popular lately. All of the classes, from the highest to the lowest; sorry but I do not like to differentiate between the classes because there is another girl she is from Madaba, she is very young, and she married young and her dad is a millionaire.

Lama contends that this trend is caused by a new societal influence among the youth themselves.

“Her friends are influencing her in this topic because her other friend is getting engaged, so I started to feel like its an influence, like a social influence.” Although Lama’s mother was not encouraging her younger daughter to marry, she did support her decision.

The idea was a little bit from our mom because she saw that Jude’s fiancé is a very good guy so she pushed a little bit on my sister ‘okay get engaged’ because she knows he is very good and ‘you do not want to loose him from your hands.’

Young women today in Amman, according to Lama, are mainly being influenced by each, rather than family.

This is my point of view, because the people now who are ages 25, 26, and 27 are getting married, the people younger than them are being affected. They are feeling that, ‘Wallah people are getting engaged and proposed to and married why don’t I get married and proposed to?’ So the thought the girl has is that she gets excited about this kind of idea because of how sweet it is. They fantasize the idea; the idea of marrying is now cool.

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I received news that Lama’s sister and her fiancé had called off the wedding, just a couple of weeks before their wedding day. “Her whole life is in front of
her,” Lama disclosed about her younger sister. “She could at least work and know a little bit about the world, because life of school and university is very different than life now. Year after year, my way of thinking changes.” Lama was relieved her sister ended the relationship. Now her sister, a college graduate, is receiving multiple jobs offers. She is working, happy, and will wait a while before considering marriage again.

Qais is a Jordanian-Palestinian who studied medicine at Jordan University and is currently completing his medical residency. Qais shares a similar view as that of Lama. The 33-year-old contends that marriage has in fact changed throughout the generations, and is recently linked to societal illusions about marriage.

Marriage in our days is not like a long time ago, not in the age of my parents or my grandparents or before. It was easy, marriage was safe; it was something very safe. When you're getting married, you're getting married because you are feeling safe. A long time ago, men and women were into marriage and family and whatnot, now there are distractions, life is harder, social media, the internet…the person now sees more, and does more. Things were more simple, stable and safe.

According to Qais, Jordanian men in Amman marry between the ages of 28-35 and women between the ages of 22-28, therefore asserting that 70 percent of the population is like this. However, he does not understand why some marry young, "How does he do it?" Qais ponders at the thought of a man marrying at 22 or 23. “You are not even man enough or mature enough to understand marriage responsibility, even girls." Qais believes that the majority of youth in Amman understand marriage through a very narrow lens shaped by culture. "We have people here who think a wedding is a white dress and sex. They only look in this very closed window. They don’t look at the responsibilities." Qais says he needs at least two-three years to know the woman he is marrying before marrying her thus rejecting the traditional route. “No way, my family will never do this, I will never go to a house and see someone,” he continues to say that his mother never accepted anyone to come to the house to see his sister.
Like Qais, the majority of my interview participants believe that the average age of first marriage has decreased attributing it to the younger age of first dating experiences and societal pressures from peers to marry. However, it is still too early to determine whether or not this perception is actually reflective of a new trend. According to national statistics in 2017, the highest number of men in Amman married between the age group of 26-29.\(^{121}\) For women in Amman, the highest number of first age of marriages ranged between the age group of 21-25.\(^ {122}\) However, there have always been peaks and lows in the statistics on age of first marriage (Jordan’s Department of Statistics).\(^ {123}\) More time and research is needed before labeling this as a new trend.

**CONCLUSION**

Youth’s current perceptions on marriage, and their desires to find future spouses on their own without the involvement of family, come to define the new social structures my research participants adhere to, forming their own sentiments and behaviors. Financial stability and compatibility were reoccurring factors both men and women and in sample discussed. Additional, there seems to be a discrepancy in their perception on age of first marriages, as mention by a few participants. The second chapter will provide insight on the dating structures in Amman. Since my sample is a select group of individuals who prescribe to a specific lifestyle, we will see how their socioeconomic background provides them the opportunity to date. What the proceeding chapter will expose is *where they date, and whether or not long term dating has influenced or mitigated the desire to marry young?* Chapter two will begin with a historical

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narration of the demographic changes that occurred in the capital, in addition to outlining the relevant neoliberal economic policies and their influence on urbanization and dating.
CHAPTER TWO

Urban Space and Dating in Twenty-First Century Amman

Space is constituted through and constitutive of social relations and material social practices. It defines categories of people and practices, generating systems of exclusion and inclusion related to classifications of good and bad behavior. The term space refers to multiple sets of intertwined social spaces, and must be understood through these interrelations...space is not a passive flat surface for social, economic, and political action; it is dynamically and dialectically linked with people, place, objects, and events.


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THE RISE OF URBANIZATION IN AMMAN

Rapid urbanization in Jordan and throughout the Middle East in the 2000s, has contributed to social changes in society. How do we define urbanization and what particular factors related to these processes of urbanization have led to the increase in dating in cities? This chapter seeks to address changes in social dating in public and cyber spaces through the lens of urbanization. In this chapter, I explore how economic liberalization coupled with rapid urbanization of the city created more spaces for dating and leisure – spaces that have enabled some young people to date openly. However, the spaces I noticed are only available to a certain socioeconomic class in

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Amman. These spaces not only represent a certain lifestyle, one adhere to by my participants and their class level, they also provide Jordanians living in ‘west Amman” the luxury of dating in the public sphere. In addition, I show how social media has similarly expanded the “spaces” for meeting people by offering a private ‘cyber space’ to a relationship. Alongside these material changes, young people negotiate between new opportunities and community and familial expectations, as they navigate between their desired lifestyle and one imposed by previously accepted social structures.

NEOLIBERAL URBANISM IN AMMAN

Rami Farouk Daher traces the evolution of Amman and the ways in which urbanization has been mapped out. According to Daher, the neoliberal phenomenon in Amman, one defined by the State “subsidizing large-scale investments for business elites” created classists opportunities for “projects of urban reconstructing” for the elites in Amman. The construction of the new Abdali downtown projects and malls such as Mecca mall “plagued” the city since the late 1990s. Jordan, like many other countries, has also seen a rapid urbanization of its population. Today, 42 percent of Jordanians live in Amman; the urban center has doubled in the last ten years, as a result of rural-urban migration and an influx of forced migrants and refugees. Ninety percent of the total population in Jordan today lives in urban areas. The significance of rural to urban migration was reflected in my fieldwork. Quite a few of my interlocutors had family origins from rural towns or governorates outside of Amman. 27-year-old

126 Ibid., p. 51.
127 Ibid., p.56.
Lama recalls when she left a small town in Madaba, a governorate south of Amman. Born and raised in Madaba, Lama spent almost fifteen years of her life there. For her the move was not easy, but she was able to adapt to life in Amman.

I got confused. How am I going to leave my friends, how am I going to leave? We left Madaba and we came to Amman and it was a bit mixed feelings. I was happy but at the same time I didn’t want to leave because I was born there, it was my hometown. All my childhood was there. We came to Amman and rented a house, one close to my house now the one in Abdoun, which is a very good area. Abdoun is the best area in Amman.

For Lama’s family, moving to Amman was financially strategic. Unlike Madaba, Amman offered her mother more economic opportunities. Madaba, according to Lama, used to be a wealthier town, but started to slowly regress in the early 2000s.

Economically, Madaba a long time ago was really nice and the economics in it were really nice because it was a touristic place and the people who were in it were very sophisticated and now everyone who goes there you don’t know their class. It's lower, nowadays. It's getting worse every year basically.

Moreover, her mother’s move to Amman was not only financial; the large city offered her some privacy, which she was deprived of in a small town. “Amman I feel like it is better; the people don't get in each other's business like how they would in Madaba. The older generation when they spoke it would have an effect on mama.”

Despite some negative factors of urbanization, Moghadam highlights positive features of urbanization. Urban citizens become part of the global economy through investments, trade, multilateral organizations, and international treaties. 130 Citizens in cities have greater access to new information and technologies, and mass education, as we see occurring in Amman since the early 2000s. 131 Individuals move to Amman without family for university or job opportunities, like 29-year-old Emad. Emad works and lives in Amman with his band members and commutes

131 Ibid., p. 20-1.
back to Az-Zarqa, a governorate north of Amman, only on weekends to see family. Besides
greater work opportunities, Emad recognizes deep social distinctions between the two locations.
“Let me tell you that in Amman, in Lweibdeh, in Jabal Amman, these locations are extremely
open, especially Jabal Amman; but if you go to other areas no.” According to Emad socially
“closed” minded areas are found in non-urban places. “Go to the camps,” Emad added, “you'll
see things you never seen before.” Emad replied with a comparable answer when describing his
hometown of Az-Zarqa.

In Az-Zarqa of course it's normal that you see things that never in your life would have
crossed your mind. The atmosphere is very bad in regards to stories about rights and
women's rights. I can’t tell you that it's all like this, but usually, or the majority of the
people.

Emad describes the discrepancy in comparing dating in Amman to dating in Az-Zarqa.
“Oh wow, how different the answer will be,” he admittedly chuckled. He then went on to add, “I
don’t think that in Az-Zarqa they'll say ‘okay let's go out guys and girls together,’ I don’t think
so.” Even though Emad has not spent much time in his hometown recently, he believes that the
atmosphere around hetero-social outings is quite different between the two governorates;
especially in certain less developed areas in Az-Zarqa.

There are groups of guys and girls there who go out together, I don’t want to generalize,
but in the areas where it's more like refugee camps, I don’t think this thing of guys and
girls going out together exists there. In some areas right now, yes. There’s the new Zarqa,
so maybe there you would see guys and girls out together.

In areas where recent urban development is occurring, changes to the social milieu also become
evident. Many of the changes Amman has witnessed have been shaped in part by neoliberal
economic polices (as well as regional conflicts and the related influx of displaced peoples).
According to David Harvey, neoliberalism is best described as a theory of “political economic
practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual
entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.” According to Peck and Tickell, Jordan’s adoption of neoliberal economic policy came in the form of “privatizing public services, cutting back on government spending, downsizing the State, lowering tariffs, and eliminating subsidies—to promote trade on the now free market” and the simple elimination of all principles related to socialism. Instead, heavy emphasis was placed on the individual’s economic freedom in a world market, and the mitigation of the terms society or community.

In her survey of the literature on neoliberalism in Jordan, Eliana Abu-Hamdi examines the adoption of “neoliberal urbanism,” namely urbanizing through private economic development. Through modernization projects funded by foreign aid and investments, the Jordanian state continued to partner with private investors to carry out these economic development initiatives in the city. Neoliberal urbanism in Amman can be traced back to the 1980s when Jordan adopted IMF Structural Adjustment Programs aimed at the “systematic dismantling of the welfare state” and instead upholding the free market and trade values, and the modernizing of political, infrastructural, and economy in Jordan, policies enshrined in basis of neoliberal beliefs. Al-Husban and Al-Shorman also highlight Amman’s urbanization, asserting that the urban evolution of the city occurred through the “political issues and events” the region experienced in 1948, 1976, 1973, 1991, and 2003. In the structural adjustment era, the Jordanian government took hold of private and public lands for the sole purpose of selling

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135 Ibid., p. 104.
136 Ibid., p.102.
137 Ibid., p.103.
properties to local, regional, and foreign investors at a premium cost.\footnote{Abu-Hamdi, p. 103.} In this new urban landscape, “universal values are highlighted, while local values are marginalized.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 105.}

According to Abu-Hamdi, neoliberal urbanism in Amman occurs through private economic investments in “shopping malls, upscale apartment buildings, and spectacular high-rise towers,” and other projects of “imported modernization schemes,” which includes: western franchises of pubs, bars, and restaurants given the theme of the thesis. Abu-Hamdi analyzes the way in which these buildings themselves influence a community and city through what she calls a “site-specific study.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 105 & 102.} However, rapid neoliberal urbanism is only taking place in the western part of the capital. “Market-driven urbanism” through neoliberal economic strategies has mostly failed in Amman, mainly due to its reinforcement of “structures of class power,” that have visibly widened the income disparities between the elite and the middle-to-low income classes in Amman, perpetuating the divide of East and West Amman.\footnote{Ibid., p. 104.} According to Yasser Elsheshtawy, private corporations used their power to initiate developments that function as tools for the powerful and elite in Amman’s society.\footnote{Yasser Elsheshtawy. The Evolving Arab City: Tradition, Modernity And Urban Development. (New York; London:: Routledge, 2008) p.5.} This notion of neoliberal urbanism, or what Abu-Hamdi deems as forms of colonialism disguised as globalization, not only has produced “local aspirations toward modernity” but exasperate the divide between east and west Amman, creating “hybrid spaces” for the population living in the western parts of the city to enjoy.\footnote{Abu-Hamdi, p. 105.}

According to Christopher Parker, this ever urbanizing and “changing cityscape” reflects emerging “configurations of power” in Amman.\footnote{Christopher Parker. “Tunnel-Bypasses And Minarets Of Capitalism: Amman As Neoliberal Assemblage.” Political Geography vol.28 no. 2 (2009): p.110.} This new cityscape, located in the western parts of the city as seen in the map below, represents efforts to attract private corporations and
“market-oriented solutions” to develop economic growth.\textsuperscript{146} Moreover, investments in Amman via grants, and investments and remittances from the Gulf, gave rise to new wealthy upper class neighborhoods and financial districts in west Amman, where the majority of my interview participants reside and or work.\textsuperscript{147} These neighborhoods include: Shemsani, Abdoun, five of the eight circles along Zahran Street in Jabal Amman including the developments of third, fourth, and fifth circles through luxury five-star hotels, the “high-end redevelopment” of 7\textsuperscript{th} circle, and the settlements just south of Amman’s international airport on airport road.\textsuperscript{148} He juxtaposes these areas with the eastern part of the city and Wihdat, seen by “neoliberal planner[s]” as “problem places that slow the flow” and are simply in the way of investors who “pass through.”\textsuperscript{149} The map below, provided by Parker, highlights the developmental divide in the city, as seen by the dotted line. Furthermore, Parker continues to express that East Amman has been intentional excluded from “flows of capital deemed essential to development.”\textsuperscript{150}

\textbf{Figure 1: East/West Divide of Amman}

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\caption{East/West Divide of Amman}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{146} Parker. p.110.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid. p. 110-3.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid. , p.118.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
This east/west divide is problematic for Al-Rabady and Abu-Khafajah; it contributes to “cultural denigration and humiliation” and normalizes orientalism in the minds of local and regional actors through its division of old and new Amman downtowns.¹⁵¹ With this binary, it becomes evident that Amman is split into two identities: one that is classical, local, and orient, and the other deemed global, Western, and contemporary.¹⁵² “Oriental urbanism” sustains the “East–West paradox” and continues to produce notions of “social disparities and cultural denigration.”¹⁵³ Through global, regional, and local powers, neoliberal investments created the Al Abdali Project or a ‘new downtown for Amman.’¹⁵⁴ Through oriental urbanism, Old Downtown, or east Amman, has been orchestrated to represent Amman’s culture only through its oriental identity, while the New Downtown and west Amman, normalizes the East-West “inequalities at the global, regional and local levels.”¹⁵⁵ Al-Rabady and Abu-Khafajah posit that urbanism in Amman, and throughout the MENA region at large, should instead allow for and liberate “politics of identity” through the sovereignty and self-determination of local populations, therefore underscoring the local as an essential focus of urban design.¹⁵⁶

Neoliberal urbanism not only affects income inequalities, divides east and west Amman, and upholds notions of the oriental society by foreigners and elite locals, it shapes the way youth from my sample today utilize these spaces and the areas they choose for their leisurely dating actives. The lifestyle shared by my participants influences their choices on where they go in the city to date, perhaps to present themselves in a certain manner, and to distinguish their lifestyle from others. In the proceeding sections, will we begin to understand the ways in which neoliberal

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 1.
¹⁵³ Ibid.
¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p.8 (for more information on this project visit www.abdali.jo).
¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 3.
¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 1.
urbanism has shaped youth’s dating habits. The fieldwork will also reveal the top 21 popular places to date, all located in west Amman, where neoliberal investments by private corporations intentionally choose to establish pubs, restaurants, bars and cafes in the most urban parts of the city.

**BEYOND CAFÉ CULTURE: CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN NEOLIBERAL SPACE**

Deeb and Harb and Moghadam highlight the interaction between urbanization and social change in Lebanon and the Middle East at large. I apply a similar lens through which I approach Amman because economic liberalization and neoliberalism, in general, are visible in both places. Even though their ethnography takes place in a Shi’a suburb in south Beirut, the phenomena they describe are relevant for Jordan. Deeb and Harb explore the increase of cafes and the rise in public sphere hetero-social relationships. “Cafes were an integral part of downtown Beirut as it became increasingly urbanized and populated at the turn of the 21st century.” They attribute this to “café culture,” arguing that these became increasingly mixed gender thus “reflecting the modernization of public spaces in the city center.” This “new leisurely landscape” provides individuals with “lived space” in an era of “infitah” or opening. 

Emad echoes this pattern of café culture in Amman.

The majority of relationships are created from university...or maybe from cafes, social cafes or cafes that you feel like okay they are trying to do something new. For example Turtle Green, it’s in Jabal Amman.

The changes present here speak to new public dating arenas for youth. Deeb and Harb illuminate the moral negotiations associated with particular urban settings, attempting to

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158 Deeb and Harb, p. 12.
159 Ibid.
illustrate youth’s “multiple moral rubrics” or the idea of right and wrong behavior in these urban spaces.\textsuperscript{161} I draw on Deeb and Harb’s definition of morality in city space by emphasizing how youth in Amman also consciously try to “live a good life based on a code of conduct, a standard by which behavior is assessed to be good or bad.”\textsuperscript{162} The urban changes not only provide youth with city space at cafés, pubs, and malls, but also mitigate the social stigma on dating. In a similar vein, my study analyzes the role of social media, arguing that it too serves as a different space to date. Through my interviews and collected free lists, I expand on Deeb and Harb’s definition of urban space, going beyond just “café culture” to include social media, cars, and pubs and bars, and Dead Sea resorts and hotels, as cultural spaces for dating.

Jordan’s era of privatization, foreign investment, expanded access to social media, and urban development projects, frame the context for contemporary dating styles. The increase of cafés as explained in the previous section and other newly created spaces provide opportunities for dating.\textsuperscript{163} Cafés, no longer male-only, become central and respectable locations for potential couples to court. In this public arena we can see dating habits form and take shape in west Amman. However, more insight on contemporary coupling and dating styles and public spaces chosen for dating need to be addressed in the discourse. The missing question I raise here is an analysis of this short term dating: whom in Amman’s society participates in public dating and what other public spaces do they utilize for short-term dating?

The chart below depicts precisely the new leisure landscape youth from my sample enjoy and utilize for dating. At the end of each interview I conducted, my 32 participants had five minutes to write down as many places that they have gone to for dating and/or getting to know a potential suitor. A total of 336 responses were recorded ranging in frequency levels. As shown in

\textsuperscript{161} Deeb and Harb, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., p. 16.
\textsuperscript{163} Adely, 2016; Deeb and Harb.
table one, the top spaces couples use to date is in a car, with 44 percent of participants admitting that they had in fact gone out on a date in a car either driving around or parked near a scenic view. We can connect this to urbanization of the city, building of roads, and the increased rate of car ownership over the last ten to fifteen years. Despite this urbanization, not everyone in Jordan has the luxury of owning a car at the age of my interlocutors. The underlying assumption of dating in a car reveals a certain class category presented by my sample. The Dead Sea, pubs in Jabal Amman at First Circle near Rainbow Street, and Starbucks, were other commonly mentioned places to date. My interlocutors often noted the Dead Sea hotel resorts as “dating hubs.” We can attribute this to recent real-estate investments made in Jordan by foreign investors, thus providing additional leisurely space for youth to occupy. It is not surprising that six out of the 21 responses are considered pubs; this also makes up a large category of dating sites mentioned. Jabal Amman’s circles and Lweibdeh are the go-to areas youth today enjoy as more and more businesses thrive with the acceleration of urbanization. The list below reveals that the experience of my interlocutors is painted by the opportunities afforded to them based on their class level. All indications from the data exposes that the sample is relatively upper middle class, which in turn shapes their experiences on where they can afford to go. I visited the majority of the places listed below, and the prices and costs found at these locations illustrate that their lifestyle is one that is not experienced by all in Jordan.
### Table 1: TOP 21 PLACES FOR DATING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Total percent</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Cars</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>44%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Dead Sea, and its hotels</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Copas- <em>pub</em></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31%</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Starbucks</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>5. La Calle-<em>pub</em></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28%</td>
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<td>6. Homes/on roof and when parents gone</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28%</td>
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<td>7. Corners-<em>pub</em></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Blue Fig-<em>restaurant</em></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Movies/Cinema</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>10. Lweibdeh- neighborhood</td>
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<td>11. Vinaigrette-<em>pub</em></td>
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<td>12. Scenic Views (mTal)</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>13. Rumi-<em>café</em></td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>14. Crumz-<em>café</em></td>
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<td>15. Books@- <em>café</em></td>
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<td>16. Malls</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19%</td>
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<td>17. Parks/Japanese Park</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<td>18. Lemon-<em>restaurant</em></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Good Pub</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. Cantaloupe-<em>pub</em></td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>21. Abdoun-*neighborhood</td>
<td>5</td>
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Averages were rounded to the nearest whole number

For Ahmad, going to a person’s home is preferred, but only if parents are not home, as mentioned by other participants as well. However, the private setting of a car is the second best preferred option for him. He admittedly disclosed having sexual intercourse in a car once, laughing off the incident and revealing that a passerby had almost spotted them in the act.

I spend a lot of time in the car. Once we didn’t have a spot actually, my place or her place so we ended up in a car. We parked at a place called Jordan Street, we just started driving, it's a very long highway, and it has trees. We went to one that was dark and had an empty place to park, so we stayed there for I don't know how much time and a funny thing happened. We had our clothes off and we were kind of napping and then I heard this voice and then I saw this guy walking right next to my car. It wasn’t the police it was some guy. He didn’t see anything but we just flew away!
Like Ahmad, Natalie also mentions the car as a space for youth to spend their leisurely time. For Natalie, driving around town and getting coffee from street vendors is a normal part of being Ammani. “We would go on drives,” Natalie says:

In Amman yeah of course you have Abu Saleh the coffee guy, the people who are out in the street and they serve coffee. It’s a trend in Amman; this is the Ammani thing. You go for drives everyday, you go, you get coffee with whomever, you put music in the car and you go and drive to views.

She continue to say that people often times go for drives when they “find the right spot to go to date.” She tells me that while in the car, it is normal for young men parked in the street corners to call for their attention “Guys are afraid of rejection, but other guys on the street reach out and say ‘hey!’” You know how they are. Girls actually respond to that, if you go to Abdoun near Sugar Daddies.” Natalie also stated that many girls do this as well.

For example I was with my friends the other day and we were in a car. I was in the front seat. We were in Khalda with two guys in the back who then ask me to hide myself because the girls in the car next to us noticed them. The girls were actually waving at the guys in our car and saying ‘hey what's up.’

Although Natalie does not call for the attention of young men in cars, she said other young women do this, “For me I've never done that, it's not in my society, but there are girls up here who want to know guys.” She does not see a problem with young men in cars attempting to take numbers from girls. “If he's getting a response and she likes his attention, then why not?”

Sports stadiums are other urbanized spaces where Lama believes youth meet one another. She met one of her serious ex-boyfriends through a gathering with friends at a World Cup game in her third year of undergraduate study. Lama recalls,

My friend wasn't trying to introduce us, but it was the World Cup games. One of my friends from university, asked me to come watch the match between Brazil and some other team at Sports City. So I said, ‘okay let's go,’ me and her and a group of guys and girls together. So we went, and there I met my boyfriend.
Lama explains that her friend was not trying to set them up, however, Fares intrigued Lama when she met him at the game. “So we met each other, he was wearing a Brazil shirt, and I said wow he is wearing a Brazil shirt and he looks cute, and said ya habibi I want to know his name and his family's name!” Lama and Fares started talking about their admiration for Brazil’s team. “This made me so attracted to him.” Lama added. After that sports match, they continued going out and seeing each other. Lama said they would typically go to a newly opened adult arcade called, "Winners and Score." Lama explains that Fares liked that she played video games, claiming that guys “are more attracted when they meet a girl who likes stuff like this.”

For Ghaleb, a 25 year-old-Christian, relationships now are different due to the new spaces made available for youth his age. “Back then they did not used to go to bars and meet each other and stuff like that, now it's different.” Ghaleb believes this changed occurred due to, “Globalization and the Internet. Everyone watches movies from America; they start thinking like them and start doing like them. Monkey see, monkey do.” For Ghaleb nightclubs have really increased in Amman, and have become a visible aspect of the city. “There’s also the clubs, the Russian ones, they are everywhere in Jordan, places where you go to meet a Filipino or Russian girl, there everywhere.” He mentions a Russian club in north Abdoun called Musicar.

My friend has been there. Everything of course is over priced. You get a drink, you get a table, and the manager comes and says ‘do you want any of the girls to come to sit with you?’ They come, the girl sits, you have to buy her a drink of course her drink is not alcoholic but she pretends it’s alcoholic and of course her drink is double the price of your drink.

According to Ghaleb, people from all different socioeconomic backgrounds go to these places. “The taxi drivers go to these types of places,” but also mentioned that some doctors go to.

Some people just sit next to the girl. The highlight of their life is just to have their hand around the girl that's it. It’s sad I know. Actual what happens inside is not legal, but it’s legal if it’s a dancing place.
He says often times the men who go to these clubs end up leaving with the girls to have sex. “Some places the girl leaves with them, if you want, but it’s like 300-400 JDs.” He continues to say that there are also regular clubs now just for dancing that he goes to with friends.

Normal clubs like dancing clubs we go to. There are a few, there was a pop-up club that opened for four months that is in Shmesani, in the Kempinski Hotel. Technically it’s not the Kempinski but it’s next to it, but it has another entrance or something.

According to Ghaleb, the government knows about these places because "they’re licensed." He names a couple of other nightclubs as well.

There’s this place called Esaki it’s next to Centro near Fourth Circle. There used to be G Club, Upstairs Downstairs, Clstr; they’re normal clubs like clubs in Europe, people go to dance. They exist actually everywhere. There’s a couple in Shmesani, in Al Rabia, in Gardens.

The above experiences highlight some of the urban places around Amman where youth from my sample have met other single Jordanians to date. Sports events, nightclubs, bars, and cafes were in fact popular venues; however, it was driving around in the car that seemed to be the most popular and preferred method. All of these locations indicate that my sample has the financial means of using and occupying these spaces for their leisurely activities.

**NON-CONVENTIONAL SPACE: SOCIAL MEDIA AND CYBER DATING**

Going beyond physical space, cyber space or dating through social media using new information and communication technologies is another common method of dating my interlocutors mentioned throughout their interviews. Facebook, Tinder, and Instagram are three popular venues youth in Amman utilize when meeting other people, for either casual or serious dating. Khalil explains that Facebook creates a history for a person that youth today like to see, in order to know the other person.
Facebook creates for you a history and this is something that the girl likes to see. She likes to see you in 2007, so right now we're talking about ten years. She really likes to see how you were ten years ago, who used to go with, how your life was.

He goes on to say that the first thing youth in Amman do after they meet each other is examine this history on Facebook. “The first thing, that you see when someone tells you about a girl is her Facebook.”

Natalie believes that hookup culture in Amman is a significant part of their daily lives due to the role social media plays. “We have the culture of hookups right now in Jordan, just hookup and not do anything else, since five years ago, since social media and the Internet has happened. Tinder is really big here.” She knows people on Tinder like her friends or cousins, however she is not on it. The perception, however, according to Natalie is that people judge relationships that form on Tinder. “I think it's looked down upon, “oh I met her on Tinder.””

Like Ahmad’s experience with Tinder, 26-year-old Amelia often uses the application for dating. She said despite being a universal application, Tinder in Amman, in her opinion, is used differently than in the United Sates, where she actually spent four years completing her undergraduate study. “In the States its more like a hookup app” she declares, “and here, well some people are on it to hookup, and some people are on it just to meet people, and some people are on it to get married.” She describes her experience using the application, and how she started a serious relationship with a guy she met in 2016.

I met my ex boyfriend on Tinder, in May 2016. He’s Palestinian Jordanian from here. His parents and my parents were apparently friends growing up but I swiped right and he swiped right and he asked me out on a date and I remember seeing that we had mutual friends.

After being in a serious relationship with someone in the States for four years, Amelia did not want to waste an opportunity to find a Christian Arab.
I went on Facebook and I looked him up and I said yes to his date when I found out that he was Christian because I am going to be 26, I am not going to waste this. I was hesitant throughout but we went out and it was a really fun date, we hit it off super well.

For their first date, Amelia and her Tinder Match went out to a popular pub called Dubliners located in Al-Swaifyeh near 7th Circle. “I think we kind of got wasted and we ended up making out in my car, in my garage.” Amelia then reveals, “My mom thinks I’ve only held hand with boys…but we'll let my mom believe what she wants to believe.” Her relationship with her Tinder match lasted about seven months,

That was also kind of long distance because he lived in Dubai and I lived here but we talked all the time. It lasted about seven months maybe tops because he was telling me that he was going to come to Amman and he’s going to see me, and then he stopped replying to texts.

He would sporadically come visit Amman, and during Christmas 2016 they saw each other again and she introduced him to her friends, however, the two did not continue dating.

28 year-old- Fadia was currently in a relationship with a Turkish man she met on Tinder when we sat down to discuss dating and relationships in Amman. Unlike Ahmad however, and the stereotype surrounding hookup culture, Fadia does not use the popular dating application for that manner.

I met this guy through Tinder. I try to avoid it as much as possible; I didn’t meet a lot of guys through it. I call them for a coffee, not a date. I don’t really like it to be dating a person from the first time I’ve met them.

In her mind, Tinder dates in Amman do not always mean relationships or anything sexual. “I don’t really consider it a relationship. There are no hookups, there’s no sleeping. Basically some of them would delete me, and some would keep on talking to me.”

However, despite growing in popularity, 24-year-old Jameel and Emad are against using online dating application. “I don’t like this stuff,” Jameel stated,
I like classy stuff, meeting somebody, making an effort, going into social media randomly and trying to test my luck, it might be the new age thing, it might be the new thing to do, I just don't like it. I have different standards. You know why I don’t use Tinder? Because I love the story behind it; I want to be able to share the story of how we met.

Like Jameel, Emad does not have Tinder, and is also against the idea preferring instead meeting someone naturally. “Well I know a lot of people who meet on social media, I feel like it not a thing that happens organically, there is something wrong, I don't know what, like Tinder.” A lot of Emad’s friends however, do have Tinder and use it, as he explains for more than casual dating purposes. “Usually to be honest, the people who download the app, usually they are looking for one thing, let's say it's something that is mainly related to a sexual relationship.” Emad then adds:

Honestly, I know one or two guys and a girl; they have it for this reason. And I don’t know maybe other people no, but the people who I know who have Tinder or those who use it a lot, or are very active on Tinder and they make friends from it, it’s just for this sexual direction.

Facebook is another social media method of meeting people. Aya met her current fiancé at university, however she always ignored his attempts to talk to her. It was only after he added her on Facebook that they actually started communicating.

He added me on Facebook. I accepted him and said okay it's not a problem. It's Facebook. It’s nothing. And then he kept talking to me and talking to me he would send me messages, ‘hey, I want to hang out,’ with his friends because I know if he said go out with me alone of course I am going to say no. But even still, I have my friends and I am the type that I don’t like changing friends. I have these people that I like and that I trust, I go out with them, I have fun with them.

After a while, Rami, frustrated at her refusal to go out with his friend group, eventually stopped messaging her. “He stopped talking to me, for a whole year,” she disclosed:

He’s thinking no this girl is not responding and it's clear she doesn’t want me. And I was very shocked, because I kept pushing and pushing him away and just like that he disappeared and I even stopped seeing him at university, we never happened to be at the same place at the same time.
After nearly a year, Aya said Rami reappeared in her life: “He sent a message and I replied back and I was friendly, I wasn’t like before, so he took my phone number. I gave it to him and then we started texting.” The two now have been engaged for a year, and even though Rami lives in Abu Dhabi with his family, Aya says they Skype often and plan on marrying spring 2018. According to Aya’s perception, though not entirely true, she believes that it is only in Amman where she is able to date, whereas other areas in Jordan, dating would not be accepted.

In cities outside Amman, the people still think in a way let's say not so open minded, and everything has to be according to the traditions and the girl must wear a hijab, and she meets through traditional marriage. There are no girls there who can befriend a guy for example, have a boyfriend and introduce him to her parents, there isn’t.

George also shares his perspectives on the changing social arena in Amman. “The community is more vibrant with the introduction of let's say, social media.” George states.

Through social media, you can find certain people because it gives you suggestions. For instance, if you now work at a certain place or live in a certain area, it gives you suggestions of friends to add on Facebook because they share the same location.

He continues to say that this has allowed people to become more familiar with each other. “Facebook, Instagram; I've heard so many stories that people just have mutual friends so they become friends, and so on and then they go out and it actually becomes a relationship.” George then revealed to me that he had met and dated a Christian woman through a social media event in Amman called a “Tweet Up” back in 2013. He explains to me that in a Tweet-Up “you meet and discuss an idea that was created through a hashtag.” They dated for a year and a half and spoke all the time, according to George. After the Tweet-Up event, he started reading her blog and was impressed. “She had all the qualities, that was insane! I remember seeing her at the Tweet-Up.” He then messaged her on Twitter after, when he noticed she was a friend of his friend. “I decided to text her. I was very blunt, that was my first time.” He messaged:
I think you're great and I’d like to ask you out on a date. She said yes and we went out, to Fann w Shai, It was one of the best nights of my life. I remember every detail and we walked around Lweibdeh and we stayed up until 11pm, that’s six hours. Then we started talking regularly, but she used to study at a university in the UK. She was bright; valedictorian, very political and we became extremely close.

Ultimately George said, “She drifted away though.” This really hurt him because they both loved each other. “We were perfect for each other.” He says. Omar shared a story about a classmate of his who met her husband on social media.

Recently now I think everyone meets on the Internet. A lot of people they add each, send messages to each other, randomly. A girl she married a guy and she was in our school, how did she meet him? He messaged her on Facebook, and they met and now they are married. Its common, a lot of people do it but I don’t think this will work, you know because I think its creepy to send message to someone I don’t know. Sometimes a lot of friends meet, and if I know you, maybe I will arrange a date for you.

Omar thinks his community will change in the next 20 years due to the Internet.

It will be more open, because of the Internet, all the social media applications to meet up and stuff. I told you a lot of guys and girls get into a relationship, and their family doesn’t know, even the boys, and they go out and have sex and do stuff.

He continues to say, “Social media here lets girls connect with more guys, and in the same way it lets guys connect with girls easier than before.” Despite these benefits, he recognizes some ramifications of these new communication technologies. “It’s a problem because a lot of guys start fooling with girls and a lot of girls fooling with guys; they will both be secret about it.”

Omar also describes to me the cyber relationship he had with a woman he noticed tagged on his friend’s Facebook photo.

The crazy part is I didn’t meet her! I was talking to my friend Bateel. I was looking at her Facebook and noticed another person. I asked her as a joke, ‘okay who is this girl with you, she looks very beautiful, I want to meet her.’ She told me she is not in Amman she is in Bahrain. Two days later she tells me, ‘message her on Facebook. I talked to her and she wants to know you, she liked your picture.’ So I messaged her. At first she was very tough she said ‘if you want me, come so we can get engaged; come from the door.’
According to Omar, and other participants, the phrase “coming through the door” means a woman wants to make the relationship serious by involving both families, having them meet at home. And even though they had just met online, she wanted Omar to take these serious steps.

Entering the house from the door basically means if you want to be in a relationship and if you are serious, then ‘come from the door’ with your family. I told her, ‘I don’t know you yet, and I want to meet you. Let's start as friend if we like each other, good.

According to Omar, his cyber friend did not like this response.

After that she said okay to being friends. Less than a month later and she thinks that we are dating and she starts calling me baby and she would call me. At first it was nice but after that I was really thinking I don’t know you, we didn’t meet, I am not ready to be in a serious relationship now anytime. I told her we should wait a year to know each other very well and we will come in the summer and we'll meet you face to face and then we will decide if we want to get engaged and I want to have some money. Right now I am finishing my house, I built a house above my family and I bought a car. I told her to wait she would say yes, but then she became crazy. I told her I couldn’t now, I don’t have a lot of money, and I will not use my father's money.

The relationship lasted less than two months. Sarah, a 23-year-old pharmacist shares a similar perspective as Omar, believing that society is changing due to social media, although she is not too pleased with the idea.

Of course people will change, but I hope not. If there way of thinking changes, from the Internet from technology, the whole world will be very open, maybe the customs in America will be here in Amman.

The use of the Internet, social media and new communication and information technologies has provided youth in Amman, and particularly those who share the lifestyle of my participants, an opportunity to date through cyber relations. As indicated by the stories above, Tinder, Twitter, and Facebook are popular outlets used for meeting other single youth. Although the majority of the cyber dating stories did not last, nor did they develop into an actual marriage, some did. Nevertheless, my participants conveyed that it was the most popular way to meet other single youth among their inner circles.
A RISE IN DATING CULTURE

This section will provide a detailed account of where and how youth today meet and date in an ever-changing social and urban atmosphere. Their lived experiences illustrate trends in dating that emerge from school, university and the workplace. Research participants also provided insight on their attitudes regarding interreligious dating, and how some navigate family expectations. George describes how Amman’s social circles work in ways that help facilitate the dating experience and meeting new people. According to George, youth in Amman have friendship circles from different stages of their lives.

There are several friend networks in Jordan, you don't just go out with the same group anymore. You have several groups to go out with, you have several communities. There's work group, high school group, university group, there’s like four groups within your university.

Often times youth mix their social groups during events or parties when they believe it is suitable to mix them. For George this depends heavily on their personality. George explains that his generation has the freedom these days and the space to go out, in comparison to his parents’ generations.

Back in the day my mom couldn’t just go out with a lot of groups, they were restricted to her friends at school that her parents knew about because they live in the same neighborhood. But now no, it’s different, there is more communication. I think the turning point was when I grew up, I couldn’t judge back then to be honest. Even my cousins, the older ones, when there is a 12-year difference you can see that they did not even go out a lot.

As George described to me relationships between young men and women in Amman, he was quick to use the term dating, “I'd say they would call it dating,” asserting that many youth in his circle use this term to describe their heterosexual relationships that are more than friendships, “all my friends would call it dating,” he adds. He also believes dating is a popular trend amongst
his social circle, “Come here to Maestro at eight and probably you'll see a lot of dates here.”

Despite its growing popularity, George believes that some parents are still unaware that their children date. He asserts that some parents don’t accept the idea:

> There's a lot of dating going on but nothing that parents actually know of. It's still kind of amateur because parents are still used to the fact that you have to "go through the door," that’s what they call it, which means you go to her home and say to her father ‘hi amo, I want to date your daughter.’

Since my participants emphasized that dating is a common aspect of their social lives in Amman, it was critical to examine how this dating style appears, where it happens, and the social spaces people have used to meet each other.

For Ghada, dating and relationships now in Amman cannot be generalized. She has been in two relationships so far, one with someone she met while in university, and the other through a mutual friend. Even though both relationships did not work out, Ghada does not feel pressured by her family to find a husband anytime soon. She believes the situation in Amman has changed compared to generations before stating that there are “no trends” in marriage patterns, rather its “whatever works for you.”

> You can have someone who is in university getting an education and still getting married at the age of 19 and you have someone who is 28 and she does not want to get married and she is not even looking. And you get a guy who is 23-years-old but his father has money so he can back him up through the marriage. So it is all normal, but if a guy is actually working in Jordan or working in the Gulf or any other country, he would be a little bit older because he needs to raise the money to actually get married. Right now there are no norms, it is whatever works for you.

However, what Ghada did comment on is the increasing trend in high school relationships that she sees herself, and hears from her mother, a high school teacher at a popular private school. When this is the case, Ghada thinks it’s much more difficult to approach the female student and tell her to make wise choices while dating.

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164 Maestro is a pub in a popular neighborhood called Lweibdeh.
They are having boyfriends at such younger ages, and relationships are just really progressing. High school lovers are still together in university and still together out of it. After them being together for seven or eight years you can’t come and tell her, "Hey think about it," no I am not going to think about it now, if I wanted to think about it, I would have thought about it before.

Emad’s perception on dating in Amman has been defined by the foreigners that live in the ever-urbanizing city. He argues that because Amman is now diverse with people from all over the world, it becomes probable to date a foreigner.

Let me tell you something, this area is very mixed with foreigners. And the Arabs in Amman are very accustomed to the idea of a foreigner. So if she is a foreign girl and she slept with a guy, maybe one would see that as normal. But if she is an Arab maybe one would see it in a different way, like she is a slut or something like this.

Emad’s third relationship in his life was with a European woman. In fact the two lived together. “It was a girl from Switzerland. I met her here. We decided okay, let's see what will happen between us and live the European experience; she had an obsession with the Middle East.” He went on to say that his European girlfriend had a deep admiration for Arab culture and he began to feel she was dating him only for the experience. “This place in her mind is a place very holy and it’s a place that needs to have stories and things come out from it. We lived together in a house for two months.” Emad’s relationship with his European girlfriend was mainly sexual, and the two no longer speak.

Another common space for dating that emerged throughout my interviews was the workplace. According to George meeting at work is another place couples meet and date, and some eventually marry. “There are a lot of married couples at work, one of them usually quits especially if they are in the same department and someone becomes a partner.” The increase of women in the public work force in Amman has allowed for more opportunities for men and women to meet in a professional environment and outside the space of the home.
Sua’ad is currently in a relationship with a 29-year old bank manager in the company, but at a different branch. She explains that their relationship developed from colleagues, into friends, and now as boyfriend and girlfriend. “Both of us are managers at different branches,” Sua’ad explains. “We've known each other for two years but the relationship was distant – just a friendship.” Hakim would help Sua’ad with the managerial tasks and at first she did not think anything of it.

This is my first time as a manager, and he has been a manager for seven years so I started needing someone to help me. I would call him and ask him questions. Then we started to talk to each other continuously and now we're together.

Sua’ad said their relationship developed over the past two and a half months, and although she has known him for two years, the past two months have clearly led to a different type of relationship. “From before we would just talk to each other normally, and days would go by and we wouldn’t talk, it was normal. But now we talk to each other everyday.” It is these everyday phone calls that allowed for the relationship to develop and mature.

As soon as I come home from work, I change, immediately I call him and we stay on the phone until we both fall asleep together, we hang up together and then fall asleep. In the morning when I wake up, because his shift is before mine, he always calls to wake me up and we talk to each other for half an hour and then he comes here sometimes.

Sua’ad’s family does not yet know about the relationship, and it is perhaps the luxury of living in Amman without her parents that allows for this to occur. She plans on telling her family about the relationship when it becomes serious.

Not yet, but once the relationship stabilizes and becomes clear I will tell them. Right now we are just trying to get to know each other on the surface. We know each other, but we don’t know a lot about each other. It's hard for me to go and tell my family I am in a relationship, but still I am not 100 percent agreeing on him.
Once she feels as though it is time, she plans to sit her mother down and tell her about her relationship with her co-worker. Sua’ad knows exactly her mother’s response because it will be exactly what she told her sister.

Are you two serious in about this? If you're just spending time together, the subject ends now. But if you're both serious then okay. I want to be informed about everything that happens so I can keep an eye on the situation from a distance.

This increase in dating culture has broadened the spaces in which dating occurs for those in my sample. Not only are youth meeting and dating at work, they are turning to new technologies as a way to meet new people. The stories above indicate that although my sample shares an overarching sentiment believing that dating is desirable, their lived experiences vary. No one generalization can embody their dating experiences, especially within the diversity reflected in the urban space in which they live.

CONCLUSION

The diversity of dating stories speaks to the ever-changing social atmosphere in Amman. Rapid neoliberal urbanism in west Amman, and the increase of pubs, cafes, highways, and hotels, provides some youth, or youth with the material means as indicated in my sample population, an opportunity to date openly in the public sphere. Additionally, social media platforms, such as Tinder, have come to define dating parameters in Amman today as they gain popularity through easy phone access. Furthermore, youth today highlight the other physical spaces where they meet another such as the workplace. All these scenarios extend far beyond the boarders of kinship and marrying through traditional structures. In chapter three, I will go beyond dating, exploring the ways in which sexual behavior has also changed due to these urban changes.
CHAPTER THREE
Shifting Desires and Negotiating Intimacy

We live in artificial protection here. Things have to be perfect. We will not compromise this checklist. And if sex happened, that’s it? It’s the end? That's not life. That's not reality.

Petros, Summer 2017 on premarital sex and virginity. Amman, Jordan.

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An in-depth survey of sexual behaviors practiced by unmarried women and men in present-day Amman is currently unavailable. Anxieties regarding the topic are seen in the accessible literature, such as the works of Judith Tucker, Dialmy and Uhlmann, and Fortier and Maffi, to name a few.165 The previous literature on this topic is heavily focused on reputation, honor and virginity, yet lacks a wider understanding of youth’s contemporary perceptions and their lived experiences with intimacy and sex. This chapter highlights current narratives from youth on their intimate dating practices and they ways in which they negotiate their sexuality. This chapter is not about, promoting, denying, or celebrating sexual freedom. Nor is it an argument about whether or not it exists in the Arab world. Instead, by highlighting some examples of lived

experiences on the topic, I hope to contribute to a relatively thin literature on this topic. I seek to shed light on questions regarding: *who has sex, under what socioeconomic conditions, how widespread these practices are, and current perceptions on virginity?* In answering these questions, this chapter will ultimately demonstrate that no precise patterns or trends on sexuality and virginity exist in Amman, but rather a wide variety of individual experiences and thoughts are represented in this ethnography. I begin with a brief review of the literature on the topic of virginity underscoring the reasons why a heavy emphasis on virginity is promoted in society. Then, I will juxtapose the literature with contemporary perceptions from my participants to assess whether or not these previous beliefs still hold truth and value in the sample group I examined. The data I collected illuminates our understanding of their opinions on premarital sex, thoughts on virginity, an inside look at some of their sexual experiences, and lastly the way pornography has been used in society as substitute for sex education in school, a trend visible throughout all cultures and regions of the world.

**REPUTATION AND HONOR IN LITERATURE**

Understanding the historic attitudes regarding virginity and kinship provides a lens in which present day attitudes can be compared. *Why is reputation tied to virginity and how does family attempt to monitor a daughter’s actions and behaviors before marriage?* Julia Droeber Ewa Górecka, and Adely depict the social expectations families uphold as methods to preserve reputation.\(^\text{166}\) Previous literature on the matter depicted how protection and honor often superseded love in the traditional marriage structure, making it difficult to marry for love.\(^\text{167}\) As described by Abdallah, Adely, and Layne previously, notions of virginity are enmeshed with the

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\(^{167}\) Abdallah, p. 60.
protection of social class status. Layne states that control of women’s fertility and sexuality is in fact an issue of kinship honor and is associated with the private domestic sphere.\(^{168}\) Traditionally, marriage was the desired outcome for a girl to live a respectful life and the “marker for adulthood” for women, as explained by Adely.\(^{169}\) Abu-Lughod sheds light on the denial of sexuality, questioning why modesty is connected more to a woman’s virtue than it is for a man. Moreover, Abu-Lughod argues that this exact sexual denial preserves the “whole male-oriented social order.”\(^{170}\)

Despite enjoying new leisurely public spaces, modern technology, and an urbanizing capital as described in chapter two, Jordanians still uphold certain aspects of traditional laws. The Jordanian Penal Code according to Amira Sonbol, was meant to “make the law more equitable for women” however, despite its positive attributes, it fails to protect women against discrimination.\(^{171}\) Ewa Górecka highlights these injustices women in Jordan face today discussing women’s rights concerning the workforce, education, and socially regarding marriage and honor killings. The implementation of the 1976 Family Code improved women’s status, as it granted them sole ownership of *mahr* and institutionalized the husband’s obligation to provide their spouses with a home, medical service, food, and clothes.\(^{172}\) However, despite these benefits, little was mentioned for protection against rape and honor killings.\(^{173}\) Ninety-five percent of murders of women in 1997 were related to “jeopardizing family honor,” linking thus again notions of virginity and honor.\(^{174}\)

\(^{168}\) Layne, p. 23.
\(^{171}\) Sonbol, p. 238.
\(^{172}\) Górecka, p. 74
\(^{173}\) Ibid. , p. 75
\(^{174}\) Ibid. , p.76
During unmarried adulthood, women are seen to be responsible for their family reputations. Droeber discusses this responsibility and compares the tolerance of honor killings with tolerance of street harassment, questioning why the misbehavior of men is tolerated, while the misbehavior of women is not. Her work can be used as a comparative backdrop regarding women’s negotiated sexual behaviors today. Droeber reveals that on average 25 women were killed in 2002 in so-called honor crimes. These victims came from all socioeconomic backgrounds and ranged between the ages of fifteen and thirty. Jordan’s Penal Code protects male family members who commit these crimes, preventing them from being convicted, as Górecka explains. Honor crimes play two roles, punishing women for the alleged misconduct, and as a means of social control in their role within the system of rumors and gossip. The idea of social control over women and their bodies however, extends further beyond Jordan and the Middle East, encapsulating all other regions of the world.

Considering honor and shame in the context of contemporary premarital sexual habits is a critical component to understanding the diverse experiences of women in Jordan. Not everyone is dating in Jordan, and some women are much more constrained in their mobility and ability to interact with males. Even though advances for women in Jordanian society have been made in education and through their labor participation, we can ultimately conclude from Górecka, Adely, and Droeber that more must be done to alter hetero-normative social practices. These distinct themes will set a foundation for us to assess current attitudes on reputation and virginity and thoughts on sexuality in west Amman. Before proceeding, we must be careful not to assume intimate experiences never existed prior to the 21st century. However, as explained before, little has been mentioned in the literature on this matter. I fill this void with the fieldwork I conducted.

175 Droeber, p. 34.
176 Ibid.
177 Górecka, p.76-7.
ATTITUDES ON PREMARITAL SEX TODAY

Wide ranges of opinions were captured throughout my fieldwork regarding attitudes towards premarital sex, and therefore, no generalization can be made. What is most evident from my fieldwork is that among my sample population, set in a particular class background and lifestyle, neither religion nor educational level were predetermining factors for engaging in premarital sex among my informants. However, what I did find is that participants believed these intersectional characteristics mattered when describing a person in society who would engage in dating and premarital sex. For example, many of my Christians participants held the perception that the Muslim women in their community have more sex; ironically, the Muslim participants reflected the same sentiment on their Christian counterparts. On the contrary, understanding their practices demonstrated that these perceptions are not relevant determining influences. The interviews described below attempt to capture the fluidity in attitudes.

Zaid explained that premarital sex exists in Amman, and that men and women can be found who are sexually active to certain extents.

Yes of course it happens, if there’s chemistry and love between them it could be they’re just going to do it. It might not be the proper way but there will be some sexual things, maybe because here they’re afraid of losing their virginity.

He elaborated more on the fear of losing virginity and what it meant. “It’s a small country. A girl’s reputation or the guy’s reputation is the same.” He explains that families still ask about a potential groom, and if he does not have a great reputation the family might not allow their daughter to marry him. “It’s not just the girl’s reputation, the guy is just as important.” Zaid gives me an example about a colleague at work whose reputation was questioned by a woman’s family who knew their manager. They asked the manager about Zaid’s colleague before agreeing to proceed forward with any marriage plans, however when the employer replied, he told the
family that his employee is not a good person and “it ruined the marriage.” According to Zaid, reputation and honor is also discussed at church. He explained that a month before a potential couple marries the priest announces their plans to marry to all church members, indirectly asking for information regarding the bride or groom.

Even at church, I go every Sunday; sometimes there are people who want to get married and the priest announces that after a month it’ll be the wedding of this person and this person. He gives the people a chance if they know anything about them to come and report to the church. They announce who is getting married indirectly as a way to speak up.

Although Zaid has not engaged in any sexual experience, the reason behind it is not waiting until marriage, rather he wants to be aware of his actions, and what he is doing.

Sexually usually I don’t. It’s not about waiting until I’m married, I prefer to try everything and this, but to be aware of what you’re and not drunk. This is what I mean you’re aware of what you’re doing and you’re sober and conscious.

He then explains that there is a large percent of men in Amman who have engaged in sex, but that there is also a large amount that have not been exposed or experimented with anything at all. Zaid asserts that there is “no in between” percent, meaning he believes that men in Jordan either have intercourse or they don’t.

Dima does not believe in premarital sex, instead preferring to wait for marriage. “I'm with having a relationship but I wouldn't go having sex,” however she did disclose that it does happen in her community. “I told you I never had, but I've heard a lot of things. I've had a lot of friends and there are people who do this, some people who do that.” Dima shared a story with me about a certain friend who tells people she has had sex, but she truly had not. “I have one friend who I've heard her telling something to people about it. When we were together and she told me that ‘I know you heard this this and this, and it's not true. I just say this.’ She was bragging that she had sex, which was weird.” Dima shares another story about a middle-class educated friend
of hers who had been dating her now husband since the 7th grade. “There's a couple that got married, I knew them after they got married …and I talked to her and she said that they knew each other since 7th grade and then I told her ‘what have you done?’ and she said ‘what haven't we done’.” For Dima, this meant that her friend had had a sexual experience prior to marriage.

Wanting to comprehend Dima’s attitude on the subject, I asked her what she felt about her friends’ revealing stories on their sexual behavior; “Deep down, I don't know what to believe.” Despite confusion in her opinion on whether premarital sex is acceptable, Dima asserted that she would never judge a friend based on this.

For me personally, if I found out that if you personally had sex it wouldn't matter because it only matters to me as long as you're a good friend and things like that. The concept of people having sex sometimes I sit and think ‘okay so there are people who tell me it's good to have sex and there are some people who tell me it's not.’ Someone told me that people have too have sex; to make sure they're compatible sexually.

Dima explained the reasoning for waiting to have sex is based on culture. “So now the justification you know is to keep it for someone special and I agree with that.” However, Dima believes the concept of exposure to other ideologies and cultures, hold more influence.

It depends on what each person has been exposed to. So the people who travel a lot, they become exposed to other things so they have a different perspective. And there are people who are exposed to experiences here that give them a different perspective.

Since Dima is currently single she questioned whether her perspective on premarital sex would change if she loved someone or whether or not she was only waiting because of cultural expectations:

Inside me I say ‘keep it’s for the special someone, but there's part of me that thinks ‘am I like this because I was raised this way or because it's prohibited?’ Deep down I don't know because I've never had that experience. I think at first I wait to have sex because of the culture, but then I think it's good to keep it for that special someone.
For Samira, the role of the community and its institutions plays a role in her perception on premarital sex. Unlike Dima, Samira finds that religion provokes such beliefs. However, she recognizes that it is both in Christianity and Islam.

It's not a matter of okay or not okay, its about the community. Our community does not accept sex before marriage because they think it is haram or that you are committing adultery. Here adultery is defined as you're having sex without being married, so you're sinning against God, here it is more of a religious belief both for Muslims and Christians. It's only two religions here and we both share the same perspective, so it is common here that it is not okay to have sex before marriage. But for me, as a modernized woman I do accept couples who sleep together before marriage and I really like the European life style of people because they get to experience living together before committing to a relationship.

Despite this, Samira has conflicting values on whether or not she would engage in premarital sex. For her, it’s a special kind of relationship to have with “one person” that helps create a connection. “That's my own belief,” she says:

I do accept people of different mentalities I am fine with it. I support it as well. I have my own perspective, and I need that special moment for me through marriage. I want something serious and I want something to last.

Even though Samira does mention pressures from the community, she asserts her Christian beliefs are rooted in her regardless:

I believe in my religious views and I do know that this moment is special with a special person and I don’t want to sin against God so I think I believe in that. I think if sex happened when two couples are truly in love and truly committed without marriage it is not a sin, because they are committed.

This view holds true for Omar as well. The 26-year-old explained to me that in his opinion, both men and women should not be engaging in sexual intercourse prior to marriage. “I don’t think that for guys its okay, it’s not okay for the guys, because if the girl saves herself for you, you should save yourself for her.” He tells me that he has never had sex before but that this year he kissed a girl for the first time. “I kissed a girl, a French kiss. Before a lot of girls tried to kiss me,
the first kiss should be with my love to share. I believe everything in the beginning will be the best thing.”

Like the others, Sua’ad also believes that premarital sex is happening in Amman. “Yes there are some people who do and there are some people it's normal for them to talk about it, girls among girls, it's normal talk. And it doesn't have to be a full sexual relationship.” She adds that a full sexual relationship is not that common and that instead couples engage in other behaviors she describes as “just simple stuff touching and kissing.” Suaad believes that experiencing more than holding hands is not acceptable. She will openly tell her friends, that it is not okay to engage in certain behaviors. “I tell them that they're wrong, but they're free.” Suaad does not think badly of the people who do engage in premarital sex. “People's expression of love for each other will always be different. Some people love each other through this way [sex].”

Natalie’s views on sexual behaviors of youth in Amman are in fact tied to class. According to Natalie, the upper and middle class of society engage in certain behaviors such as kissing, “it happens on the first date here,” she says. She explains to me that around 60 percent of men in Amman from the upper and middle classes have sex in their cars and in their homes. In her interview she articulates and recognizes the difference between sexual intercourse and “hookup” culture in Amman. To a certain extent, Natalie herself is okay with hookups, like kissing and touching and says that it is quite common for women in Amman, believing it to be around 40 percent. Natalie extends these views on how she would like to raise her daughter in the future. “I want to raise my daughter as my friend. I want her to explore but not actually have sex. It's something important for a special person.”

Like Natalie, Khalil also describes this idea of negotiating sexual behavior and the extent certain people are willing to reach in their moments of intimacy. He begins by affirming that sex
is present in his community, “Of course it's present, but it's the level [of sex] you have to look at.” Simply put, Khalil recognizes the extent of sexual negation among youth today. “Deep sex, penetration, no we don't have that a lot.” His description of sexual behavior negotiation is placed into three categorized. “We can split it in three stages: one is deep sex and that's complete and it's very rare. The one before is called dry sex,” he uses an Arabic term “minbarra la barra” to describe dry sex, or doing sexual act while fully clothed, and claims that 30-40 percent of society in Amman engages in that. And the last category he explains simply engage in a “lip kiss” claiming that 40 percent of the society falls under this category. He continues to explain that in society even parents of men won’t allow for their children to have sex. This fear, Khalil explains is the reason why parents push for marriage. “They just marry him off, they're afraid that he might make a mistake.”

Despite these perceptions, namely that one should wait for marriage, others I interviewed indicated that they were sexual active and that this was increasingly acceptable to some of their peer. In the proceeding section, stories of shared sexual experiences will ultimately reveal the wide variety of experiences and attitudes in Amman by youth.

**INTIMACY AND SEXUAL EXPERIENCES OF YOUTH**

The lived experiences of youth today in Amman are in constant negotiation between intimate desire and family, community, and religious values and expectations. Throughout the interviews, a common theme of secrecy or secret sexual experiences reappeared, as participants explained the ways in which their sex lives are kept secret from their families. This section delves deep into the secret lives of youth in Amman who prescribe to a certain lifestyle and new
social structures, as a method to maneuver between what is acceptable in society, and what they desire as youth.

Hythem was 25-years-old when he began his six-month relationship with then American girlfriend Leah, his first relationship with a foreigner. The now 30-year-old tells me that the relationship was the first time he started having sex. Leah was living in Lweibdeh at the time, and he had agreed to meet her on a blind-double date since her friend and his friend were dating. A month after breaking up with Leah, Hythem met a German woman at a birthday party in Aqaba. “I started to be more curious about having sex, because my first time was with Leah.” His relationship with the German woman quickly developed and lasted for three years. “We had sex the first time we met actually and I started seeing her again. She was the love of my life.” His parents knew about her, but not exactly the extent of their son’s relationship with her. Hythem never introduced her to his parents,

This was actually one of my biggest mistakes I did in my life, I didn’t introduce her to my parents. I was afraid to hurt their feelings since my parents became so religious. They want it to be like a marriage not a girlfriend-boyfriend, its haram they said.

During the last year of the relationship, Hythem moved in with his German girlfriend who had also lived in the Lweibdeh neighborhood. Then the two moved to Jabal Amman. He told his parents however that he was living with a male friend. His German girlfriend eventually had to move away to complete her master’s and they dated long-distance, for about six more months, "We loved each other so much, we survived the long distance...she went back in 2015.”

Although Hythem’s first experiences with sex were with foreign women living in Amman, it is the upper and middle classes in society, according to Hythem, that have the means and opportunities to engage in sex without direct consequences.
They are all a bit opened minded maybe, sometimes I feel like this, also middle class now. I’m middle class, and all my friends are middle class and they are all free and they have sex and everything, but I feel it’s more of a privilege for the upper class.

Comparably, Omar also believes that couples in Amman are involved sexually and that it’s mainly tied to socioeconomic class status, rather than religion.

In the past few weeks a lot of men and women told me they are having sex with lovers. Real sex, Muslim, Christian, all the upper class, they have sex. I know that 90 percent of the very rich, if their son doesn’t have a girl, they bring a girl for him in the upper class.

Ghaleb and his friends have had active sexual lives but said that it is still kept a secret. “It's very secretive only a few people know, and if their parents know they wouldn’t ask. People are involved sexually even if they are not in a relationship.” Ghaleb explains that not everyone who is having sex is in a relationship. “They want to have sex, I mean they've never been in a relationship, its just friends with benefits, I had that for a while.” He elaborates on his sexual experiences with two Jordanian women, one Muslim and one Christian, although he was never in a relationship with either of them. “It was during university also, it was 2011. One Muslim and one Christian, but the with Muslim girl not real sex.” Although Ghaleb recognizes that sex is deemed a taboo in his community, he tells me that people do it, including Jordanian women. He explained that the Christian woman actually told him that she has sex with whomever she wants.

It is a taboo but a lot of people actually do it, one girl in my university she actually told me, ‘I have sex with people, all men, not any guy who tries with me for many months, no, if I want it, I do it, I initiate it.’

Ghaleb’s sexual relationships occurred during the summer and that they would have sex in his home. “My house, if my parents are out, stuff like that. My friend's house, he used to live alone.” Likewise, Samira also believes that the sexual lives of youth in Amman are kept secret.

It's secretive they don’t tell you. Maybe if you are close friends you can know, they will tell you but otherwise its known that here some men do like to play, and do need this
sexual satisfaction so they go to places where they have Russian girls, or girls from other nationalities just for an affair.

Samira said these Russian women are paid. "It happens here but it is not as exposed as it is in other countries.” However, Jordanian men are also engaging in sexual relationships with Jordanian women as well; “The stories I hear are more about foreign girls, but of course there are girls, all type of nationalities.” Ultimately she reasons that there are many consequences for a woman who engages in sex:

It has a lot of consequences because the males who do these activities are over protective over their sisters because they think that girls are all the same and will do the same things, so they do a lot of bad stuff and then they try to make their sister's life hell.

According to Samira, couples that are actually dating are not having sex because eventually they will marry she explains, however, this does not stop them from engaging in other physical contact such as hugging and kissing:

They are getting married in the end and if they are serious and respectful about it, yeah they are waiting. And if they are really in love and are serious, they can wait. Sometimes I feel like when a man respects a girl here he will not ask for any physical contact, physical is okay, but sexual contact before marriage no because he respects her enough, because he is, we can say, religious or he fears adultery and sinning against God. But in the end he is getting married to her, but if he is not serious maybe he can play with her feelings.

Fadia believes that sex before marriage is happening between those who are 20-26 years of age, she believes it’s “a growing trend.” However, she does not think it will ever become something openly talked about in her community. “It will remain underneath sheets and covers,” she replied. I asked her if she would allow her children to have sex, she replied, “Yes, I won’t be okay with sex, but I’m okay experimenting with things.”

Nawal expressed that in Amman people are having sex in different ways. “I have to tell you about sex here. It’s very important to understand this one; it’s a very big taboo to have sex,
but everyone has it, everyone.” However, she was not talking about actual intercourse, but rather something she and her friends call “virgin sex.”

The girls don’t lose their virginity, but they have sex, they call it virgin sex. In virgin sex they do everything, everyone, they have sex, maybe sometimes anal, but it’s not so common. Most people they have virgin sex they play with the genital parts, kissing, hugging, doing these things and that’s it. This I’ve had with most my boyfriends.

Nawal admitted that she engaged in virgin sex with all of her previous boyfriends and although she does not think virginity is that valuable, she is still a virgin. This is mainly because her current long-term boyfriend fears the consequences she may face if she has intercourse with him, therefore they only engage in virgin sex.

I am still a virgin; I did not lose my virginity. I believe it is not that important. My boyfriend he is scared to do it, because he is very protective of me. If someone knows or if my family knows I am strong enough to fight for myself, nobody can do anything for me, but he feels scared for me, he doesn’t want to put me in a dangerous position.

The level in which sexual encounters is negotiated is explained by Qais. He believes everything is present in his community, although having “full intercourse” is still rare.

There are no two people, let’s be honest, there are no two people who love each other and they date for six months at least, that there won’t be anything sexual between them. Impossible, it’s natural! And it starts with holding hands, then kissing, then whatnot, its all normal, but full intercourse is less, its present, but not as much as the other stuff.

George links the increase of sex in his community with men feeling stressed. He also emphasized the existence of double standard regarding sexuality.

They are very stressed. Let me tell you something, the culture thing here prevents having any sexual relationship. So you find a lot of guys, to be honest, just wanting to get married because there is not an outing for the energy or those biological factors. And parents actually know that, but they don’t speak it explicitly, they do it implicitly.

George explains the different ways people are engaging in sex in the terms of bases, and of course as explained by the other participants, without the knowledge of parents:

Usually they don’t go that far, it’s called base four. They don’t go to base four, they usually do all the stuff instead of going in, some of them do actually go in, and some
actually don’t care. There is a lot of stuff going on and of course the parents don’t know about it.

Although George disclosed that he never had sexual intercourse, he does support sexual experimentation as long as no one is getting hurt or used, and that people are being safe and protected. He revealed the most he has tried is “base two,” which he explains is oral sex. He does not want to reach base three, anal sex, or base four until he is married; “I don’t want to go to base three or four unless I am married, not because of religious purposes, it’s because I am scared, I am paranoid. Even if I use protection.” George fears an accidental pregnancy, which he believes, “ Might ruin both futures, it’s not worth it for that night.”

Petros articulates a similar response, arguing that more people today in Amman are having sex than the generations before:

I believe it’s happening more and more these days. Ten years ago it wasn’t that easy to get sexually involved, it was not easy to get sex. The opportunities were very low and now it’s more and more and with all the media influence in fashion and everything, people are accepting it more.

Despite his beliefs, Petrous has in fact found himself renegotiating some of his original beliefs and therefore kissing a girlfriend: “I ended up compromising some of my beliefs but if you start compromising thing after thing after thing, it’s easy to get in trouble so maybe you should slow down.” According to Mahmoud, his community is changing and that everyone will start compromising the traditional beliefs:

I think that our society will be very western 100 percent. It will be normal and after 20 years everyone will have a boyfriend and a girlfriend and the family will know. Even my kids!

He mentions that like anything else, this will lead to pros and cons, but mostly negative effects because the idea of family and kinship will change in general.

In the west the subject of sex is so normal, anyone can practice sex at anytime they can. But then you’ll find a lot of families that don’t know their dad or mom. Many people run
away. Also health problems, the spread of disease, sure they use condoms with sex but in the end it’s not completely protecting.

The experiences described above illustrate that not everyone from my sample has engaged in pre-martial sex and that even their perceptions may slightly vary. The common sentiment seems to be that premarital sex is becoming more acceptable in my sample’s demographic, and that these topics will be increasingly discussed more openly throughout society. The following section will provide us with a detailed account of contemporary sentiments about virginity.

**VIRGINITY: FOREVER TABOO OR SHIFTING VIEWS?**

This universal obsession with virginity extends across races, religion, and all socioeconomic communities. Participants were transparently asked if they would agree to marry someone who engaged in sex before with a different partner in the attempts to understand whether or not these values carried on when it came time to choosing a spouse. First, I will discuss the opinions of the women who mainly find no issue in marrying a man who has had sex before. However, when asked if a man would accept to marry a woman who has engaged in premarital sex, it was perceived by the women that a man would refuse, this was a common theme that reemerged throughout the majority of the female participant interviews. Subsequently, I will contrast the female response to the responses of the male participants, in which the majority had actually denounced the need to uphold virginity standards for women. Inevitably, when discussing the issue of virginity, the role of hymenoplasty, a hymen restorative procedure, was a common topic between both the male and female participants.

**Perceptions from the Female Participants**

The majority of the sixteen female participants, both Christian and Muslim, agreed that they would in fact marry a man who has engaged in various sexual behaviors, with a few voices
of dissent. Ironically, when asked what the men would respond to such a question, all sixteen women believed that the men in Amman would refuse to marry a woman who is not a virgin. It is in this section I attempt to highlight the gendered disconnect between youth themselves. Throughout these interviews I captured gendered dynamics and contradictions between what I found and what my participants believed in regards to virginity. My sixteen female participants upheld the idea that men in Jordan would never agree to marrying a woman who had previously engaged in sex; however, on the contrary, almost all sixteen men I interviewed stated that virginity would not be a factor they would consider. The interview excerpts below highlight some of the over-arching and common attitudes recorded.

According to Luna, an emphasis on virginity still exists in Jordan mainly due to her generation’s encounters with previous generations. “The older generations is still alive and influencing us, but the children in grade one now when they become eighteen, it'll be normal in Amman, not all areas. I think Amman alone; because we are the ones moving like America.” Regardless, Luna stated that she would agree to marry a man who engaged in sex before, “everyone is like this way now,” replied the 27-year-old.

Sua’ad’s response is like that of Luna’s. “I have no business in anything that he's done before. What matters to me is that when’s he’s finally with me he does these things or not with someone.” Sua’ad considers it immoral to judge someone based on their past.

If you did it a hundred times, it doesn't matter to me. I can't judge you on something that has already happened in the past. I'm going to start judging you on the things when we start being together because 99 percent out of 100, all of the men in Jordan have done it.

Sua’ad articulated that often times Jordanian men are sexually active when they leave the country. Ultimately, Sua’ad insists that everyone has a choice to make if they know their partner has had a sexual experience. “In front of you, you have two choices, either he comes and tells
you from the beginning and you accept or refuse him.” Having honesty in a relationship is more important for Sua’ad than a man’s virginity. She then continues to say that it would be worse if he didn't tell her, they married, and then after some years the truth was revealed. She says this causes two problems in a relationship. “You're going to have two problems, this is what they are: the first problem is that he did this thing [sex] and you have a problem with it, and your second problem is that he hid something from you.” Sua’ad argues that men will not be as understanding as this if the roles were reversed. “If a girl did this thing, and if a guy knows that the girl he will be married to had this type of relationship, he will immediately refuse her.” Sua’ad says this is unfair and that the same standard should be put in place for both. “It should be wrong on both sides, not acceptable for both.”

Leila discusses the double standard in society that allows men to engage in sexual intercourse, but fails to extend that permission to women as well. Leila herself would in fact accept a man who has had sex, but presumes that most men would not be as accepting of women who have had a previous sexual experience. Leila alludes to the perplexing question of asking a man whether or not he would be accepting of someone who is not a virgin. “I don’t even know how I would discuss it with someone, 'Do you care about virginity?' Even if you do ask, you doubt your own virginity, if you ask do you care about virginity, he would definitely assume that you are not a virgin.” Leila references the hymenoplasty procedure that restores the hymen, perceiving that women who have sex, ultimately do the procedure. “A lot of girls are doing surgeries to get their virginity back,” she firmly states.

In the event she did loose her virginity, Nawal does not think she would be able to follow through with a hymenoplasty. “A lot of girls sew themselves before they get married. I can understand why they do this, but if I lost my virginity, I will not do it because I will not marry
someone who has a problem with this.” And according to Nawal, there are men in Amman who do not have an issue with virginity. She shares a story about her friend in a similar situation. “My friend she just married a guy and [she] wasn’t a virgin, he was okay with it.” However, Nawal recognizes that this is not always the case. She tells a story about a classmate’s brother whose new bride had simply made a comment on their wedding night that made him question her morality and her virginity.

My friend was in our class, and she said her brother’s wedding was Thursday and on Saturday she came and said her brother divorced! Well why? [The bride] said, ‘watch out I might not open very easy.’ She is an idiot; she just wanted to say anything.

The husband then insisted after hearing such a comment, for his new wife to go to the doctor immediately to check whether or not her hymen had been intact.

She refused and her family refused because it is offensive! ‘How [could] you say our [daughter] is not a virgin?’ A lot a girls eat shit because there won’t always be blood. There are guys who say they are open minded but there was one who married and there was no blood. He kept telling her there is no problem and that he is open-minded and when there was no blood, he sent her the next day to make sure she is a virgin.

Nawal says that not all doctors agree to these orders. “Some scold them ‘why are you doing this, shame on you,’” and some doctors do their work and it doesn’t matter to him because they consider it a guy’s right.” Like Luna, Leila, and Sua’ad, Natalie would also marry a man who has explored sexually. “It's fine,” she tells me. “It's his life, he explored. I'm actually more scared of people who haven't, especially guys.” Natalie accepts sexual exploration as a natural process, fearing that men who have not explored tend to be unfaithful. She explains,

I'm more scared of guys who are introverts and haven't done anything because I feel like they're lying to themselves. And maybe they've been waiting for this for so long and when we get married and he has it now, he's going to start having more cravings to other women. I feel like I'd rather be with a guy who has fulfilled his cravings in any kind of way and he actually wants to be steady and that's up to getting hitched, rather than a guy who's a virgin, a nice person who just wants to get married and then all of their bad things come out after.
Natalie’s believes that men in Jordan do not share her mentality and she considers this unfair.

How come you got to hook up with girls everyday, they get their drink, they do whatever the hell they want. And then they end up marrying this holy girl who's a virgin and has done nothing, they're hypocrites.

She continues to say that the Jordanian men who study abroad explore their sexuality while away and then when they return they marry the women their mothers have found them, a bride who according to Natalie is, “just a pure girl and he's done everything.” Natalie claims that this obsession with a virgin wife relates back to a man’s ego. “His ego is too big to actually imagine that his woman was with someone else. Everything in Jordan is about ego.” She says the status quo is imposed on them by society. “This is why when girls have daughters they won't let them do anything, they start scaring them with religion.” Natalie says her family is open-minded so she's not afraid to explore, however they wouldn't be okay if she had sex but they are accepting of their daughter dating and going out with men. There's no mention of religion in her family she says, they do everything logically according to her. “Here you have the tribes so it's hard to say no to your dad or your brothers, you have a reputation to obtain.”

For Fadia, notions of virginity will vary depending on where in Jordan a person lives. Fadia explained that ideas on virginity are tied to socioeconomic conditions and that wealthy families have the privilege to be open minded about virginity.

It’s different by the way. You find families were they are very open-minded. Most of the very wealthy families would be like this. But the middle class families or the poor ones, of course the poor ones, they'd be zero opportunity to open up, unless they sell their kids for sex or trafficking.

Differing notions of virginity, as Fadia mentioned, were present among my interviews, even with the female participants. However, distinguishing between socioeconomic conditions, as a measure of open-mindedness, may not be the best indicator of premarital sex. Both Samira and Lujain, 25-year-old Christian women who are a part of the upper-middle class living in Abdoun,
had slightly different opinions of virginity. “I don’t know, I might forgive him its fine,” Lujain told me when I asked if she would marry a man who had sex before. “It depends on the person. If he is really worth it and I really want to have him, and he really changed and I know that he would never do it again with someone else, then it's fine.” Lujain justifies her answer by explaining, “I believe everybody might have a slip or do something wrong or make a mistake or something…or maybe it wasn’t a mistake, maybe he used to do it, I don’t know.” Societal judgment she said is excusable if the person exhibits this behavior in the public sphere. “If they do it in public and they talk about it, I don’t like that no…I don’t even like to listen about it.”

Not all female interview participants had this same perspective of acceptance. A few interlocutors, like Samira, disclosed that they would not consider having a relationship with a man who had engaged in sexual intercourse. However, Samira recognized that she would not know either way:

I wouldn’t know, but maybe we can be truthful to each other, because for me I have never done any physical contact with any person and I expect the same from my partner. Because who am I going to kiss if I have never been in a relationship? I am not going to kiss someone from the street. Maybe physical is okay, but sexual, of course it will not be accepted by me from a partner that I want to be with because I respect myself enough, so why wouldn’t he?

The excerpts above were some highlights of the variety of opinions I recorded on the topic from my female interview participants. The common sentiment mainly expressed is that women from my sample were generally accepting of marrying men who were sexually active prior to marriage, with the exception of a few participants. Another reappearing trope in the female interviews was that men were closed off to the idea of marrying a woman who had lost her virginity. The attitudes from the male interview participants however differed, and pose the question of clashing perceptions.
Perceptions from the Male Participants

Despite the dominant notion in society that men in Amman would only marry a virgin, almost all sixteen of my male interview participants agreed that they would either marry someone who has had sex before, or that they would agree if it occurred under certain conditions. In hearing these testimonies and perceptions, I did at times wonder the validity of their statements. Where men seeking to impress me with seemingly more “progressive” responses? However, as illustrated below, many of these men provided detailed reasons to support their answers, leading me to believe that their responses were in fact genuine. The interviews below demonstrate what I argue are new attitudes from youth in Amman that may not have been openly present before, and undeniably missing from the available scholarship on the subject.

27-year-old Fayez holds strong views on the double standards that exist in society regarding sexual experiences. Admittedly not a virgin, Fayez states he would accept the idea of marrying a woman who is not a virgin.

From what I hear, and I hear it a lot, yes, a lot of girls are engaging in sex. Have I seen it? No. Muslim and Christian, I know friends who have told me, they are reliable sources. It’s the one thing that bothers me about this country, the double standards. Personally, I am not a virgin, so I am in no right to demand a girl who is a virgin.

Like Fayez, George also agreed that he would marry a woman who engaged in sex prior to marriage. “Yes of course” he replied when asked the question. “I am not judging her for that reason, why would I judge her for that reason? I am not choosing her for her virginity.” However, Fayez makes a clear distinction between overly active sexual experiences. He doesn’t want someone who goes around and has sex with many partners, saying a few people is acceptable. “If you’re a slut, and I use slut for both males and females, I don’t know, it’s not my cup of tea. I would not consider myself as that, maybe I was back in the day.” He also alludes to the double standard in society as Leila did, saying that he personally knows some men like that,
“I do find the double standard, that guy who slept with five to six girls but then wants a virgin, ‘I'd never be with a girl who's been with someone.’ It's super annoying and it is reality here.”

As a self-proclaimed liberal, Hythem used this interview as an opportunity to highlight the views of the exceptional men in Jordan that share his mentality. First he explained the societal association with virginity and honor. “Virginity here is like something physical, if it's gone, that's it you had sex, it's against honor.” Wanting to understand the perspective of these men, Hythem explained why this matters to these men.

If a women loses her virginity, she is going to bleed, and when she gets married and has sex and she didn’t bleed, her husband would think she had sex before, and maybe he will divorce her or at the same time kill her.

Hythem explains to me why there is such a burden on women to stay virgins, he makes it quite clear however, that he is against this. "I think now, guys with mentality like me, they don’t care." He believes that there are quite a few progressive thinking men and women like him. "Some girls don’t care and they have sex, and they’re Arabs." Hythem continues to say that these women cannot be categorized based on their socioeconomic conditions. Class, “does not matter,” Hythem explains. “I think, maybe it's because now women they don’t care about getting married, so they don’t care." He shares two personal stories about friends who had undergone hymenoplasty and someone who had an abortion.

My friend did it, she had sex with someone and she lost her virginity. Then she went to a doctor and he just closed it again. And another friend she had sex and she got pregnant; they were both my friends and they were both stupid they didn’t use protection, and she got pregnant and she went to a doctor in Zarqa, it was like a bad area, and she paid maybe 800 JDs and she did an abortion.

Hythem asserts that men are unable to distinguish between women who have had the operation and those who are still virgins. “He is not going to know.” Hythem does not agree with men who
have the liberty to explore sexually while their female counterparts do not, and then when it is time for marriage, they request a virgin bride.

I know some guys like this, my friend actually. He was always sleeping with girls, going out and when he got married he just searched for traditional and he went to his mom, then her place, and he picked a girl a bit religious and he got married.

Hythem undermines the character of men like this, “They are liars, hypocrites, everything, but they get away with it.” Ultimately, Hythem has no problem with marrying a woman who has engaged in premarital sex. “Of course, I don’t care. I don’t ask; we are equal. She can have sex, I can have sex.” He then continues to say that the emphasis on virginity in society is not religious based, but rather traditions. “I think it is more traditions than it is religious, because if it was religion okay, she had sex but repented, so she can get married again,” under the premise that everyone is forgiven by God, and therefore the community should forgive as well.

Although the narrative around virginity is changing according to Zaid, he clarifies that there are still people who refuse the idea, relating it to honor. “Reputation here is very essential” Zaid explains, nonetheless he personally trusts this will change in the next 20 years. “Virginity won't be important. We're developing late,” he said, “Even these circumstances are going to switch on us. We're copying America later so this will change; no one will talk about reputation.” Diminishing societal pressures in this regard will benefit the individual according to Zaid. “It’s good for the person mentally. Less stress, less pressure.” Ultimately, if Zaid falls in love with a woman who is not a virgin, he would marry her. “There's no one perfect in my mind,” he replies.

Khalil’s thoughts on reputation in society mimic the literature. “Reputation is very important here; but they're known,” Khalil says referring to the women around town that are willing to engage in sex.
The girl who has sex, all the guys know her and go to her. They call her the ‘association’ because everyone can go and do everything with her and at university they know them, the three or four who are like this.

Despite this damage to reputation, Khalil explained that these women ultimately end up marrying. “She becomes really good and then she finds an open-minded guy who marries her.” Khalil does say that he is willing to marry someone who has had sex before. “I considered it a mistake. There's a difference in the stories, if someone lied to her it’s fine, let it pass. If someone liked her and then lied to her, let it pass.” By let it pass, Khalil means it is something men ultimately ignore and simply accept. “It’s not easy for a girl to marry if she's not a virgin because that's the mentality here. She might possibly find someone in our society. We have open-minded guys lately, but it's not easy.” He explained apologetically. He said after a few months, if a couple does not at least kiss “it won't feel like you're dating.” Khalil presumes that the Muslims in Jordan have sex more than the Christians, “the Christian girl doesn't do it a lot, but the Muslim girl does.”

Petrous’s reply was also similar to the male participants above. “I'm not against it no.” In fact, he says one of the girls he dated was not a virgin, even though he is. “One of them actually had a sexual experience and I was willing to go for her.” Petrous recognizes the emotional abuse the stems from a sexual experience linked with an unfulfilled promise of marriage and the devastating effects that has on women.

The problem with sexual experience is that it can really influence you emotionally and psychologically and if you don't get the right psychological treatment for it, it won’t be good, especially the way it happens here, people aren't really open to this idea. So if something happens here the damage they're exposed to is a bit higher knowing how they're raised and how they think. If a girl or a guy entered into something and saw the damage that happened and dealt with it and they recovered, then when they go into a serious relationship they don't bring that excess baggage. I believe some sexual experience you can get over it and enter into a healthy marriage and so on... like who said that's the only thing that gets damaged? A lot of times its self-esteem.
The obsession with virginity according to Petrous is directly linked with a misunderstanding of marriage. For him, marriage should be about complementing each other, rather than finding the piece that completes you.

Oh she's had sex before, she shouldn’t be an option? That's what happens when you have a bad understanding of marriage. Reject her because she's had sex before? To me, then marriage is just for sex. If the whole point is something sexual, of course then the sexual part will be an issue, but if I believe it's much more than that and the sexual part was dealt with if there's damage psychologically, some people have done it they quickly recover, it's just the physical thing something was changed, I believe I'd be fine with it knowing that spending my life with this person would be a good thing for me and her. If that history led to the person I'm meeting today, I have to accept her with the history.

Petrous is not bothered by the fact a woman had sex before marrying her, instead he is more concerned with her emotional state and hoping she was able to recover from any emotional or mental damaged caused in a previous sexual relation, like self-esteem issues. Asking a potential spouse if they ever experienced emotional distress holds precedence over asking whether or not they are virgins.

Damage does happen like low self-esteem, people think of suicide. Why do I ask a girl if she's a virgin but I never asked her ‘have you thought of committing suicide before?’ general questions. Committing suicide, or leaving her home, or killing her mom, these are serious issues. These are turbulent emotionally and psychologically. In life people get depressed and think of ending their lives and some are seriously suicidal. Why do I make a big issue about her not being a virgin, but I'm fine with her that she thought of suicide for one whole year in her life and I'm not sure if she's recovered from it. But since it's a sexual community, we always focus on the sexual part. We make being a virgin an issue. So personally I would consider her, assuming she's maturing, she’s growing, she'd help me mature, and I'd help her mature and so on.

Contrary to the male participants above who articulated no issue with marrying a woman who engaged in sex before, some of male participants said they would agree to marry a person who had sex only under certain conditions, and that ultimately it was dependent on a case-by-case scenario. Indifferent and confused on what he might actually do, 24-year-old Mahmoud openly pondered the idea out loud during our interview.
How can I hold her responsible or be upset at her for something that happened in the past? I can’t. Maybe yes, maybe no. I really don’t know because maybe at the time, I might really love her and say yes and just cover my ears as if I didn’t hear anything and just say okay, or maybe no.

Omar, who never had sex before, also agrees with Mahmoud. He said he would consider marrying a girl who has had sex before if she was young and if “it was a mistake.” He justifies his response by saying, “I shouldn’t punish you know. For me if a guy loves a girl, he would never do something like that, unless they get married. If I love a girl, I would never do something to her before marriage.” His father also encouraged these views, “My father said ‘don’t have sex.’ He told me what it is and why we shouldn’t do it now and you will feel it is a great thing when you get married.” Omar also mentioned in his interview that sometimes people make mistakes and have sex, and that it is excusable for him. “If I really like her and love her, I would say it is okay.” Omar explains why he is willing to marry a woman who has experience in sexual intercourse. “Everyone makes mistakes.” He then contemplates the idea if it was not a mistake and his thoughts on that. “Sometimes she just does it for fun. It's a difficult question, I don’t know, if my brain will decide or my heart will decide. My brain will say no, my heart will say yes.” He also mentions his attitude on the hymen restoration surgery, which he is completely against arguing for honesty instead. “She lied to her future husband.” Instead he calls for honesty regarding previous sexual experiences. “If you make a mistake, better to be honest about it, face it.”

Qais’s opinion on the manner is quite unique and his rationale is completely different than the other fifteen male participants. He discussed first with me the community and their attitudes on premarital sex. “There are people here in our society who think that if a girl had full intercourse with a guy, she is a bitch or something; I don’t think that.” He talks about the taboo of virginity on the wedding night.
We believe that virginity is two dots of blood, but me for example, if I am going to date someone and get married to her and intercourse happened and no blood came out, I am not going to think that she is not [a virgin]. I will never even think about taking her to a place for someone to examine her to check that she is a virgin.

The 33-year-old medical student explained to me though that he plans on waiting until he is married to have sex mainly due to medical fears.

I am against full sex before marriage because as I told you there could be a pregnancy and [medical] things happen. We are not a society that accepts these things. We have to face that we are living in the Middle East; we are living in a country that has customs and traditions.

Qais juxtaposes this view to individuals living in Europe. He argues that people in the ‘West’ often times pretend to be progressive, but in actuality they are also against premarital sex. “Over there, a lot of people who are faking the change, deep inside they are against homosexuality, they are against sex before marriage, but they fake it because they have to be modern and up-to-date.”

Contrary to the other male participants who articulated that they would marry a woman who has had sex before, Qais’s opinion and reasoning are different. Although he believes he will be “flexible” on the matter, he questions the mental strengthen of a woman who engages in sex before marriage, arguing she is “hurting herself” emotionally. Qais explained that it’s not necessarily the fact that she had sex that bothers him, rather he wonders if she will be able to make right choices when encountering other tempting situations in the future. For Qais, premarital sex equates to a flawed and weak character.

The issue is not if she had sex before marriage, maybe a little it bothers me from the sexual thing, but it bothers me from something else more. If you break something like this, it means you're weak. I don’t want to be with a weak girl, so maybe it’s not sex with another guy, but maybe its something else out in front of her she becomes weak again and does it. I want a strong girl from the start. I want a girl who has been tough since she was little, and this matters to me a lot that her character is strong. I go back to say if she became weak to something like this, this is something you can’t control. I think it will be no, but it depends on the girl. I don’t know, I know that I am flexible, but it depends. What would really bother me with the subject is that what if another tough life circumstance happened to her again? Will she become weak again? I don’t want her to be
weak. We never know what life will give us, maybe circumstances tougher than this. For example, we have no money she is going to go steal? Or if she is hungry, will she go steal food from people? This is natural also.

Qais associates weakness and lack of self-control with giving into such pleasures. Mental and emotional strength are vital traits he looks for in a future wife. The responses from the male participants demonstrate that they are generally accepting of the idea of marrying a woman who does not have an intact hymen. Perhaps it is their lived experiences and lifestyle that have shaped these attitudes, or more broadly, their exposure to other ideologies and cultures. Many of the men in my sample have traveled outside of Jordan and have had sexual experiences as well.

Ultimately, the most relevant take away from the male testimonies is that they chose to represent themselves through a particular lens, one defined by a progressive and open-minded lifestyle, whether or not that is the case.

**PORNOGRAPHY AS EDUCATION**

As in many societies around the world, porn consumption has increased with the advancement of communication technologies and the Internet, becoming accessible to even the youngest of teenagers and children. The United States, for example, is one country facing this dilemma. In a recently conducted study published by the *New York Times*, journalist Maggie Jones uncovers the secret sex lives of teenagers in America and the ways in which pornography, through its easy access, has shaped ideas on “pleasure, power, and intimacy” in the minds of American youth. The lack of knowledge on the topic she argues is closely tied to the lack of funding available for research geared towards understanding the correlation between porn consumption and sexual attitudes and behaviors of sexually active teens, or in other terms, are

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youth today replicating what they watch in pornographic scenes?\textsuperscript{179} Although it is difficult to prove whether there is a cause and effect, many surveys and studies indicate that a correlation does exist.\textsuperscript{180} According to Jones, smartphones have played a major role in access to pornography. “Easy-to-access online porn fills the vacuum, making porn the de facto sex educator for American youth,” especially since “abstinence based” sex education ranks supreme in the U.S.\textsuperscript{181} Jones argues that with porn consumption on the rise, understanding how to critically teach approaching porn is a vital first step at tackling the issue at hand, especially during a newly dawning era where teachers are “unequipped” to talk about porn or being accused of “promoting porn.” Ultimately without a proper base of sex education throughout the U.S and information on “porn literacy,” being critical of porn consumption becomes quite difficult especially for those who are only exposed to such material without any previous knowledge or physical contact.\textsuperscript{182}

Just like the United States, Jordan is experiencing an increase in porn consumption of young adults and teenagers, a common perception present in the data I collected. The proliferation of porn is transnational, and not simply a problem exclusive to the Arab world or even the United States for that matter. I draw on experiences from my own participants whom have discussed their experiences with porn and its role in their community. Many of my participants revealed that they were first exposed to porn by friends, older brothers, and at school, some as young as the 8\textsuperscript{th} grade.

At seventeen, Khalil and his friends would share and watch low quality pornography on a floppy disk and the male students at school would pass it around. “They would send pictures and they would send it to each other and they look at it at home and of course the mom and dad

\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., p. 5-6.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid., p. 6.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., p. 8.
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., p. 17.
know, they hear sounds, but they pretend they don't know because you're a teenager.” According to Khalil, teenage boys normally talk about sex, “Teenagers, they know the porn stars,” but asserts that after their teenage years, men stop talking about it openly, “They don't talk about it too much because by this age you should have already had someone in your life and you've been doing sex normally.” In his estimation, Khalil believes that many men in Amman watch porn; he admitted to occasionally watching comedy versions of porn himself but deletes them because he does not like to always watch; “For the guys 100 percent watch porn, if you take my mobile… usually I delete them because I don't like this.”

Omar also openly admitted to watching porn since high school with peers, and says that a lot of people in Amman watch it and discuss it directly,

When we were in school, like 9th grade, I was strict, I didn’t want to see it...guys are now saying ‘oh there is a porn star she is beautiful go watch this movie, watch this, watch that, watch her she’s pretty.’ Even girls were with us, they open it at school, in the computer lab.”

Wondering if they were ever nervous a teacher would catch them, the 26-year-old replied, “We remove the history.” Ghaleb also believes porn consumption is quite high and that everyone in the community knows it’s a high amount, around 99 percent of men in Amman watch porn, according to his perspective. He also stated that guy friends typically discuss what they watch with their friends. Despite this, Ghaleb at his age now, does understand that porn is not real. “It’s fake, it gives false perception of everything that might happen.” He also said that women he knows watch porn, “They told me, or their friends told me.”

Fayez, like Ghaleb and Khalil, also revealed that men he knows talk about porn amongst other men, and even watch it at work. “Our department is 80 percent male. All the guys I know personally, in my opinion. I think we are looking at 90 percent plus. Out of ten guys maybe nine watch porn.” To justify these numbers, Fayez explained:
It is thanks to sexual frustration, have you ever wondered why people here are always on edge? Lack of sex is a big problem; it's part of being conservative. Girls are not really expressing themselves so they may say sex is a taboo, even after marriage, some people see it as a reproduction activity and not as something that gives you pleasure, and that's why a lot of people are on edge honking horns in the morning, because you haven’t had it. That's my theory.

“100 percent,” Qais replied at the question posed regarding the percent of men who watch porn in Jordan. But for Qais, he actually feels bad for the people in the porn movies. “In my opinion on porn, I feel sorry for them. For both men and women, because for them sex is work and pleasure. I think they will lose pleasure from sex with time honestly.” Qais recognizes the ramifications of porn on women in the community. As a fresh medical school graduate, Qais shares a story about a patient he watched who, “Went under the knife” to have her vagina tightened.

She has three kids and her husband stopped having the same pleasure from before, so he is cheating on her from women to women and he watches porn. So she had to do this to satisfy him; I was so sorry for her. What the fuck, you made your wife go under anesthesia and you made her feel bad. Why didn't you just tell her ‘recently I am not having good pleasure from sex with you, let's do something?’ You could say something, but to cheat on her and make her hate herself and that she is wrong and that she is less and whatnot? This happened to her because she birthed kids for you!

Hythem believes that porn consumption in Jordan is, “One of the highest numbers." When I asked him to articulate the exact number he replied, "I'm not sure, I once read it actually, the percentage of guys doing it, maybe all of them," he responded with laughter. Hythem believes porn is not a smart way to learn about sex and that he does not watch it that much anymore. "No porn is stupid, they don't teach anything, and it’s all fake." Hythem also recognizes the dangers of porn addiction, “It’s addicting, it affects your brain, and I think some people are addicted to it. Some people don't have sex with their wives because they enjoy porn more. I hear it a lot.” He said that some men he knows watch it daily while others find the liberty
to watch it during work as revealed by Fayez, "Some watch porn in the company during working hours," he is against this.

“Wow, so many, 90 out of 100, 90 percent in Jordan!” Mahmoud revealed about men in Jordan watch porn. Intriguingly, Mahmoud believes that quite a few women in Jordan watch porn too, saying the percentage is around 30-50 percent, in his viewpoint. “For a guy to stop thinking about sex and so that he won’t do something haram, he watches porn in order to do a hand job, or something like this. He becomes relaxed.” According to Mahmoud, the last time he watched porn was about two years ago.

Like the other participants, George also believes that the percentage of porn-watchers in Jordan is rather high. “Of course it is, everyone does it, even very religious people, 99 percent probably.” Although George used to watch porn, he has now stopped, “I don’t think its healthy, it’s a personal opinion. Mentally addicting, I felt like sometimes it’s not a good outlet. You usually end up wanting more, plus you have very high expectations because it’s fake.” He continues to say that a few of his males friends did not have such positive first sexual encounters because they had different standards set in their mind by the porn they were consuming. “Most of my friends watch porn and their first sexual experienced sucked so much because they had very high expectations and the girl ended up being hurt because she felt like they were mean, ‘what is this, it didn’t please me.’”

Originally, Petrous believed that the level of porn consumption was not that high in his community, but after taking a look around him he thought, “Oh, I missed that big time,” and this is especially the case for porn consumption in Jordan. “I think a really high percentage watches porn. I'm sure if you ask people they’ll give you a percentage of 90 or 95 percent.” Petrous also had thoughts about women watching porn in Amman.
I do think they get some exposure because no one expresses their sexual needs publicly. Maybe guys are more open about it. Girls can be as sexual as guys and they have their expression and desires; but because it's not as publicized as guys, it’s easy to say ‘oh it's guys it's all they think about’ but nobody says that to all the girls and some girls that's all they think about.

Petrous then revealed that he too used to watch porn, and that he was not proud of it. “Dealing with sexual desires and sexuality is challenging and since it's easy to access, you're being tempted. You have phones it's easy.” He then adds, “No one is perfect, but I am against it, I haven't done it for a good time now.” Petrous says that some guys feel guilty about it too, claiming that, “Oh, I opened it by accident.”

Amongst my sample – young people of a particular socioeconomic class and a lifestyle, have attitudes regarding premarital sex and virginity that do not mimic previous generations. The gender disconnect on virginity speaks to the ways in which ideas or opinions about sexuality, reproductive health, and virginity, cannot be expressed openly. Thus, even among a sample that generally depicts themselves as progressive, dialogue that extends beyond heteronormative boundaries in Amman is still not present in their society. In other words, young men and young women from my sample have not yet been able to discuss issues of sexuality and sexual behavior together, leaving a gap and ambiguity about what to expect from each other. The consumption of porn is perhaps used as a method to fill this void in a co-gendered conversation on sexuality.

**CONCLUSION**

This chapter described the attitudes on premarital sex and virginity and revealed some real-life accounts of experiences with sexuality. The final section juxtaposed the on-going porn problem in the United States and Jordan, under the premise that the porn problem cannot be linked to race, region, or religion. The wide array of perceptions and attitudes on sex, sexuality,
and sexual behavior in Amman illustrates that generalizing is ineffective when it comes to this topic in Jordan. Rather, capturing lived experiences and stories is a vital aspect of understating how neoliberal urbanism and access to new information and communication technologies, has opened the door for a unique way to express sexuality, that intrinsically differs from the previous generations.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

You need a lot of time to change the whole generation. You should start with education I believe and start with a new generation, because I lost hope with the other generations. If you want to change the community, start from the roots.

-Hythem, Summer 2017 on the future of Amman, Jordan.

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The main objective of this ethnographic research has been to provide perspectives from youth on current dating trends and habits in west Amman, perceptions and behaviors that greatly differ from previous generations, and to trace the material and social realities that explain these trends. The available literature on heterosexual relationships in Amman is primarily limited to the study of delayed marriages and waithood, marriage and divorce laws in the Middle East and previous societal notions and attitudes on virginity. This research however, has illustrated the societal transformations influenced by rapid urbanization and the adoption of neoliberal economic policies generated imbalanced development throughout Amman, dividing east and west beyond physical boarders; instead boarders also defined lifestyle and attitudes. These economic and social changes provided some the opportunity to reject previously established traditions on marriage and kinship bonds. Drawing on the historic study conducted by Abdallah and the ethnographic work of Adely, this thesis has uncovered patterns of dating among a sample
of Jordanian youth residing and working in west Amman, documenting the ways they negotiate the intersections of society’s definition of moral behavior and intimate desire. Though everyone may not have been wealthy, they seem to share a set of perceptions that mark a chosen lifestyle and that sets them apart from the east. In doing so, three specific phenomena were explored within the limitations of my sample and study: 1) youth’s changing perceptions towards traditional marriage structures amid economic and educational transitions in society; 2) neoliberal urbanism and social media’s impacts on contemporary dating in the public sphere; 3) and finally, diversification of youth’s attitudes toward virginity and premarital sexual behaviors.

In order to demonstrate these changes, the first chapter began with a historic approach that harnessed the theories behind kinship bonds during the 20th century in order to define traditional marriage structures. This chapter examined kinship obligations and solidarities in society that maintained familial socioeconomic conditions. However, the changing political economy, female labor participation, and access to education in Jordan, altered kinship bonds and the traditional marriage structures they helped sustain. The structural adjustment era shifted these kinship bonds and the need for families to organize marriages. My framework builds upon Ryan Brown et al. and Dhillon and Yousef who define the terms delayed marriage and waithood, and provide a backdrop from which contemporary dating can be assessed. By juxtaposing traditional marriage structures of the twentieth century to the marriage structures of today, this thesis opens the door for enquiry on current dating habits. Ultimately, my research has demonstrated that youth today aspire to find their own future spouses and that they generally have a conflicting attitude towards traditional marriage. In this first chapter, I established three links: the first connecting kinship bonds and traditional marriage, the second linking economic changes with delayed marriages, and the third relating delayed marriages to present day attitudes
and opinions on traditional marriage, an idea previously unexplored in the literature, yet discovered through my fieldwork.

Despite a clear connection between delayed marriages and demographic and economic changes, the existing literature has not sufficiently explored the effects of urbanization on Amman’s society, particularly regarding dating and space. Thus, in chapter two, I explore this connection using similar frameworks provided by Deeb and Harb and Francis Hasso, and Shereen el Feki, underscoring yet another link between urbanization theory and dating trends. The theoretical framework of neoliberalism urbanism, or market driven urbanization provoked by private economic investments of western franchises and Gulf investments, an idea further developed by Abu-Hamdi, helped distinguish and define the divisions between east and west Amman. The parts of the city assigned an oriental identity may very well be home to very different attitudes and practices than my participants, when it comes to these questions. As the ever-expanding western neighborhoods of the capital progressively urbanize through multinational pubs, cafes, and restaurants, youth are given the space to access the public sphere, where dating has emerged. My research has found that, cars, pubs, and bars have become popular “hotspots” for youth to explore their sexualities and develop heterosexual relationships. Their coupling patterns not only have emerged in these physical spaces, my research helps establish the ways in which dating trends have gone beyond physical space, occupying an emerging cyberspace, as new information and communication technologies and social media come to define the lives of youth’s coupling relationships today, such as Tinder and Facebook. The data explored in chapter two also revealed where and how youth meet and their attitudes on interreligious dating.
Interweaving virginity with honor and reputation is a common theme often reproduced in the literature regarding sexuality in the Middle East as seen in the works of scholars such as Tucker, Dialmy and Uhlmann, Fortier and Maffi, Górecka, and Droeb. However, my research has established that these previous notions may not be as widely internalized in society among youth today as they were in the past. As previously asserted, the main argument of chapter three was not to promote, deny, suppress, or even celebrate sexual freedom, rather, the theme was to highlight the diverse perspectives on and practices of sexual behavior and current attitudes about virginity. Contrary to stereotypes, this chapter illustrated that a wide variety of sexual habits and behaviors exist based on the lived experiences captured in my dataset. The lived experiences of my interlocutors demonstrate that youth today not only experiment with premarital sex, negotiating and compromising intimate desires, many in the middle class have become quite accepting of others who have experimented through premarital sex as well. Consumption of pornography, perceived by locals as a popular outlet for sexual desire in Jordan, shows that porn transcends across the global, emerging in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds worldwide.

Nonetheless, generalizing is unreasonable since voices of dissent were also recorded, proving yet again that a wide variety of lived experiences define dating and sexuality in Amman, with no one categorization reigning supreme. The telling stories regarding hook-up culture and attitudes on virginity offer a new backdrop to assess heterosexual relationships and experiences in Amman. Additionally, youth express concern about the proliferation of pornography in the absence of other sources of information and recognize its harmful and addictive tendency.
FURTHER RESEARCH AND IMPLICATIONS

Through understanding societal changes in dating, marriage and sexuality, amidst the backdrop of neoliberal urban change and access to new information and communication technologies, my thesis provides a framework for a dialogue on educational reform in Jordan. The majority of my interlocutors expressed the urgent need to incorporate standard sexual education courses in schools throughout Jordan. This sentiment is best expressed by my interview with Qais who urges schools to adopt an educational approach to discuss sexuality and the changes in their community.

You bring in a professional; there are sexual therapists and sexual education teachers that come and understand this. The family, their focus when they talk to kids about sex is to push them away from sex. I hope it'll be in schools, it's hard to talk to your kids about sex, why shouldn’t there be a sexual education teacher who understands the subject from an educational perspective; to teach them the stuff that is correct and the diseases that spread, to teach them on the male body, the female body, to teach them all this? This has to happen; there must be a teacher who specializes in this thing.

Since the findings established by my sample highlight the changes to kinship bonds, traditional marriage structures, attitudes on love, dating, virginity, and greater access to social media and pornography, a need to adjust the education curriculum to reflect and reconcile with these societal changes is not a matter of if, but rather when. Another area for further study might include a plan to introduce classes on sexual education, reproductive health, gender, and simply using the Internet and social media in a safe manner. As Qais, Hythem, and the other participants have affirmed, the generation of youth in my sample is living in a time substantially different than the generations before. More attention should be given to the ramifications of increased sexual activity and dating that may arise if structural education changes fail to reflect the current situation on ground.
ZOOMING OUT

The stories I shared allow us to understand the fluidity in experiences and exposure of my sample. The broader themes of this thesis take pre-existing theories of Amman’s society, and incorporate them in conversation with contemporary data. Departing from the traditional approach, which examines these main themes in the context of law, or on a spectrum in comparison to the west, this research deliberately highlighted the voices of youth from within. Sharing diverse lived experiences and attitudes and the ways in which youth today negotiate between accepted social behavior and intimate desires, on their own terms. I cannot prove nor categorize the lived experiences of youth in one classification, however I suggest that it is the combination of increased access to higher education, labor participation, unemployment, the Internet, social media, and an era of neoliberal urbanism, that may have altered traditional marriage structures and the kinship bonds. These factors have contributed to the 21st century attitudes regarding dating, marriage, and sexual behavior among youth as captured in my sample. The ultimate sentiment that people I interviewed were expressing is that they are searching for ways to gain information on such topics, and for ways to formalize their self and individuality within changing economic, social, urban, and kin structures.
## APPENDIX

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<th>Category</th>
<th>Questions</th>
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<td><strong>II. Perspectives on dating, marriage, and sexuality habits and trends in Amman</strong></td>
<td>1. How do youth today meet others? 2. Would you use the term “dating” and is “dating” normal? 3. What are your thoughts on heterosexual friendships/relationships? 4. In your estimation, what is the average age to marry for a man, and then for a woman? 5. Describe to me some factors couples consider before deciding to marry? 6. In your opinion do dating relationships develop into an actual marriage? 7. Currently in Amman do you think couples that date are involved sexually? How common is this? 8. Is there a heavy emphasis on virginity for women? Why? What about for men? Is this changing? Should this change? Is this fair? 9. Where do couples meet? Public or private, and do they go out alone or with a group of friends? 10. Do people use social media to meet others?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>III. Individual personal experiences with dating, marriage, and sexuality</strong></td>
<td>1. Are you currently in a relationship or a’laqa with a guy/girl? Have you been in the past? 2. Tell me about the relationships you’ve had/are in: like where you met, how long you stayed together, did family know about the relationship, how often do you see each other and where? 3. What do you consider to be a “traditional marriage”? What are your thoughts on “traditional marriages”? Would you ever consider meeting anyone in that similar manner? 4. Would you start a relationship with someone you work with? 5. Would you marry someone that has had a sexual relationship outside of marriage before you met them?</td>
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BIBLIOGRAPHY


