Measuring Qatari Women's Progress through Reactions to Online Behavior

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Abstract

The close kinship structure of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries of Oman, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) means that appeasing one's family often supersedes personal aspirations. The family occupies a central space in the life of the individual, one that mimics the state's involvement in the everyday lives of its citizens. Within such a context we need a new framework to understand how women's private choices have sociopolitical implications. Qatari women are ensconced within the political and economic stability of the Arabian Gulf. The Western feminist tropes of activism and advocacy, as have been studied in Egypt and other Arab countries affected by the Arab uprisings of 2011, cannot characterize Qatari women's behavior on social media. Yet the degree to which women present themselves online, using their real names, is a form of agency important to their context. Qatari women also use social media in order to educate themselves about the personalities and activities of potential spouses. Similarly, male Qataris consider certain behaviors as disqualifiers for potential brides. We discuss these trends within the larger context of Qatari society and the dichotomy between modernization and traditional culture in the Arabian context. This article arose out of a larger study about contemporary marriage practices and attitudes toward partner selection in Qatar today. The ways in which both males and females analyze the social media usage of potential partners is an interesting ancillary discussion against the backdrop of larger trends in Qatari society.

Keywords: gender, social media, Arabian Gulf

Introduction

Much of the recent scholarship about Arab women's online identities focuses on their experiences of the uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Syria. In many cases, women used social media to participate in their respective revolutions (Newsom & Lengel, 2012; Stephan, 2013; Guta & Karolak, 2015). Western media lauded them for being transgressive, fighting for political rights, and agitating against entrenched systems. Indeed, the women who joined protests in person and online are to be commended for standing up to dictatorial regimes— many of them at the cost of their personal safety—and subjecting themselves to harassment. Their actions in tweeting, posting, and marching are in line with the rhetoric of Western feminism, which was created in a similar social and political context of public agitation for women's rights. Social media usage during moments of political upheaval may be a starting point for discussions about the empowerment of Egyptian or Libyan women. But this is not a strategy that can be employed wholesale to women of all Middle Eastern countries. Unlike Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, or Syria, the countries of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates have remained unaffected by the social upheaval characterized by the so-called Arab Spring. The placid relationship between the welfare states of rentier monarchies and their comfortable citizens has made revolt unnecessary in the majority of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (GCC). With the notable exception of Bahrain, where ongoing conflict simmers between a ruling Sunni minority and a populist Shia majority, most of the GCC remains unaltered by the regional calls for change.

The political stability and economic prosperity of the GCC countries make it impossible to read female agency in a similar fashion to that of their contemporaries in Egypt or other neighbors. *Khaleeji*, the Arabian Gulf states, concurrently advocate for the maintenance of culture and tradition alongside the benefits of education and technology in diversifying their economy. The advent of petrodollars in the 1970s has funded the development of a range of attendant features of industrialized societies, including advances in tertiary education as well as increased spending power for citizens, but has left the social status quo intact. Allen Fromherz (2012) suggests this might be due to the fact that Qatar and other oil-rich emirates embraced economic development without an accompanying social change.

If we try to examine the women of the GCC alongside their counterparts in the greater Middle East, there is a marked difference in the stability and affluence of their governments, particularly in light of the recent so-called Arab Spring. Until the 1930s, progress for women across the Gulf was relatively comparable. For example, the establishment of girls' schools lagged well behind those of boys across the GCC (Alessa, 2010, p. 232). The initial focus in Gulf studies centered on Kuwait and Saudi Arabia as the first two states to develop their petrodollar economies and consequently their infrastructure. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1996 also raised the profile of the nation worldwide. As discovery of petroleum occurred in other GCC countries, including Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, a stair step of development ignited advancements across the peninsula in different stages. Contemporary life in the GCC—despite its relatively small size—cannot be treated as a monolith.

For example, a natural comparison might be between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, two of the geographically closest GCC countries. Qatari and Saudi societies also share some social similarities based on a shared conservative Sunni interpretation of Islam. Research on Saudi women and the consequences of cultural and traditional infringement on personal agency is well established. Caryle Murphy (2013) describes how young Saudis enjoy conversations and

friendships with opposite-sex friends, but if they were to see each other in public they would keep walking because of the strict codes against mixed-gender friendships with non-relatives. Such is also the case among Qataris, where non-related men and women do not socialize in public.

But when considering how aspiring female drivers in Saudi Arabia have protested, broken the law, and been jailed in their campaign to gain the right to drive, we see no such social upheaval in Qatar. In 2003, for example, 25 women drove in Saudi Arabia, posting videos on YouTube and garnering further public and international support. Female civil disobedience in Saudi Arabia is an important movement toward Arab women gaining their civil liberties, and constitutes a growing area for current and ongoing research. In 2011, more than 60 women joined together to protest the driving ban by driving themselves in their cities, and the then king responded by promising women the right to vote. Qatari women have had the legal right to drive since 1997; however, their family's opinions regarding the appropriateness of women driving unchaperoned (this can include input from fathers, brothers, or husbands) influences their decision about whether or not to make use of this right.

How then can we measure Qatari women's social progress if not by overt demonstrations and use of social media as grassroots publicity? We raise this question as Gulf Studies moves forward as a field from an initial focus on Kuwait, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia into more specialized studies to understand the contexts of each emirate as well as the differences between them as the means of creating more nuanced arguments about modernity and identity. In this article, we contribute to the growing body of work about Qatari women. Keeping in mind this is a highly niche area of focus, when possible and relevant, we will offer comparison to their counterparts vis-à-vis the other GCC countries.

This article arose out of a larger original project in which we explored whether the rise in popularity of Western-style tertiary education among Qatari men and women affected the traditional marriage process. The initial multifaceted research agenda included an online survey, focus groups, individual interviews, and the collection of archival materials, including marriage contracts. This four-prong approach allowed us to create a cross-sectional understanding by which to assess the practices, attitudes, knowledge, and beliefs of the Qatari population in relation to attitudes about the ideal bride or groom. In our interviews with both men and women, there emerged a repeated theme of how traditional reputational monitoring—asking others about a prospective bride or groom's reputation—was translating into monitoring the online behavior of one's potential partner. For Qatari men, a woman's online persona is an extension of her real life; the same rules apply. For Qatari women, however, who are not allowed to socialize with non-*mahram*, or men from her immediately family, a potential spouse's online persona is a window into his identity that she may not otherwise access during the engagement process.

This article will situate Qatari women's use of social media by first providing the social context within which female citizens' actions are judged. In what ways can we measure *khaleeji* women's presence in the digital world if they are not responding to specific social or political causes? To what extent are other forms of personal agency exercised online in their everyday uses of social media? How and why do women of the GCC use social media if they are not engaged in civil unrest? We answer these questions by drawing from several examples of public discourse as case studies in which thousands of citizens and residents debated on Facebook and Twitter what constitutes appropriate Qatari women's behavior. These incidents, in which a few Qatari women are singled out for public shaming, or defended for exercising

their autonomy, exemplify the ways in which personal, everyday choices reveal the engendered social structure of one's society (Hanisch, 1969).

Secondly, in light of the public, ongoing conversation about appropriate Qatari women's behavior, we discuss how public behavior informs Qatari men and women' selection of marriage partners in our mixed methods study on contemporary marriage practices. Our respondents were students attending one of the many tertiary institutions across Qatar, ranging from coeducational American universities in Education City to the gender-divided campuses of Qatar University and the Community College of Qatar. The range of institutions reflects a broad socioeconomic demographic of men and women of diverse ages, marital statuses, and educational backgrounds. In order to tease out specific changes in Qatari social mores, we expanded on an initial online questionnaire with 15 in-person focus groups, consisting of 3–30 female participants, and 6 in-depth one-to-one interviews for a total of 350 female participants. Within the female data set, 52% were neither married nor engaged. We also interviewed 100 Qatari males in 10 in-person focus groups consisting of 5–25 participants. The disproportionate number of men is due to the fact that there are fewer men in university classrooms in Qatar overall. The 2014 Qatar Social Statistics Report states that 60% of graduates every year are women (Ministry of Development and Planning Statistics, 2014). *World Education News & Reviews* (Clark, 2013) attributes the disproportionate representation of female undergraduate students within the country to limitations on unchaperoned female mobility: "While female students represent 68% of the tertiary student body in Qatar and over 75% of the student body at Qatar University, a much higher percentage of male students are abroad studying than female students." All interviews and focus groups were conducted in English, given that this was the language used within the university setting and the primary language of the research team.

Qatari Women and Progress

Within the tight kinship structure of tribal Gulf societies, one's actions affect not only one's personal ethos but also the family's reputation (Joseph, 2000). Therefore, family identity often supersedes the wishes of the individual members. What Ahmed Kanna (2011) calls "neoorthodox" explains how the role of the family is to protect and promote "authentic national culture" (p. 109). Unlike youth in other countries, most noticeably America, Qatari university and high school students operate within the boundaries of their real-world relationships, even in their online personas. Much of Qatari society, regardless of age, evaluates the appropriateness of their peers' online behaviors through the conservative moral code applied to women's roles in society. The shielding of non-relative males and females from one another is enforced socially and structurally in much of the GCC, and the practice is evident on every Qatari street (Tetreault and al-Mughni, 1995; Mernissi, 1992) and in the boundary walls that enclose every Qatari home. This is also true of Qatari women, most of whom wear some form of *hijab* and are protected from the gaze of the passerby. In the more crowded neighborhoods, families attach partitions to the top of their boundary walls to ensure complete privacy and to prevent any accidental gazes from the family next door (M. Al Subaiey, personal communication, February 2010).

As a part of a thriving patriarchy, Qatari women, along with most female citizens in the GCC, are under the legal guardianship of their fathers, husbands, and, in the case of widows or orphans, their brothers (Murphy, 2013). This means that men are favored in inheritance law as well as more subtle forms of sexism—including higher wages and eligibility for housing allowances that working women are excluded from because the religious and cultural expectation is that a wife's salary "is for her" whereas the husband is socially and religiously

obligated to provide for the household. Within such a framework, the Qatari woman's need for agency is first within the home because the family is a microcosm of the male-dominated monarchy.

The most measurable advances for women is the incremental rise of the age of marriage for women. This is most clearly seen when we compared the age and marital status of current female university students with those of their mothers and grandmothers. Nearly half of the paternal and maternal grandmothers of respondents in our study had been married by the age of 18. This is compared to the fact that the majority of their mothers were between the ages of 18 and 24 when they were married. Within one generation, the age of marriage rose among Qatari women. Across three generations, we found that the "magic number" (as many of our participants referred to it) by which a woman needs to be married rose from 14 in the grandmother's generation to 18 in the mother's generation to 25 in the respondent's generation. Younger respondents, in the 18- to 21-year-old category, are significantly more likely to be unmarried; this is a major shift in trends compared with the ages at which their grandmothers and mothers were married. Overall, there is a higher enrollment of Qatari women in post-secondary institutions, as indicated by participants in our focus groups. However, the necessity of marriage persists, as evidenced by the fact the majority of women over the age of 25 in our sample were married.

It Began with Television

The hypervigilant nature of Qatari society toward women's behavior is enforced both in person and online. Consternation about the relaxing of strict codes of female behavior is expressed by all ages of Qatari society, including this first-year male university student: "For instance, many Qatari women use every chance they get to not wear the *shaila* that covers up their hair, and the main reason for that might be TV, media, social media, but it is definitely the influence of people outside of their region" (Al Nuami, 2015, p. 1). This student expresses dismay about women's changing dress and behavior. Exposure to Western media, beginning with images in television and films, causes women to neglect their modest customs. Al Nuami's concern about the connection of social media and a loss of female modesty is echoed in one of Caryle Murphy's Saudi Arabian participants. A young woman recounts a similar disappointment that some Saudi women take off their face veils and headscarves as soon as they board planes heading out of the kingdom: "I think they are affected by Western media" (4). A loss of religious piety is also among the neoorthodoxic concerns described by Kanna in Dubai (2011).

Insistence that Qatari women conform to specific modes of dress emerged in a public backlash against a group of young female volunteers who appeared on camera without their veils or *abayas* (traditional black robes) while building a school in the Brazilian Amazon. The program was funded as a corporate social responsibility project by Vodafone Qatar, the joint venture of global telecommunication outlet Vodafone and the Qatari government. Qatar Firsts was to be an ongoing campaign to showcase Qatari youth volunteerism, beginning with My First Amazon Adventure. Seven Qataris, three men and four women aged 19 to 24, were selected to travel through the wilderness of the Amazon to help build a remote school. When the trip's first update video was released on the corporate Facebook page, however, Qataris overlooked the team's altruism, citing the female participants' lack of *hijab*, or veil over their hair, as shameful, not only to the women themselves but also to the nation as a whole.

Using the Arabic Twitter hashtag ‏#قطر_في_لأ_تسيء_فودافون‎ (which translates to "Vodafone insults the people of Qatar") Qatari men and women decried the group's ability to represent

Qatar and Qatari values (Windrum, 2014a). Chief among the concerns was the lack of traditional clothing and veiling worn by the female participants: "To hell with marketing that is done at the expense of our values and the teachings of our religion," said one user (Al Khuleifi, 2014). Others who tried to temper the conversation called on families to police the women's behavior: "Even if the women in the video are Qatari, they have parents who can set them straight. Leave people alone," commented another (Al Yafee, 2014). Others were not so neutral in their opinions about the families of the participants. "People are saying that my sisters won't get married," said one of the participants' brother. "They are preaching against my family in the mosque, saying they should never have been allowed to go."

The fact unmarried men and women were traveling together raised an associated list of concerns, specifically about the young female participants. The online debate revealed the degree to which Qatari women's everyday choices are read as emblematic of the communal culture: "To organize such a gender-mixed trip that is not in keeping with our conservative society is indeed an insult to the people of Qatar," tweeted another (Al Mohannadi, 2014). The discussion escalated until Vodafone Qatar pulled their support and liability incursion of the trip within a few days of the social media outcry. A company statement reveals the degree to which public platforms permit the scrutiny of Qatari women's behavior:

> This decision to completely withdraw from this project and cease all kinds of support to it reflects our Chairman H.E. Sheikh Dr. Khalid Bin Thani Al Thani's commitment to seeing Vodafone Qatar providing the best services and initiatives that are suitable to the norms and values of the Qatari culture.

> We will have no responsibility of this initiative from here on in. This initiative will now be the sole responsibility of the production company overseeing the project. (Windrum, 2014b)

The trip continued, as Vodafone Qatar completed their funding obligation, and the participants were supported by their families, which notably included their brothers. Mediadante, the production company, took on liability for personal injuries. As a result of the outcry, several members of the public who disagreed with the conservative views created their own hashtag (#istandwithqatarfirsts) to encourage the team while they were away.

Such a controversy over the behavior of four young women demonstrates the entrenchment of gender and social codes to which the majority of Qatari society subscribes. The reaction to the Amazon Adventures is an example of the unevenness of modern traditionalism (Harkness & Khaled, 2014), which is the degree to which individuals manage the connections between their conventional and contemporary values (p. 591). Modern traditionalism helps explain why the Qatari public feels they can censure online content about and by female Qataris.

Let us contrast the experience of the Amazon Adventures in 2014 with the televised interview of Maryam al Suabiey on *Hadath al Yawm*, an Arabic program aired on French television, two years later in 2016. The topic was "How a Qatari Woman Views Herself," and Ms. Al Suabiey's replies centered on women's independence and accomplishments, despite the persistence of patriarchy. For some of the viewers at home, in Doha, the fact she was not wearing a veil did not go unnoticed: "If education leads to disobeying God's orders it's no good. I'm not honoured by this woman," tweeted one woman (Um Abdulla, 2016). Others came to her defense, including bloggers and university students, calling attention to the ironies of such fault finding: "A Qatari entrepreneur appeared on television and all we noticed was her

hair" (Al Bawaba, 2016). The public exchange in this instance was much more measured than in the case of the Amazon Adventurers, with rumors circulating that someone from the Emiri Diwan, the seat of Qatari government, had called to thank Ms. Al Suabiey for her positive portrayal of Qatari women. We see in this second example another instance where modern traditionalism and progressives clash over the proper behavior (i.e., attire) for Qatari women in public. For the purposes of our study, we expand the idea of modern traditionalism to also include the degree to which women adapt online spaces for their own ends yet maintain social conventions.

We will now discuss other tangible ways of measuring changing social mores about women's behavior in Qatari society, as discovered during our study of contemporary marriage practices. What role does reputation monitoring play in spousal screening? Has social media changed the way couples assess potential marriage partners? Two generations ago there was little formal education for women in Qatar, and they relied on their families to make good marital matches. Modern young Qatari women have a wide range of educational choices and options by which they form their own opinions about prospective husbands.

Modernity and Qatari Women

As we gathered data about Qatari women, education, and contemporary marital practices, we discovered that social media gives these otherwise restricted women access to knowledge about male behavior in public arenas that they would not be able to witness themselves. Such access then allows them to make informed personal choices about their selection of partners. This type of agency among young unmarried females is revolutionary within the context of their tribal, patriarchal society.

Our participants' responses led us to a second and more focused look at how social media usage confirms and challenges gender norms for Qatari women. During focus group sessions, university-age participants mentioned the way social media accounts allowed them to form their own opinions of potential spouses. Even as parents and other relatives were asking close friends about the reputation of the prospective groom, young women declared they were checking his Instagram posts to discover for themselves what kind of man he was. Once we realized the degree to which potential partners could inform themselves about one another through social media, we expanded our original questions to include the extent to which women and men consulted social media as part of the partner-screening process.

Qatari women are well aware of the disconnections between tradition and modernity as applied to traditional gender roles. The articulation of the tensions between personal ambitions and familial obligations are felt even by university students, as this first-year journalism major explains:

> A woman in Qatar is expected to weigh both the social and domestic sphere equally, to appease her own aspirations, society and her family, which are often in conflict. The government encourages women to further pursue their studies, offering great opportunities in and outside of Qatar, while the dynamic and expectations of Qatari families haven't changed as drastically … women are still expected to get married and raise a family of their own. (Al Attiyah, 2015, p. 1)

Previous research shows that Qatari women are constrained in the creation of their social media profiles by social conventions applied to their lives offline (Rajakumar, 2012, Faceless

Facebook; League & Chalmers, 2010; Vieweg & Hodges, 2016). While some might view the lack of personal photos, one of the salient features of the popular application Instagram, as contradictory to the purpose of being online, we argue, along with Vieweg and Hodges, that making deliberate choices about one's online content allows users to "repurpose them in ways that fit within their lifestyle and ethos" (p. 1).

Our research, and that of others working in Qatar, indicates Qatari women prefer to use accounts that include their real names (Rajakumar, 2012, Faceless Facebook; Vieweg & Hodges, 2015). Taking such a public stance can be both empowering – the female user is online under her own name—but also limiting, since now anyone she knows can censure her for inappropriate behavior. It is these tensions that Qatari women are constantly balancing.

There are other significant differences between these seemingly similar populations: Qatari women have had the legal right to drive since 1996, though many use drivers because of familial preference. Qatari women have access to coeducational classrooms from primary school to university as well as mixed-gender workplaces. Again, some families choose single-gender schools for their daughters. Many couples stipulate post-marital working conditions in the engagement process. The important fact is that should a Qatari woman, with her family's consent, choose to exercise her options, she may do so.

Methodology

As part of the larger study, we conducted an online survey with males and females to glean demographic information about participants' educational levels and marital status in comparison to that of their parents and grandparents. We then invited survey respondents to discuss their views on the changes in the engagement process in an interview or focus group setting. During many of these focus groups, the use of social media by potential partners emerged as a common theme. Both Qatari men and women acknowledged that social media was an additional source of information through which to evaluate a prospective bride or groom. Yet their approaches and weighing of online behavior varied significantly depending on gender and age.

Our team also collected and analyzed 63 marriage contracts from a broad range of Qatari families as archival evidence reflecting changing bridal expectations. These contracts were translated from Arabic to English. In comparing the survey responses with the focus group discussion and marriage contracts, we constructed a picture of how educated Qatari women are balancing the demands of modern and traditional roles. We did so to capture the changing social landscape and the impact these shifts are having on traditional Qatari institutions, namely marriage.

Men, Women, and Social Media

When asked to what degree men would consult social media in order to form impressions about prospective brides, an older married male student said, "I wouldn't rely on this [social media activity] …. After all, she can change if she wants to. It's better to ask people, they will know the truth." The reliance on personal networks to seek information about women's reputations was the preferred method of the older generation. This comment was consistent with other respondents over the age of thirty in our sample, most of whom were married with at least one child. However, female university students referred directly to social media as a means of screening potential suitors:

> Interviewer: Through social media, would you go and look him up on Twitter or Facebook, Instagram?

> Participant 3: I actually did that once, but he wasn't interested in social media. I just wanted to know more about him. (Rajakumar, personal communication, August 14, 2015)

Our female participants indicated that assessing the followers of an account was as important as the content the user was sharing. "I would look to see who is commenting on his posts," a female university student said. "Is it all girls?" (Rajakumar, personal communication, August 14, 2015). Most respondents saw a large female followership as inappropriate because in a society that maintains gender segregation after puberty, it indicates a man who craves female attention. Women cited their concerns about a man's lack of trustworthiness, and viewed extensive contact with other women as indicative of a propensity for affairs. In a polygamous society, worries about infidelity or their spouses finding new partners is a consistent theme for women.

Women were also screening the content posted by the men who proposed. "Flashy cars are a big no," a first-year female university said. There was considerable agreement among the other participants of this particular group that the car he drives is a symbol of the groom's personality and level of maturity. The flashier the color of a man's vehicle, including neon and pastels, the more likely he was associated with a host of playboy traits that would not ensure a successful marriage. These included cruising the city late at night with his friends and driving around densely populated areas like shopping malls to attract the attention of girls. Other males also view such activity negatively. "They [men who drive brightly colored cars] are pimping themselves," explained a male interviewee in the short film *Doha Driving* (Rajakumar, 2012). Analyzing a male's social media profile and postings allows women to form their own character studies of prospective partners. The asynchronous nature of social media allows women to do this in a culturally acceptable manner—from the privacy of their own homes. They use new media technologies as an additional layer of information in determining their fit with the lifestyle of a suitor. Being equipped with more knowledge about their potential partner empowers them to say no and perhaps persuade family members who might otherwise be inclined to accept the groom.

Men, however, gleaned a different set of information from the online activity of prospective brides. "Maybe [I'll do] some basic investigation online. Because in the end she definitely has a public profile online. If that public profile is very inappropriate then definitely she's not the one," said a young unmarried male professional. In our discussions, the male participants were in agreement about the type of content that would dissuade them from pursuing a proposal: "If she posts a picture of her face, that's a big red flag," said a male university student. This idea was greeted with many nods and echoed by others in our groups. The idea that a woman would post a photo of her face, in a selfie or with others, is the ultimate sign of indiscretion and defies the strict social conventions about women's behavior. Others indicated they would exercise their privilege as fiancées: "It doesn't matter what she has up. It's all going to change," said one male college student with a laugh. This was met by sheepish grins around the room.

What was interesting to discover is that while men had hard-and-fast opinions about their brides, the role to which they influenced the other women in their family varied greatly. For example, one first-year university student explained that her actions were less than favorable in her brother's eyes, but he wouldn't address it with her: "I post photos of my fingernails with nail polish. My brother doesn't like it but he feels it is my father's place to correct me. So he

lets me do it" (Rajakumar, personal interview, 2015). We did not speak to fathers with teenage (or older) female children for this study, but clearly further study on the role of the father's influence and permissiveness is important.

What varied among the men was the indication that some were beginning to overlook such transgressions if the disapproved content was removed as the relationship progressed: "Maybe some will say okay now that everything's gone, they'll turn an eye . . . to say 'okay, fair enough, everything's been removed, everything's been deleted'" (Rajakumar, personal communication, April 2014). A "forgive and forget" attitude signals a more flexible approach to women's online behavior than has been previously seen in studies on Qatari society. However, the insistence that an error is a permanent blemish was also shared: "Then again some people say once it's up, it's up." Unlike our female participants, the men were not in agreement about the extent to which a woman's social media profile was an indication of her personality.

Our focus group participants referred to a fairly conventional use of social media: strangers were checking in on various platforms to see the types of content and behavior posted by a person of interest. Participants did not disclose any of the clandestine behavior discussed by Ansari and Klinenberg (2015) in their chapter on dating in Qatar. The authors describe Qataris as "using technology to flout these repressive rules" (p. 600). Some of the responses from his sample, comprising two Qatari female interviewees questioned over video, perhaps do not resonate with ours, because they are by necessity more modern in their outlook by participating in a commercial project with a male interviewer, a set of circumstances that most Qatari women would eschew because of impropriety. Many female students at the Qatar Foundation campuses, for example, tape a piece of paper over the built-in camera of their laptops "just in case" someone happens to have taken over control of their machine and is watching them without their permission (M. Al Darwish, personal communication, December 2013). Their observations that Qataris are "a photophobic society" . . . resonate with the experiences discussed by our participants: "People don't want any record of themselves in public. Especially when people are out in clubs or malls. Their families could get very upset." Another of Ansari's subjects describes Qataris "using the Internet to organize small private parties in hotel rooms" (p. 604). That this subculture exists is likely true for a subset of the elite members of society who have a greater degree of freedom and have the disposable income to organize parties in the international hotels around the city. Such usage of digital technology and their social implications are among many topics that deserve further study.

Women, Media, and Choice

For Qatari women, who are expected to fulfill the twin goals of marriage and motherhood, screening potential suitors is directly related to the degree that she will be able to exercise her personal choices about pursuing an education and a professional career. Social media provides an additional way through which women can form their own opinions about prospective grooms apart from the advice and information they are given by parents or other relatives. A prospective partner's online profile allows the Qatari woman to survey a suitor's actions and personality in a way that she would not be allowed to do in person in a gender-segregated society. Ansari suggests that "social media is giving people in Qatar and in the United Arab Emirates more new ways to meet and express themselves" (p. 606). We stumbled on the uniqueness of this topic while setting out to study other trends, and were surprised to find how interrelated tradition and modernity are in Qatari society. The focus of our questions was Facebook and Twitter; this is a rich field for further investigation, which also includes Instagram and the now popular Snapchat. Ansari's informants suggest "guys sometimes get

photos of girls [through Snapchat screengrabs] that would dishonor them and then use that to extract things from them" (p. 606). Such behavior is in keeping with the policing of female-generated content that our participants also discussed.

Backed by culture and religion, Qatari men enjoy a place of privilege further entrenched by social media. They can censure women's behavior, online or otherwise, through social media channels like Twitter and garner support for their conservative views. Until brothers and fathers, some of whom we discussed in this study, are more supportive, Qatari women's adverse choices, both online and offline, will continue to have far-reaching consequences.

In a society where family reputation trumps personal preference, social media may be a burgeoning avenue to elide social convention. As women utilize new ways to inform themselves about their suitors, many other factors are at work in the success or termination of a marriage. We need further studies about women in the GCC that complicate notions of empowerment in both the political and social arenas, both online and in real life. The established body of work about Kuwaiti and Saudi women can be expanded to include the second wave of modernization in the Arabian Gulf, Emirati and Qatari societies. In so doing we create a more nuanced understanding of diversity in the GCC countries and a more accurate picture of non-western feminism on the Gulf Peninsula.

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