Institute on Culture, Religion & World Affairs

Love Stories: Youth Aspirations & the New Ethics of Intimacy

This conference is the product of a BU graduate seminar offered through the Department of Anthropology, *Global Intimacies: Sex, Gender, and Contemporary Sexualities*, taught by Prof. Nancy J. Smith-Hefner in the spring semester of 2016. Papers are based on original research conducted over the summer using a shared interview protocol. Data and paper drafts were workshopped in the fall.

Conference papers explore shifting conceptualizations of love and romance and their expression in contemporary practices of dating and courtship. Recent studies have documented how in many areas of the world, young people are expressing a new interest in romantic love and companionate relationships different from that associated with their parents and grandparents (cf. Hirsch & Wardlowe 2006, Lipsett 2004, Padilla et al 2007, Zigon 2013). This new interest is reflected in a shift in marriage patterns away from conjugal matches arranged by familial elders to matches involving a greater degree of individual choice. These shifts in marriage patterns have been linked to both demographic as well as socio-cultural transformations – among them the shift away from agricultural production toward wage labor; higher education, urbanization, and the growth of a new middle class; the association of new marital practices with ideas of progress; and a focus on individualized achievement and consumption as markers of success (Hirsch & Wardlowe 2006).

The papers in this conference compare the romantic aspirations and dating experiences of educated, middle-class youth in Indonesia, India, Iran, Morocco, Vietnam, and Kazakhstan, as well as those of Iranian students in the US and American "sugar babies," within the context of globalizing discourses of sexuality, consumption, and ethico-religious self-making. They examine both recent socioeconomic changes that have supported the possibility of higher levels of education and social mobility (especially for young women) as well as the role of modern technologies and new spaces of leisure and consumption such as cell phones, internet cafés, malls, and coffee shops in the transformation of romantic expectations and dating patterns (cf. Deeb & Harb 2013; Hasso 2010).

Against the backdrop of on-going religious and ethical debates, papers take up accompanying shifts in gender roles and expectations and consider to what degree and in what ways young men's experience might differ from that of young women. Most critically, the papers examine the possibility that the new emphasis on romance and romantic love opens a space for the expression of individual autonomy and increased gender egalitarianism.

Conference Papers
Edited by Nancy J. Smith-Hefner

"Too Educated for Love? Women and the Marriage Market in Indonesia"
Nancy J. Smith-Hefner

"The New Kazakhstani Woman: Balancing Dual Expectations of Family and Career"
Laura Tourtellotte

"Where Does All that Cynicism Come From? Reasons behind the Pessimistic Attitudes toward Marriage among Emerging Adults in Urban Iran"

"Between the Mirage of Love & the Burden of Commitment: Courtship and Marriage among Iranian Youth in the US"
Paniz Edjlali

"Moroccan Romance 2.0: Upholding Traditional Religious and Gendered Norms in the Digital Era"
Jessica Lambert

"'A Strange Kind of a Relationship': New Possibilities for Thinking about and Experiencing Love in Urban North India"
Jennifer Koester

"Fantasy in the Sugar Bowl: Sugar Baby Narratives of Love, Money, and Agency"
Carmen Rowe

"Virtual Love: Technology and the Struggle for Gay Romance in Contemporary Vietnam"
Dat Nguyen

Too Educated for Love?
Women and the Marriage Market in Indonesia

Nancy J. Smith-Hefner

Indonesia is among the shrinking number of Asian countries demographers identify as following a pattern of "universal marriage," defined as a country in which fewer than 4% of women over the age of 40 have never married (G. Jones 2004). The marital imperative weighs particularly heavily on young women. Those who reach the age of 25 without finding a partner are considered to be "unmarketable" and placed in the category of "old maid." Women who put off marriage to pursue an education are in an especially precarious position; since most Indonesian men look to marry "down" with regard to age and education, educated women face the challenge of finding someone who is an appropriate match in a narrowing field of candidates. They also face the perception held by at least some men, that educated women will assume a dominant position within the family. This paper presents the life stories of four educated Javanese women and examines the hurdles they face in finding and securing a marital partner. Although young Indonesians have embraced the idea of romantic love as the proper foundation for a modern, companionate marriage, and it is widely accepted that youth should make their own choice of "soul mate" (jodoh), educated women are finding it increasingly difficult to meet their match.

Demographic studies have shown that across East and Southeast Asia women are achieving dramatically higher levels of education than previous generations and have even begun to surpass the educational achievements of men. Rising levels of women's education have gone hand in hand with rising levels of female participation in the urban workforce and are correlated with delayed marriage and even non-marriage among women (G. Jones 2005, 2009; see also *The Economist* 8/20/2011). Indonesia has followed this pan-Asian pattern with regard to women's educational achievement, employment, and delayed marriage (G. Jones 2009; Oey-Gardiner 1991, 2002). However, unlike other Asian nations, Indonesia has been slow to shift away from the

pattern of universal marriage which once defined the region (G. Jones 2004). In Indonesia, the marital imperative weighs most heavily on young women. Those who put off marriage to pursue a tertiary degree are in an especially precarious position. Because most Indonesian women prefer to marry someone of at least the same age and educational level as themselves, while most men look to marry "down" with regard to age and education, many educated women find it a challenge to identify an appropriate match in a narrowing field of candidates (G. Jones 2009, Utomo 2014). The result is that at least some educated women are choosing to marry men who have fewer years of schooling and may be less financially secure – and in some cases, even younger -- than themselves, moving away from a long-established pattern of Indonesian hypergamy to one of hypogamy.

While considerable attention has been paid to the dramatic demographic transformations taking place in Indonesia and the wider region, comparatively less attention has been paid to concomitant shifts in understandings of love, romance, and marital commitment. These emerging "structures of feeling" (Williams 1977; see also, Ahearn 2001) hint at new ways of experiencing and expressing affective changes in progress. Here, I consider some of the common hurtles educated women face in finding and securing martial partner by examining the life stories of four young Javanese women. Although contemporary Indonesian youth have embraced the ideal of romantic love as the proper foundation for a modern, companionate marriage, and although it is widely accepted that young people should make their own choice of "mate" or *jodoh*, educated women are finding it increasingly difficult to meet their match. Perhaps not surprisingly, in their efforts to secure an appropriate partner, these women draw on a discourse of marital love that emphasizes themes of a companionate partnership and shared conjugal project, one that gives more weight to comfort love and compatibility than romantic passion.

Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world by population. Javanese are the largest of Indonesia's 300+ ethnic groups and make up 40% of the Indonesia's nearly 260 million inhabitants. Over 95% of Javanese are Muslims; the vast majority are Sunni. Javanese Muslim youth uniformly report that they consider marriage to be a requirement of their faith as well as a critical part of the moral debt every child owes to his or her parents. The idea that a young woman should be married by age 25 is a recurrent theme across my interviews with university-educated women. Those who do not marry by age 25 are commonly referred to as "old maids" (*perawan tua*) and are described as "no longer marketable" (*tidak laku*). In addition to being a religious requirement and repayment of an important moral debt, marriage is also linked to the cultural imperative that one provide a grandchild *keturunan* (lit. descendant) to eager grandparents. Age 25 is cited as the optimal age for a women to marry because it is considered to the peak of a woman's fertility, after which time her ability to bear children is believed to rapidly decline.

All of the young women I interviewed expressed anxiety over marrying. None of them contemplated a life alone as an attractive option, not even those who were finishing advanced degrees or already had secure employment or a career. Even among those

women who had been supporting themselves for some time and very likely would be able to support themselves in the future, none could imagine the possibility of remaining unmarried.

Mbak Hana: Too Educated for Marriage

Mbak Hana is representative of many of the unmarried, educated women in my study. Hana is a tiny figure with a round face and a huge smile. She dresses in "Saudi style," in a long solid color robe and matching headscarf that reaches all the way to below her hips. It is a style of dress which is not common in Indonesia. Hana is 33 years old and has been actively searching for a marriage partner for the past five years.

Hana has been on her own since she came to city for university at the age of 19. The result of a complicated family situation, she has supported herself by teaching in a religious boarding school and by working several years in Saudi Arabia as a tutor, a nanny, and as a maid. She is now completing an MA degree. Because of her conservative dress, she tends to attract men who are looking for a religiously conservative wife who will take on a subservient position within the marriage. Hana, however, is looking for someone who views marriage as a partnership and will share familial responsibilities. She says,

> *People consider me an old maid. If by age 25 a girl hasn't yet married, she's considered "unmarketable," an old maid, or not normal. That's how villagers think almost everywhere across Indonesia – and not just villagers.*
>
> *I mean, well, I don't feel that way, but it's the parents who feel embarrassed because others look at them and think "Wow their daughter isn't married and she's already so old! What's she waiting for? Why's she still in school? What's she looking for?"*

Repeated attempts to meet with young men, especially those recommended by her friends and colleagues as possible candidates for marriage, have made Hana realistic about her options and increasingly willing to make compromises. She is "serious" (*serius*) about marriage and says she is above all looking for a partner with whom she can "dialogue," one who is willing to work with her as "part of a team" and can grow together with her over time. She says that while she was initially hoping to find someone who shared her same level of education, she no longer feels that is critical, so long as he is flexible and willing to compromise. But she has discovered that too many men find her educational status and experience intimidating and quickly withdraw their interest once they learn about her achievements. This masculinist anxiety figured frequently in my interviews: many men fear that a woman with more education and experience than themselves will be the one to take the lead in making family decisions and will leave their husband without any power. Hana says,

> *I'm really serious [about wanting to marry] and I'm not picky. Maybe I used to be. Like when I got my BA and I felt I really had to have someone with a BA. But*

now I don't think it's a problem. What's important is that we can connect. We can talk and come to an agreement about things. And we can work together as a team. [If he's less educated] it's no problem. We can improve things as we go along in the process of getting to know each other.

Lots of guys just back down when they find out about my education and experience. They wonder if I would be happy as their partner because they haven't done anything like that. They feel inferior (minder). They say, "Later, if we marry, I'll be behind and you'll be in front making the decisions and I won't be able to do anything at all." They just weren't confident (kurang pede).

Despite the difficulties educated women encounter in finding a partner, very few say they would consider asking their parents to arrange a marriage for them. Whereas just a generation or two ago, the majority of marriages in Indonesia were parentally arranged, today the percentage of arranged marriages has dropped precipitously (G. Jones 1994). Acknowledging what is in social fact a widespread increase in female autonomy, especially among educated women, parents say they do not dare to make arrangements for their daughters, fearing they would be blamed later if the marriage didn't work out. They often add, "I gave her an education so that she can make her own decisions." And yet, although young women are insistent about finding a partner on their own, a surprising number – including Hana -- report they have never had a boyfriend. They describe feeling awkward (*canggung, kaku*) and nervous (*grogi, gugup*) around eligible, unmarried men. This is especially true of women who have absorbed the message of their Islamic teachers who warn that interactions with unrelated members of the opposite sex can easily lead to sinful thoughts and interactions (*zina, dosa besar*) and should be avoided. Many of these women endorse the admonition heard in Muslim circles, that "there is no dating in Islam -- only *ta'aruf*" (meeting for the purpose of deciding whether or not to marry).

Mbak Ning: The Importance of being Serious

Mbak Ning had attended Muslim schools all of her life and was painfully shy. Like Mbak Hana, Ning also emphasized the importance of being "serious" in approaching marriage and in identifying a potential partner. But at age 33, she too had never had a boyfriend. Her cousin literally *pushed* her into attending several mass matchmaking events, filling out the requisite paperwork for her and on one occasion even forcing her into a waiting taxi so she wouldn't be late for the meeting.

Increasingly popular in post-resurgent Indonesia (which is to say, since the late 1990s), these large-scale matchmaking events are typically organized by religious individuals or organizations of a moderately conservative inclination who are motivated by the conviction that it is their moral duty to help singles meet and marry. Matchmaking-meetings attract anywhere from 50 to several hundred singles – almost always more men than women. To enroll in the event, participants submit their biodata to a committee which then facilitates the exchange of data and subsequent meetings between participants. Biodata typically includes information on religion, age, height,

weight and complexion, and a succinct statement about what one is looking for in a marital partner. The requirements for participating are simple but strict: one must be single, serious in one's matrimonial intentions, and ready to marry quickly.

Mbak Ning eventually met her husband at one of these mass matchmaking events. Now 36 with a two year old daughter, Mbak Ning married at age 33, almost 34, and got pregnant almost immediately. At the time she married, Ning had already finished her BA (S1) and had worked for some time as an assistant teacher at a school for children with special needs. She has since taken the national exam to become a civil servant and now has a full-time, teaching position. Her husband is two years younger than her and has only a grade school education. He makes a very modest income as a sales clerk in an office supply store. Ning explained,

> When we finally met, I don't know why, but I felt sympathy for him (saya simpati) right away. He seemed like a good person and easy-going. And we were both mature and ready to marry. So why not? Maybe this was my match (jodoh).

Because they were both serious and ready to marry and because Ning was concerned about her age and anxious to quickly have a child, just one week after they met, the couple decided to marry.

Mbak Fika: Aggressively Pursuing a Partner

The speed with which couples make marital decisions can be dizzying -- especially if the woman is "older" (that is, over 25) and anxious about her dwindling possibilities and plummeting fertility. Like Mbak Ning, Mbak Fika and her now-husband decided they were serious about each other after meeting only twice and married within three months of coming to an agreement. At the time, Mbak Fika was 26 and working on completing her MA. The marriage would have taken place even sooner, but the couple had to secure the agreement of the groom's older sister who had not yet married.

Mbak Fika is now in her early 30s. She is a lecturer in the faculty of Religious Education (*Tarbyiah*) at a private Muslim University in Yogyakarta. Mbak Fika has an MA and has plans to go on to pursue a PhD, possibly abroad. She first saw her husband at a seminar where he was one of the presenters and was immediately attracted to him. At the end of his talk, she asked him for his contact information, using the excuse that she was working on a similar topic for her MA thesis. Afterwards, she let all of her friends know that she was interested in him. She stalked him on Facebook. She enlisted a colleague to tell him she was interested.

> I was actually what you might call aggressive. My mom warned me, "Because you have so much education, guys will feel nervous approaching you. So you have to open the way."

When none of her efforts seemed to work, Fika finally messaged him asking if she could borrow a book for her MA thesis. He responded that he would bring it right over. Things moved quickly from there. He brought the book to her house and they

immediately "clicked."

> Mbak Fika explained,
> *We really only met one or two times. The first was the seminar and the second was when he dropped by my house with the book. The third time he asked me to a movie. And after the movie we had something to eat. While we were eating, he said he was looking for a marriage partner (jodoh) and I said I was too. And that's when he said, "I really like you. I'd like to meet your parents. Would that be ok?" And I said, "Sure, go ahead."*
>
> *What was important is that we were both serious. We didn't date (pacaran)…not like playing around. It was direct. He was the one to speak first, to say he liked me (saya suka sama kamu). And I said I liked him too.*

In recounting her story, Mbak Fika says that she fell for future husband the first time she saw him. She used the English phrase, "falling in love," to describe her experience. I encountered this use of English emotion terms for especially "charged" affective expression frequently in interviews and conversations: respondents say the use of English borrowings makes the emotion easier to express and less forceful or startling than using the comparable Indonesian phrase, *jatuh cinta* – although the latter term literally means the same thing, "to fall in love."

These rare expressions of strong affect aside, Mbak Fika and the other women I interviewed were rather cautious in expressing their feelings, emphasizing "companionship" (*persehabatan*) and "comfort/feeling comfortable" (*nyaman/kenyamanan*) rather than sexual attraction or romantic passion as the reasons for their choice of marriage partner. They spoke of "liking" their partner (*suka, senang*) more often than "loving" them or being/falling in love (*cinta, jatuh cinta*). Not uncommonly, young women referenced the Javanese saying, *tresno jalaran seko kulino* ("love grows from being close to/getting accustomed to someone") to underscore their expectation that as long as both partners were serious and committed, their affective bond would develop *after* marriage. In fact, laughing about the speed of her nuptials, Mbak Ning – who had met her husband at a mass match making event and married just a month afterwards – observed that it was much more romantic to "date after marrying" (*pacaran setelah menikah*) than beforehand, and that, now settled in marriage, she was enjoying slowly learning about her new husband and his likes and dislikes.

Mbak Ayu: A Practical Approach

Mbak Ayu was particularly articulate about her feelings regarding love and marriage, but drew on themes present in my discussions with other women I have interviewed. At age 31, Mbak Ayu has an MA and is a lecturer in sociology at a large and prestigious Indonesian university. Like other educational high-achievers, she plans to go on to get her PhD --- but emphasizes that she is anxious to marry first. Unlike many of her highly educated counterparts, Ayu has had a serious boyfriend since 2013. He is a computer

consultant and works on intermittent projects. Although Ayu is anxious to marry, the couple has encountered multiple challenges that have resulted in repeated postponements.

Despite these difficulties, Mbak Ayu remains quite matter of fact about love and marriage. Ayu emphasizes the practical and relational aspects of the martial bond more than its affective or romantic features. She links marriage first and foremost to the desire to have and to raise children, to make her family/parents happy (*membalas budi*), and to fulfill the requirements of her Islamic faith. She says she is being realistic (*realistis*). What she wants, above all, is a life partner who values and recognizes the importance of shared commitment and dedication to a mutual conjugal project over the reckless abandonment of romantic love.

> *Of course it's a given that I will marry. For me it's a way of honoring my parents and God. Because I believe that marrying is a form of devotion, of worship.*
>
> *But I'm realistic. I once said to my boyfriend, "It's possible that I could marry someone I don't love. Because what I need is a partner who can walk with me into the future. Not just because of love, because love can evaporate."*
>
> *It's not that I don't believe that a relationship can work based on love alone. But love is not enough. You may love each other but you don't work together. So you have to be realistic. That's how I feel.*

Romantic love, Comfort Love & Sexual Desire

Anthropologists William Jankowiak and Thomas Paladino (2008) have identified three types of love: romantic/passionate love, comfort/attachment love, and physical desire/sex. They argue that all three forms of love exist in all cultures – but add that the three elements are rarely given equal weight. Instead, they exist in tension or in some cases even outright conflict.

There seems to be just such a tension at work here in Indonesia. Here the contemporary and more or less "globalized" emphasis on romantic/passionate love is widely recognized among youth, but it exists in palpable tension with the more longstanding and equally pervasive value of affective equanimity and the "flattening" rather than the heightening or "pumping up" of emotions. As anthropologists have long emphasized, ethnic Javanese, have downplayed the overt expression of strong emotions, considering the forceful expression of affect disequilibrating for both the individual and society (cf. Anderson 1972, Geertz 1973a; and on Bali, Geertz 1973b, Mead & Bateson 1942). The ability to restrain or mute one's emotions in public interaction, and thus demonstrate affective self-control, has long been linked not only to adult maturity but to masculine status, political power, and spiritual potency. Conversely, strong emotions and a relative lack of emotional self-control are identified with young children and with women (Brenner 1995, Keeler 1990). For similar reasons it is women who are expected to engage in important "emotion work" within the household, making certain that family relationships are harmonious and the household

atmosphere remains tranquil and stress-free – above all, of course, for husbands (C. Jones 2004; see also Hochschild 1979). It is also women who are expected to invest considerably more affective time and energy in maintaining their marital relations and are more likely to be faulted if the relationship goes awry. Given this pattern, at least with respect to Indonesia, we could agree perhaps with Giddens' assertion that "romantic love is essentially feminized love" (Giddens 1992:43).

The groundwork for so many of the social and religious changes underway in Indonesia today, was laid by the New Order state that governed Indonesia from 1966 to 1998. Under the New Order, the government promoted a conservative gender and affective ideology that cautioned against excessive and uncontrolled emotion (*nafsu*) and emphasized the immorality of premarital sex and the dangers of passionate love/desire. Although today the internet, new media, and middle-class consumption have all worked to some degree to relax this emphasis on self-control and affective equanimity, the state and religious organizations have if anything come to place even *greater* emphasis on monogamy and sexual restraint outside of marriage. In both state and religious discourses, it is reproduction, not sexual satisfaction that is given a higher value and sex is acceptable only within the bounds of marriage.

The strenuous devaluation of passionate love and sexual desire in the discourses of state and religious organizations, however, has not extended to a devaluation of romantic love within the context of a companionate marriage. In fact, the growing popularity of the idea of a romantic, companionate marriage remains one of the great transformations in the culture of contemporary Indonesian affectivity. In complex ways, however, the discursive idealization of romance as a publicly recognized and valued foundation for a modern marriage interacts with other cultural legacies. Those cultural legacies include the long standing emphasis on masculinist emotional control and women's greater emotional volubility, as well as the notion that with time, familiarity, and commitment, (romantic) love may flourish within a conjugal partnership.

To return then to the theme of our conference, yes, something like the experience of romantic love *is* a cross-cultural universal – but the experience is at the same time culturally relative. Romantic love in all of its aspects is not necessarily recognized or valued to the same degree in every society; nor is it embraced equally by all categories of social actors or groupings (cf. Jankowiak 1995, Lipset 2004). It is perhaps not surprising that within the context of far-reaching social and demographic transitions, educated Javanese women today emphasize companionate ideals of "seriousness of intent" and commitment in seeking a partner, and do so more strongly than do their male counterparts. If in the course of seeking a companion who shares one's life project and goals one happens to be lucky enough to find one's romantic soul mate, this is an unexpected bonus of the marital pursuit, but not the relation's precondition or prerequisite. Unlike American women who hold out the hope of "having it all" and finding in a single person one's best friend, romantic lover, and passionate sexual partner, educated Javanese women are hopeful that with the right attitude, time and dedication, the marital bond will honor one's parents, fulfill religious duties, produce offspring, and, much longed-for but least certain of all, "allow love to grow."

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The first wife is from God, the second from the people, and the third is from the devil

– Russian proverb

The New Kazakhstani Woman: Balancing Dual Expectations of Family and Career

Laura Tourtellotte

Among a new generation of upwardly mobile urban Kazakhs, long courtships flourish as couples grapple with the pressures of educational and professional success in an unsteady economy. These pressures disproportionately affect women whose rates of academic and economic engagement have increased dramatically over the past 25 years. Asel, a 27-year old Muslim Kazakh woman from southern Kazakhstan, moved to Kazakhstan's capital Astana for education and employment, leaving her boyfriend Demirzhan behind. Although he soon followed her to the city where they both lived with relatives, they married only after 5 years of hard work and infrequent meetings. Not only have the pressures for education and employment spurred a delay in the marrying age of upwardly mobile Kazakhs, but contemporary Kazakh women carefully consider the costs and benefits of entering into partnerships that require they take up the double burden of professional success on the one hand and traditional expectations of motherhood and the maintenance of strong kinship networks with in-laws on the other. New technology also plays an essential role in the changing image of the

modern urban Kazakh woman, as more and more married and unmarried women turn to innovative platforms to solicit advice on their love lives and relationships and on how to fulfill their kinship obligations while still maintaining a career. The Instagram account Ladyblog.krg is one such venue for educated urban Kazakhstani women to explore different ways of fulfilling traditional expectations of female restraint and filial obedience within modern urban life.

When speaking about contemporary patterns of love and romance in Kazakhstan people voice similar concerns in a familiar litany of observations: divorce is on the rise; things were better in the past when women were less materialistic; and the country is becoming more religious, which is changing the cultural landscape of marriage, for better or worse. Secularization and urbanization changed traditional marriage and kin structures among Kazakhs in the early 20th century, while intensive resettlement policies and forced sedentarization altered the ethnic makeup of Kazakhstan's territory. After 25 years of independence, however, Soviet rule remains a nostalgic memory for older generations and appears absurdly irrelevant to young lovers' lives. New technologies such as cell phones and email play prominent roles in contemporary romances, while social platforms such as vkontakte.com (the Russian-language version of Facebook) and Instagram serve as modern meeting places for romantic prospects.

Gender neo-traditionalism, which political scientist Janet Elise Johnson (2009:38) defines as "a belief that physiology dictates that men are to be the strong providers and protectors and women the beautiful loving caretakers" has been steadily intensifying in post-Soviet countries since the 1990s (Rivkin-Fish 2010, Kandiyoti 2007). Meanwhile, Kazakhstan's countryside is steadily depopulating, with 53.2% of the populace living in urban centers as of 2015 (CIA World Factbook 2016). These pressures are evidenced by the stream of young middle-income ethnic Kazakhs leaving their home villages (*aul*) and smaller provincial cities and moving to the larger urban centers of Almaty and Astana for education and careers, while taking their more traditional customs with them to the big city. These dual trends of neo-traditional gendered expectations and urbanization put particular pressure on young women, whose attainment of higher education has surged since independence. As of 2015, 51.7% of women in Kazakhstan were enrolled higher education – an increase of 17.6% from 2000 - as compared to male higher education enrollment, which lags at 40.5% of the male population in Kazakhstan (World Bank 2016c). Female engagement in the workforce since independence has increased as well, although not as significantly, from 62% in 1990 to 68% in 2014 (World Bank 2016a). This is nonetheless a higher rate of workforce participation than is the case among women in neighboring Russia, where 57% of women are engaged in the workforce, a drop of 3% since 1990 (ibid). With the swelling demographic of a new cadre of highly educated working urban Kazakhstani women, however, models of traditional family life and kinship structures are coming under increasing strain.

According to custom, Kazakh brides (*kelin*) are supposed to demonstrate extreme filial piety to their in-laws and live in patrilocal multi-generational households caring for their children and kin while attending to the family hearth. As Kazakh ethnographer Amanzhol Kalysh notes, although "the former gap between purely 'male' and 'female' work is being bridged," national surveys indicate that ethnic Russians have more equitable distributions of household responsibilities than ethnic Kazakhs (Kalysh 2012:2-3). Moreover, divorce is on the rise for both ethnic groups, with "dissimilarities in character" frequently cited as a main cause (Kalysh 2010:4). People are now more likely to divorce not only because of lessening social stigma, but also because the pressures of modern living and higher earning demands coupled with traditional expectations for caring for and helping extensive family networks, strain relationships between spouses. Women may express discontent over family expectations that their husbands to contribute to the family coffer of their parents instead of providing for their own children, for example. These recent developments in the private lives of ethnic Kazakhs point to the development of new models of success and attainment especially for women, creating a rupture from traditional Kazakh ideals.

Modern urban ethnic Kazakh women must leverage their education and work accomplishments as models for contemporary success against traditional family structures and filial piety, relying on education and modern technology to position themselves as modern urban workers, while continuing to fulfil traditional roles in the household and within extended kin networks. This paper intertwines two types of analysis: first, a sampling drawn from an online women's forum helps sketch the social landscape for how upwardly mobile Kazakh women manage their family obligations and modern urban lives. Secondly, the analysis compares those findings with the presentation of one young couple's romance narrative as they met in the more rural south, moved to the capital city of Astana, and negotiated issues of modernity and tradition in their expectations of marriage and family life. Following anthropologist David Lipset's case study of North American college students to find a 'modern romance chronotope' (Lipset 2015), I seek to use the romance narrative of Asel and Demirzhan to identify a modern Kazakh romance chronotope[1] for upwardly mobile pious ethnic Kazakhs. As the close analysis of a local lifestyle advice column and an in-depth case study of a young urban Kazakh woman demonstrate, conflicts between older traditional kinship structures and gender norms are put in sharp relief against "modern" contemporary ideals of companionate marriage and romantic love in Kazakhstan.

Instagram as an Advice Column: Ladyblog

For some, like anthropologist Nicole Constable, social media and new technologies provide a cyberspace characterized by "new imaginings and new opportunities for escape from local marital constraints" (Constable 2007:254). However, as Constable also notes, "the options have limits and the possibilities are not equally available to all." Certain technological resources are limited to a select group – the urban upwardly mobile smartphone-owners. As of 2012, there are 175.4 cell phones per 100 people in

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[1] Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin developed the idea of chronotope to describe agentic narratives that function in specific spaces and times – in my romance chronotope, narratives are informed by class, upbringing,

Kazakhstan (UNICEF 2012), however, indicating access to mobile technologies is on the rise and attainable for many. While Howard Rhinegold describes online interactions as being able to "leave our bodies behind" (quoted in Constable 2007:257), Constable discovers that we nonetheless reproduce gender binary distinctions and impose other social and cultural categories that may reinforce more traditional gender norms via new technology.

Nonetheless, new technologies offer innovative ways of forming large-scale networks of communication and fostering an exchange of information (or a calcification of rigid gender expectations) that can connect a wide range of people. This is the case with the Instagram account named Ladyblog, which is based in Karaganda, the third largest city in Kazakhstan. With more than 960 posts, Ladyblog boasts over 36,000 followers. Ladyblog is maintained by a female moderator who lives in Karaganda – she publishes the write-ins of different women seeking advice, giving them an outlet for anonymously soliciting advice from fellow women. As the Instagram bio outlines, the blog is for a female audience and features stories of its followers. In addition to posting women's queries for help resolving lifestyle[2] problems, Ladyblog also posts ads for local manicuring and hair salon services, clothing stores sales, cooking advice, and girl-power poetry.[3] Over the course of June 2016, Ladyblog posted more than 60 times, mainly providing short biographical backstories of women writing in to seek advice for how to resolve family issues ranging from domestic violence and postpartum depression to how to scare off mistresses and determine if their boyfriend is "the one." Instagram, a website originally designed for 'visual storytelling' (Instagram 2016) by sharing snapshots of its users' everyday lives taken on smartphones, has thus been co-opted as a type of crowd-sourced women's counsel, where anyone can write in to offer up their opinions on how to fix marriages and lead one's life as a woman. In Ladyblog, however, this platform has been appropriated to instead serve as a democratic user-curated means of dispensing female wisdom and advice, replacing the obsolete newspaper advice column.

One woman counsels a lovelorn advice-seeker with the following wisdom '*Uilenu onai, ui bolu kiyn'* (it's easy to marry, but difficult to become a family) invoking a Kazakh proverb to advise the anonymous lovelorn across Kazakhstan (Figure 1). Thus, a traditional message of female forbearance and women's roles in engaging in emotional labor to ensure the smooth running of a household are merely transplanted into a digital medium (Hochschild 1979:572). In fact, despite its contemporary medium, Ladyblog's comments are riddled with Kazakh and Russian proverbs, reflecting the deep-seated role of older folk traditions and customs in ordering one's contemporary life and making sense of family conflicts. A chorus of online voices will invariably chime in to advise a woman wondering if she should return to her old flame and ditch her current, more

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[2] Used here as a gloss for any questions relating to feminine appearance, friendship, marriage, intimate relations, interpersonal problems, and sexuality and sexual orientation.

[3] While some might find the mix of advertising and focus on the new material goods and services of the contemporary Kazakhstani woman to be at odds with the overall structure of the blog to dispense user-curated advice, both of these interests engage with an imagined modern woman. Moreover, displays of materiality or consumption among Kazakhstani women could be viewed not as shallow, but as strategic, as women search for materially wealthy spouses as a means of guaranteeing stability in an uneasy economic climate. For an example of this strategic sentimentality among Russian women and American men in online matchmaking, see Patico 2009.

considerate love interest, commenting "one can't go into the same river twice" and "one can't mend a broken bowl" (for example, see Figure 2). Likewise, commenters counsel one another not to let men who "go to the left" (*khodiat na levo*; i.e. cheat by going to the left, or the wrong side of their marriage), and "hang noodles on their ears" (*veshit' lapshu na ushi*; i.e. lie to them and make a fool of them by presumably making them look silly) (See Figure 3).

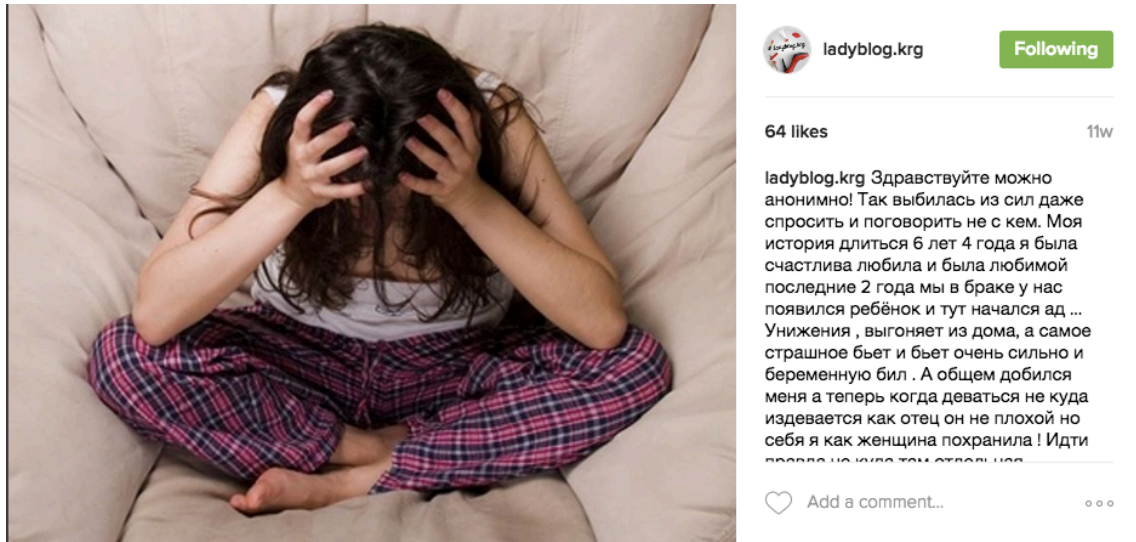Figure 1. June10: Careworn mother seeking advice on domestic violence

Figure 2. June22: Lovelorn asking for advice about an ex-boyfriend and jealousy

Figure 3. June38: Woman wondering how to move on from a relationship with a married man

The important role of Kazakh kinship structures, respect toward elders and in-laws, and other village customs is evident not only in the widespread use of traditional idioms, but also in the content of the family problems described. While 20 of the 67 (29%) posts on Ladyblog in June 2016 related to jealousy or adultery, 14 posts (20%) concerned issues of intergenerational conflict involving multi-generational living situations. Moreover, often those posts about in-law conflicts and housing overlapped with larger concerns regarding virginity and sexual mores and distribution of funds within the larger kin unit. Indeed, frequently women wrote in describing their wishes to live in nuclear family units and have their husbands prioritize them and their children over his natal family. The flip side of the argument occurred, too, where women would write in to complain about young brothers-in-law who had moved into their wives' family house were not fulfilling their kin obligations to their new in-laws by contributing to the family coffer while still reaping the benefits of living at the family house and eating communal food.

Thus, this subset of advice-seeking people also serves to highlight the cleavages between the contemporary romantic ideals of urban nuclear family structure with the customary kinship structure and family contract typical in Kazakh *aul* (villages). Moreover, as exemplified in the case study of Asel and Demirzhan's relationship which I take up below, the very structure of Ladyblog's online platform reflects changing life

patterns in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. As an Instagram account focused on personal maintenance as well as personal development and emotional support, women exchange tips on crafting themselves as modern women and exchange advice on how to find and keep desirable husbands. While there is an undercurrent of disdain for the widely perceived materialism that women display, in truth this can be read as contemporary women's pragmatic approaches to finding appropriate breadwinners and providers for their future households. In these contemporary circumstances, women must be more strategic in their sentimental entanglements (see Patico 2007), as they are expected to be responsible not only for the emotional and physical upkeep of the family, but also to be modern career women.

A Very Long Engagement: Asel and Demirzhan

Asel is a 27-year old married Muslim Kazakh woman who grew up in a strict and traditional Kazakh family, the middle daughter of three. She has pale skin and a round face with large dark brown eyes, and keeps her hair tied back in a tight ponytail. She was born in Karaganda, but moved to a smaller city in the southern Kazakhstan Jambul province, where she met her future husband when she was in her late teens. They were friends for three years, and courted for five years due to various obstacles, including Asel's pursuit of a master's degree in Kazakhstan's capital city, Astana. Currently, they live together in an apartment in Astana and are awaiting their first child. As Asel explains her relationship with Demirzhan, he fell in love with her at first sight, but for her "it came with time."

Asel was Demirzhan's first girlfriend, and although there were many girls around at the party where they met who were giving out their numbers, he only wanted hers. As a matter of fact, Asel refused to write her number down for him, but after she conceded to say it out loud (which she was sure he would forget), he proceeded to call her constantly. For the first three years of their friendship, they would meet up only about six times a year as "friends," either at cafes or in the library, where they would chat. While Asel and Demirzhan lived in the same city, they were constrained by her father's feeling of propriety and the fact that she was living with her parents and had strict curfews to meet only a few times a year. Asel described Demirzhan as educated and well-spoken (*gramotniy*), someone who was driven to succeed (*vezgde uspeval*), despite the fact that he came from a relatively small city and presumably had fewer prospects.

From the very start of their friendship, Demirzhan would tell Asel that he would "take her as [his] wife," but she would always jokingly put him off. Nonetheless, during their long initial acquaintance as friends, Asel only began to suspect that Demirzhan loved her when one day at a café he presented her with a balloon that said so in English. According to Asel, despite this, Demirzhan thought for a long time about asking her out, because he thought she would refuse him. What finally spurred him to action was Asel telling him she was planning to move away for her master's degree in a year's time. It had just turned midnight on April 1st, and since it was April Fool's Day, Asel wondered at first if Demirzhan was joking when he asked her out. Although at the time she wasn't completely sure of her feelings, Asel knew that she didn't want to lose Demirzhan even

as a friend, and that if she refused him, he would never speak to her again, so she agreed to date him.

When Asel and Demirzhan began dating, they quickly became serious. While they both were living in the same city, Asel only saw him once or twice a month. While generally couples might see each other a couple of times a week and go out to cafés for ice cream or coffee, or go to museums or the theatre together, this was not the case for Asel and Demirzhan. It was uncomfortable for her to ask her parents' permission to see him more frequentlyoften, and often her father would drop her off at 9 pm at the designated café and then pick her up by 11 pm. Since her father has three daughters, he was very protective of them while they were growing up and 'ticklish' about where they went. Since daughters typically live with their parents until they are married, Asel's father was always checking out which venues they were frequenting and making sure that they got back home safe.

It was clear, however, that Demirzhan was committed Asel, and he soon asked her to marry him. Since Demirzhan didn't have a car or a high-paying job at the time, often they would go and walk in parks. Parks are typically a low-cost way of dating – while modern dating often involves displays of wealth by taking girls out to expensive restaurants or driving them around the city, parks are public spaces in the city where young couples can wander around to get to know one another. Asel's friends would tease her and say "you must be in love with him, if you're going to the park!" and slowly she began to realize they were right. When Asel was younger, she had had more concrete ideas about what she wanted in a mate, including material welfare, but when she met Demirzhan, she changed her mind. "I think, that if there is education, then there will be a good salary and everything else! So one shouldn't worry about that too much. The most important thing is to love and support one another, and then everything else will work out. And isn't it the case that that wealth can go away at any time."

In Astana, Asel and Demirzhan met once or twice per week. Thus, during their long-distance and then close-proximity courtship, a "spark appeared" between them, and over their protracted courtship they "became tied" to each other – that's what love is, according to Asel. Having fallen in love and agreed to marry, however, Asel and Demirzhan faced a number of obstacles that prevented them from going through with their wedding for a number of years. First, Asel had to finish her master's degree. Then she had health problems, and subsequently he was in a car accident. Deaths of their elderly relatives then occured in each of their families whose mourning observances prevented marriage. Finally, after 5 years Asel and Demirzhan went through the wedding ceremony. Beforehand, however, they asked her older sister for permission to marry, since by tradition her sister should have been married first.

Asel was a virgin when she married, and according to the accounts in Ladyblog, virginity before marriage is still widely cherished. In a recent poll by Russian sociologists, 49% Kazakhstanis consider themselves religious,[4] while 36% are accepting of abortion, divorce, and premarital sex (Selina 2015). This puts Kazakhstan in a unique position

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[4] In Kazakhstan, the main religions are Islam and Russian Orthodox Christianity. However, perhaps due to extended Soviet rule, religious observance is usually limited to the celebration of particular holidays and dietary restrictions against pork (for Muslims).

among post-Soviet countries, where it straddles the mid line between the more liberal and secular countries of Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia and more religious and conservative countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus. While Ladyblog acknowledges that premarital sex happens and often features women seeking advice on extramarital sex, the commenters also frequently remark that it is best to maintain one's virginity (see Figure 4). So while there is acceptance, as Asel puts it:

> *Some people get hung up on this, but there are many different cases that can happen. Not everyone is able to maintain their virginity. For instance, there is rape in Kazakhstan – there is a lot of rape here. If a girl is raped somewhere or somehow, I don't know… in a bar or somewhere else where she and her friends went out. then no one will say that is a big shame [pozor] she has brought on herself. Here in a big city, like in Almaty – virginity is not judged and that's normal. Young couples, even those who I know who live here and are my girlfriends, - they lived together as a couple, and slept together. It was no big deal…I don't judge them because life has many different situations. The most important thing is that their husbands do not criticize them for that and don't beat them for it. In principle, as long as everything works out, let them do it if they want to.*

Figure 4. June45: Woman looking for advice on a one night stand she can't get over
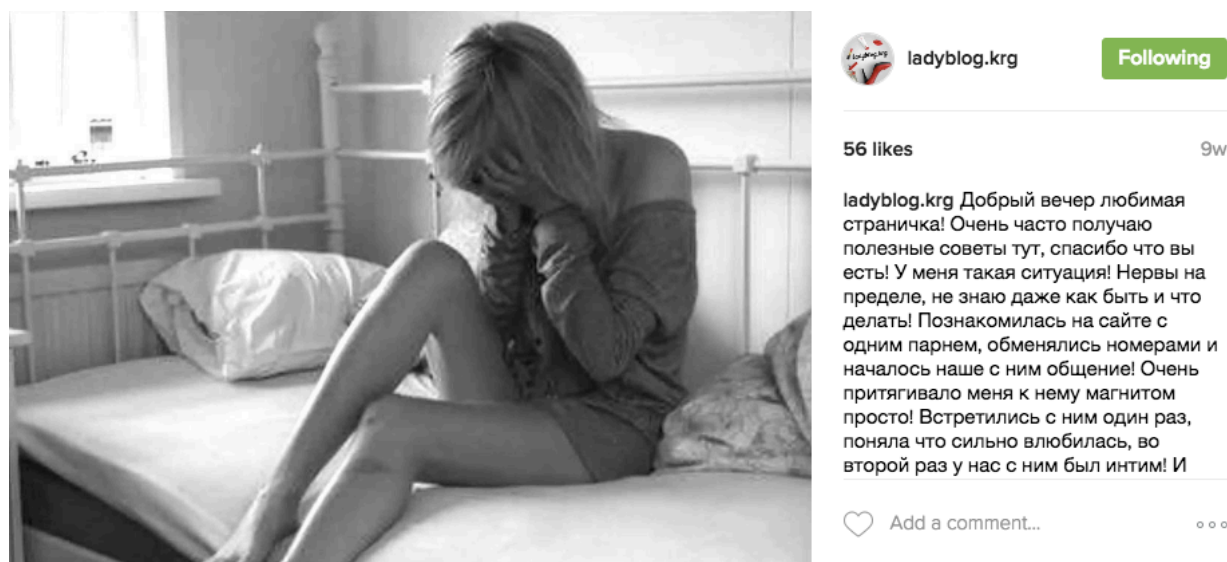
Now that Asel is married, she is considered a *kelin* (young bride), and must observe specific customs when she visits her in-laws' village. Although she does not otherwise, Asel wears a headscarf along with modest clothing when visiting her in-laws' *aul* – if she did not, the neighbors might disapprove of her demeanor and start gossiping. Asel's mother-in-law gave her permission not to wear the headscarf when in Asel's own house

or while traveling with her parents, but at her in-laws' house, she always wears it and performs the traditional obeisance of respect to her elders (*salem saluu*). Furthermore, out of respect for her in-laws, she will not visit them or her own parents until her pregnancy is over, because to appear before them 'with a belly' would be shameful and improper. As demonstrated, the opinions of elder kin have a great deal of weight, since Asel would have refused to get married without her sister's blessing.

Meanwhile, Asel's sister at 28 is in a dire situation, which is one reason why their parents still call to check in on her every day. Asel's sister Zhanara is highly educated and also lives in Astana. Zhanara, however, has few marriage prospects because her parents refuse to allow her to marry a divorced man, and there are few Kazakh men of her educational level and age cohort who remain unmarried. Asel avers that it is a necessity to marry within one's religion out of respect for customs, and not only within Islam, but specifically it is best to marry a Kazakh man if one is Kazakh, otherwise there will be national misunderstandings. In Zhanara's case, it goes without saying that she must marry a Kazakh man. When pressed, Asel explained that it wasn't so much that their parents wouldn't allow either her or her sister to marry a Russian, but that they themselves were against it, thus positioning Asel and Zhanara as examples of successful, modern, upwardly mobile, but nonetheless deeply pious Kazakh women.

As Asel relates, if one were to marry outside of one's ethnicity, even if it were within "Great Islam" (i.e. the Muslim faith, but of a different ethnicity), there could be the potential for big problems. For example, one of Asel's Kazakh friends married a non-Kazakh man who abuses her because she has two autistic children, and because they do not share an ethnic background, she cannot rely on the traditions of the extended kin network to restrain or modify his behavior. In yet another example of the heartbreak that may accompany an ethnically-mixed marriage, Asel related the story of another one of her friends, the result of a Kazakh-Russian union. When this friend's Kazakh mother died, her Russian paternal relatives came to the wake and offended all of the mourning Kazakhs by raucously drinking at the wake. As Asel says, "Russians may sit there and drink, and that, I don't understand. Because his wife died and one must respond to that with respect. And different religions do it differently. This is very difficult, I think." Although Kazakhstan has a large ethnic minority of Russians comprising 23.7% of the population (World Population Review 2016), substantial ethnic tension remains from the Soviet policy of promoting ethnic Russians within the government and giving preferential treatment to Russian cultural traditions, even within the ethnic republics.

Conclusion

In reflecting on her marriage, Asel echoed many of the statements made by various women writing in to Ladyblog – as she reflected, finding a mate can be difficult, especially with the material considerations of today and the necessity to find someone with a comparable level of education and employment. On the other hand, she admitted she has friends who are her age who are unmarried, but probably because they don't want to be, because of how hard it is:

Take me, for instance – it's good that I got married when I did, because if I were to have gone unmarried for another year, I probably wouldn't have wanted to get married. You lose your freedom when you're married, you have more responsibility, you need to give birth. You need to feed everyone. You need to watch after everyone. You need to cook food all of the time, and you need to have time to spend time looking after you husband. You need to constantly maintain harmony (derzhat' garmoniiu)*, to make sure that he doesn't leave you, doesn't cheat on you.*

It's very hard. With Kazakhs, for example – sometime a long time ago, for the most part women – I mean brides – they sat at home and were engaged in household tasks. They still do that in the auls*. The husband is the provider – he is the breadwinner (*kormilets) *of the house. But now it's fashionable – or maybe it's just like this now – that girls are all educated and they all work. This is the case with me – why did I get my master's degree? And I want to start my PhD. I can't sit at home. When you don't sit at home and also have a very difficult job – I work with autistic children – then come home and need to cook, do laundry, do the ironing, and please your husband (*muzhu ugodit'*). It's quite hard.* [laughs]

In contemporary Kazakhstan, women are both expected to take on the full load of household responsibilities, including childcare and satisfying one's husband, while juggling the needs of providing a second income and working outside the home. In order to maintain a contemporary household, there must be funds not only to support one's nuclear family, but one must also fulfill the traditional obligations toward one's natal family. In these cases, women are often judged as materialistic and as wanting too much from men for making strategic decisions regarding their potential spouses. In fact, the materialism that women are judged for is more a result of pragmatic decision-making, as modern women look for likewise modern and successful men to support them in their challenging roles in the high-paced workplace and as caring mothers and dutiful wives. Women are expected to do the laundry, cook, bear children, keep house, and work, and to do so while maintaining a pleasing appearance and harmonious demeanor.

Whereas during the Soviet era Kazakhstani women could rely on extensive state support for childrearing and maternity leave, now crumbling state-run maternity wards and employers reluctant to hire women because of long maternity leave policies pose additional challenges to hamper women's abilities to work outside the home. As Ashwin notes in her examination of love in the post-Soviet condition, "motherhood – is being redefined as a private institution and responsibility" (Ashwin 2000:20). Indeed, women face similar issues across the post-Soviet space – just as anthropologist Jennifer Patico noted among her Russian respondents in Moscow who sought American husbands via international matchmaking (Patico 2009), so also Kazakh women desire to set up house with "serious" men. As Patico notes, women in the post-Soviet condition emphasize "the creation of a better base of operations from which the continuing unpredictability of everyday life can be managed effectively" (Patico 2009:317). Thus, Kazakh women

struggle to find suitable mates and good earners by presenting themselves as model wives and simultaneously arm themselves against the vagaries of fate in an uncertain market by becoming highly educated and employable. However, even with relatively high female workforce engagement, the fact remains that middle income Kazakhstani women display the largest disparity in engagement in the workforce compared to middle income men, with a mere 48% to 78%, respectively (World Bank 2016b). Thus, high achieving upwardly mobile ethnic Kazakh women like Asel must carefully choose their husbands in order to fulfill their roles as mothers and position themselves as modern successful professionals. Asel works at a children's autism rehabilitation center where she complains that the hours are hard and the work is physically taxing, at the same time, she plans to pursue her PhD. Since she is pregnant, however, these plans will most likely be put on hold as she bears and raises her child.

If women fall behind on any of their responsibilities, they are to blame for straying or for provoking abusive husbands, raising insolent children, and disrespecting their in-laws and national customs. The collective female-centric advice echoes throughout the posts on Ladyblog: maintain your appearance, keep your husband fed and happy, and don't be shrewish; do all of the household work and be pleasant when your husband returns home, having a home-cooked meal for him, even if you have had no interaction that day except for the kids and he doesn't allow you out of the house alone. Even Asel, who appeared content and happy with her devoted husband and her child on the way, still relayed the fear that it was difficult to keep up with all of her work and please her husband. And yet, delaying marriage can also be problematic, since Kazakh women have narrow windows of opportunity to get married. Just as Asel and Demirzhan waited eight years to marry because of educational constraints and in order to be proper Kazakhs, thus Asel's sister Zhanara's marriage prospects become increasingly slim as she gets older. Despite these constraints, contemporary young pious Kazakh women like Asel demonstrate that young people are able to harness increased educational and employment mobility to stake out a position in the new middle class. Meanwhile, new technologies offer innovative means for women to build support networks and offer advice on the difficulties of being a modern Kazakhstani woman.

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Dating & Contemporary Iranian Youth: Between the Mirage of Love & the Burden of Commitment

Paniz Edjlali

Since Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979, the state has been trying to protect Iranian Muslim values against the influence of the West. Yet despite all its efforts, western culture and lifestyles have had a massive impact on the identities of young Iranians, particularly in recent years (Jafari 2007). Globalization and the availability of new social media and technology have supported "modern" ideas of individualism and self-actualization, especially among highly educated urban youth (Abbasi-Shavazi, Morgan, Hossein-Chavoshi & McDonald 2009). One notable impact of these globalized ideas is on how young people view courtship and marriage. According to the 1996 Census, age of first marriage has steadily increased and total number of marriages in Iran have dropped precipitously over the past decades. Eighty-nine percent of the population in the 15 to19 year-old group and 55% of the 20 to 24 year-old group were never married. (Basmenji 2013). These statistics demonstrate how the recent generation's views on and expectations of life and love have changed from previous generations. This paper explores precisely this group, young Iranian men and women between the ages of 25 to 30, who have come to the United States to advance their education and are hoping to stay. By focusing on their stories of romance, this paper

explores the impact of new ideals of individualism and personal achievement on young people's attitudes towards and perceptions of love, relationships, and commitment.

Over the past century, Iran has undergone significant sociocultural, economic, and political changes that have influenced the social and private lives of Iranians (Jafari 2007). The catalyst for many of these changes was the 1979 popular uprising against the long-standing Iranian monarchy which resulted in the formation of an Islamic republic. When Islamic hard-liners took control of the country, they first suppressed the secular liberals and the leftists who were competing for power and later ousted the Islamic liberals (Keddie 1995). Once they had established themselves and became recognized as the governing power, they began advocating for the protection of Shia Islamic values against the influence of Western culture identified as "Westoxification" and have continued to do so ever since (Chehabi and Keshavarzian 2007).

Yet despite all of the efforts of the Islamic regime, western culture and lifestyles have had a significant impact on the identities of young Iranians, particularly in recent years (Jafari 2007). The government has been unable to stem the tidal wave of new technology and social media that has inundated Iran, facilitating accessibility to globalized ideas regarding youth culture and social styles. Equally if not more important, the parental generation has not been in agreement with many of the Islamically-informed regulations put into place by the new regime. A majority of the parents of today's youth are in fact, the former participants and supporters of the 1979 uprising. They include leftists as well as both secular and Islamic liberals who have been disappointed by the outcome of the revolutionary struggle. Privately, they have raised their children according to a very different moral code than that promoted by the Iranian government. Young Iranians are themselves frustrated by continued political suppression and limitations on their rights and freedoms. According to the Iranian sociologist, Fatemeh Sadeghi, "this experience has led [young people] to be less political than their parents and to prefer to follow their personal interests" (Sadeghi 2008:259).

Despite the negative effects of the Islamic revolution, there have also been some positive developments which have occurred under the Islamic regime; among them, higher levels of education, continued urbanization, and an expanded "aspirational" middle class. Women have made particular gains. Women's involvement in the revolution was necessary for its success, therefore, the revolutionary leader Khomeini, encouraged their participation, and after the victory, he approved of women entering the public sphere. In the beginning, these opportunities were designed to direct women into particular domains and barriers were set to prevent them from entering other fields of employment (Ibid). Gradually though, under women's political lobbying these barriers were lifted and thanks to the joint work of Iranian women, Islamists and secularists, women's' equal rights have improved and continue to improve (Ibid).

A result of these and related developments, over the past decades the age of first marriage and total number of marriages in Iran have dropped consistently. According to the 1996 Census, Eighty-nine percent of the population in the 15 to19 year-old group

and 55% of the 20 to 24 year-old groups were reportedly never married (Basmenji 2003:20). These statistics suggest a radical shift in how the contemporary young people's practices, views, and expectations of life and love have changed from previous generations. Unhappy with the political and social situation in Iran and informed by globalized models of love and romance, educated urban youth aspire to ideals of individualism and self-actualization that were not previously seen in Iran (Shavazi et al. 2009). **In this paper, I explore how new ideals of individualism are shaping patterns of courtship and marriage among young educated urban Iranians by focusing on their struggle to balance these new notions of personhood within the realm of love and romance.**

This paper is based on in-depth interviews with twelve Iranian men and women who all came to the United States as students in pursuit of higher education and have been living here for over 3 years. They are all from middle and upper middle class urban backgrounds and although some came from religious families, they all claimed to be either atheist or agnostic. All of them indicate that they hope for an egalitarian marriage based on love and a romantic companionship in which individuality and authenticity are highly valued. All have postponed marriage in order to pursue an education and career abroad. My interviewees shared surprisingly similar attitudes about key issues such as sexual experimentation, dating, religiosity, and the preferred social class, family background, income, and educational level of their chosen partner. **In all cases, they expressed unrealistically high romantic expectations -- yet their desire to fulfill their life goals and to pursue their dreams have posed serious challenges to their long term relationships and in some cases has led to a cynical attitude towards love and its achievement.**

Helen: Love Means Putting the Other Person above Yourself

Helen is a beautiful 29-year-old Iranian getting a doctoral degree in dentistry in the northeast. Her family moved to Canada a couple of years ago from Iran and she moved to U.S shortly after for better education opportunity. She doesn't know if she wants to stay in the U.S or go back to Canada but she knows for sure that she doesn't want to return to Iran. She says she feels her family has made massive sacrifices to allow her to pursue her dreams and she is not willing to give them up. Helen is dating another dentistry student who is on a year-long program at a neighboring university. He will soon be finished with his program and will be going back to Iran. He wants Helen to go with him but she would like him to stay in the US with her. Helen had been in several relationships prior to this one and they each ended because one person had to move away for their career. In a discussion of love, she says:

> *Love really means to put the needs of the other person above you. You spend your time on them even if you are busy and you catch yourself doing things that you would never do for anyone else.*

> *But these days, young people are not willing to commit! They are not patient enough to work things out. That is the biggest difference between our generation and our parents' generation. Social media has had an important influence on the*

way people love these days. It depicts this image of how you should love. Everybody keeps comparing their relationships to others on social media and they are always dissatisfied with what they have. And cheating has become so much easier because you just meet people online. Love has become so shallow... It's really sad.

Helen went on to talk about her current relationship with uncertainty and questioned the nature of it. She sees marriage as the end goal of a relationship knowing that it might happen, or it might not. Except, when you don't know if your partner's future plans will match with yours, how can you invest so much of yourself in the relationship? Even though ambivalent towards their intention and direction of the relationship, Helen was not willing to break it off and said, "We shall see what happens."

Arezoo: Madly in Long Distance Love

Arezoo has also met someone and is "madly in love" but she too indicates that her desires for self-advancement and achievement are primary. Arezoo is 27 and moved to the US 8 years ago to continue her education. She is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in psychology at a highly regarded university in Washington D.C. Arezoo met someone a year ago and they fell in love. Unfortunately, he had to move away not long after. The couple has continued their relationship even though Arezoo never thought long distance relationships could work.

> *I wanted my partner to be my best friend and to walk by my side as we help each other grow and reach our goals and dreams. That's why I love my boyfriend. He is THE one! I see a happy future with him. Instead of thinking oh now I won't get to do all the things I want to do, travel to places I want to see or try to turn my dreams into reality because this other person will say I'm crazy and discourage me, he has allowed me to be free in my imagination. He gets excited about my plans. He is so supportive of me and allows me to work towards becoming the person I want to become and that means the world to me. I always felt so limited in my previous relationships and hated the idea of marriage because it seemed like the end of MY OWN life, but with Rayan, it seems like the beginning.*

Arezoo complained about how difficult it is to be in a long distance relationship, so I asked if she'd ever give up her Ph.D. program to go and live with her boyfriend. Interestingly (despite her professions of love for him), her reply was, "never."

> *I would never give up my own career and wouldn't expect him to do it either. In fact, I would lose interest in him if he expected that of me or did that for me. We are supposed to help each other to become the best version of ourselves… not to have a destructive love affair.*

Hamid: Love & Sacrifice

Hamid is also in a long distance relationship and complains about how difficult it is. He is a 27-year-old young Iranian professional. Hamid came to the U.S almost four years

ago to get his masters in computer science. After he got his degree a year ago, he started working at a Tech startup in Boston and is now making a six-figure salary. Hamid has been in a long distance with his girlfriend, Ava, for two and a half years now, though she lives in New York so they see each other relatively often (every 2-3 weeks or so). Hamid told me:

> I'm in love with my girlfriend and I'd do anything to make her happy. But I feel like there is something, not wrong, but… So she has studied fine arts and she needs to stay in NYC because that's the place to be for arts, and I can't move there because I work in this Tech company in Boston and I'm on visa; I can't move to New York whenever I decide. But this has been going on for 2 and half years now! That is not a short amount of time for one of us to decide to move to be together. It's something else… I feel like we are the kind of people that want to be in a relationship, but don't want to be in a relationship (laughing). Like now we are mentally in this relationship but I'm living my own life and she's living her own life. I think at the end of the day we both prioritize other things before our relationship.

> I don't want her to move to Boston because I know that it's best for her to stay where she is and I'm looking for a job in NYC but I'm looking for a job that I really like! Not just an okay job. I think about my career and my life and she does the same. It makes sense. It's been fine in our relationship to be like this and I don't think it is a bad thing. I think every relationship should be in a way that you don't sacrifice EVERYTHING. But it's hard.

Amir: Love and Cynicism

Amir articulates a similar focus on self-advancement and career mixed with what seem to be unrealistically high expectations with regard to love and romance. Amir is a 26 year old PhD student of Aerospace at a reputable University in Atlanta, Georgia. He moved to the US when he was 21 to pursue his masters and stayed to continue his education. Amir's brother had come to the US several years before Amir for education and later got his Green Card through his job. Amir would like to do the same. Amir comes from a traditional and religious family, but he emphasized that he is neither. He has a great sense of humor and talked with considerable passion.

> When I asked Amir about love, he said excitedly:

> Love is when you are in your mansion and suddenly you discover that there is a new door in it, so you open it and explore it and then… you just want to put everything that you've got in that one room! You want to align everything with that person. Your work and family and EVERYTHING! It takes a lot of sacrifices… a lot of devotion.

He then went on to tell me his one and only love story. He fell in love with one of her classmates, Yalda, in university in Iran. He tried so many different ways to approach her, but it always failed. Finally, he got up the courage to approach her, but she rejected him. The following year they were in the same class and they had to do a group project.

Amir made sure he was in the same group as Yalda. After a while, Yalda warmed up to him and soon after they became a couple. Amir said their love was so pure, so out of this world, and full of energy. They wanted to get married after they finished their studies, but right around that time, he got an acceptance letter from a university in the US. Yalda had applied and got accepted as well. They were supposed to come to US together, but Yalda's mother fell very ill and Yalda didn't want to leave her alone. She stayed back in Iran. For 2 years, they skyped non-stop and Amir wanted to go back after his master's degree to marry her. Except then he was accepted into a very good Ph.D. program and everyone told him that he should not let go of this opportunity. Yalda couldn't handle being in a long distance relationship any longer and thought Amir was being very selfish so after a couple months of constant fighting, they broke up.

After telling me his story, Amir added:

We live in a modern era where science has changed the way we understand and perceive things. We now associate love with hormones but in previous generations love was associated with something divine and sacred. Putting it on a spectrum, it was more close to religion than something logical and justifiable. Also, individualism is growing and people are becoming more selfish. 'YOLO[5] mentality is spreading so you want to get the most out of your life and you are less willing to sacrifice. Love used to be something holy and heavenly, but now it's become earthly and human.

This sort of thinking has made Amir somewhat cynical towards love and marriage in general. Amir is stuck within a paradox between love and self-actualization. He regards love as a holy phenomenon that requires so much sacrifice and devotion but then when it comes down to it, he did not in fact sacrifice himself and his future to be with Yalda, who he considered his one and only true love. The inconsistency between the imagined love versus the practical love leads to feelings of ambiguity, frustration, and cynicism towards love and courtship in general, which Amir expressed in his interview.

A Romantic Disconnect

The new kind of egalitarian expectation among Iranian youth, in which both parties are recognized as equals and their life goals and careers are equally as important, is resulting in a new type of relationship that is based on individuality and mutual understanding. However, there seems to be a disconnection between how young people view love and romance and how they practice it. My respondents upheld **selflessness, sacrifice, and intimacy** as the ideals for love and romance. According to them, love is validated through selflessness and acts of sacrifice, the authenticity of one's relationship and individuality of one's partner are to be celebrated, and intimacy has become the bedrock of this new form of partnership communicated through romance. The romantic idolization of the beloved expressed in phrases like "s/he is made for me," "s/he is different/unique from other people," and "completely irreplaceable," came up repeatedly in respondents' stories. These features are perceived as markers of true love and what distinguishes a love relationship from casual dating. These are the elements that make the relationship precious.

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[5] You only live once.

In their love stories, however, my respondents expressed inconsistencies in their stated beliefs regarding love and the way they actually practiced it in their relationships. In reality, all of my interviewees put their own self-advancement above their love and their beloved. Schielke theorized that people could embody different moral registers that delineate perfectionist promises while being inconsistent and even contradictory to one another (Schielke 2015). This is very descriptive of my interviewees. The sample of young Iranians that I interviewed with had all came to the United States in order to advance their education but also to stay. They had left their families, friends, and memories behind and took upon the hardship of moving to another country and try to fit in within in a different culture all by themselves in hopes of a better chance of self-actualization. They all romanticized about a love that would enhance their personal advancement rather than it being the object of their pursuit and at times their equal desire for love and personal realization came at a crossroad.

Conclusion

In general, there seems to be a disconnection in the way contemporary Iranian youth perceive love than how they practice it. Based on my small sample of urban upper middle-class and highly educated Iranian youth in the U.S, I argue that modernization and the changes it has brought has created a new dilemma for youth. Young people are self-ascribing to two sets of moral registers that are often in tension: love (focusing on the beloved) and self-realization (focusing on the self). Stuck between the burden of committing to their beloved and their obligation to themselves to fulfill their own potential, many place their own life goals first, which has let many, like Amir, to develop a cynical attitude towards courtship and love; denying its possibility altogether.

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Moroccan Romance 2.0: Upholding Traditional Religious and Gendered Norms in the Digital Era

Jessica Lambert

A modern emphasis on romantic love and companionate marriage has become a central theme in young urban Moroccan's stories of courtship. Just two generations ago, sex-segregation and arranged marriage were the norm and pre-marital contact was limited and supervised. Few scholars have examined in depth how greater access to education and changing social mores as well as the widespread availability of cell phones and internet access, have affected young Moroccan ideals of romance, dating, and marriage. This paper addresses the influence of these social transformations on young people's search for a marriage partner, with special attention to the trajectory of romance from initial contact to formal commitment. Using the life stories of twelve educated young people living in urban Morocco, I examine the roles of religion, community norms, and shifting gender expectations on youth dating culture. Despite dramatic educational and social transformations, I find that -- in contrast to the situation in some other Asian and Middle Eastern contexts -- these young Moroccans are not questioning the institution of marriage. Although young Moroccans are delaying marriage and marriage rates are declining (especially among the educated), marriage nonetheless remains a cherished ideal. Instead of rejecting marriage, young Moroccans are using new social and educational opportunities and new forms of technology to frame marriage within religious and community norms as both highly gendered and

complementary.

Mounir and Laila have been dating for almost five years and text each other constantly; she films her commute, he takes selfies while drinking coffee, they send voice messages with updates on school and family, and share stock images they find on Tumblr and social media sites of couples traveling, hiking in the woods, or canoeing in mountain lakes.[6] Mounir says they often talk about traveling the world together and that they share a dream of "running away together to volunteer teaching English in Africa."

Mounir is 23 years old and lives in Rabat, the capital city of Morocco. Mounir laughs frequently and jokes around, but at several points during our conversation he takes an earnest and thoughtful tone. Mounir shows me photos of Laila on his phone. In one photo, she is wearing bright red lipstick. Her dark hair is cut in a modern style, buzzed on the sides and slightly longer on top, swooping down over her forehead. She is stunningly beautiful.

Laila is also 23 years old. They met during their first year at university because they were both in the English Department and shared the same class schedule. Laila is Moroccan but her family moved to Saudi Arabia when she was young. After graduating from university in Morocco, she moved back to Saudi Arabia to be with her family. Mounir says that the long-distance relationship has been hard, but that they still see each other regularly. They are not engaged, but Mounir calls Laila 'my future wife' and 'my partner' and talks about their future married life.

Based on my interviews with Mounir and other young Moroccans, it is clear that marriage remains a cherished goal among youth, one that is reinforced by cultural norms and religious values. Morocco is now awash in technology with 119 cell phones per 100 people and over 55% of Moroccans regularly accessing the internet (UNICEF, 2012). Rather than eroding marital ideals, however, I claim that technology is being used by Moroccan youth to support the development of more romantic, companionate relationships as well as supporting a renewed interest in a more normative Islam. And although women have gained new legal and social rights as well as greater access to education, I argue that these new relationships are still aligned with religious and cultural norms.

The Role of Religion

Morocco is a Muslim country, and although it is often perceived to be more liberal than other Muslim countries (Charrad, 2001), Moroccans hold many traditional religious and cultural values (Geertz, 1971). Although education and access to technology are often interpreted as liberalizing factors, they have supported the interest among young Moroccans in more normative forms of Islam. Mounir is an example of how this renewed interest in Islam plays a role in young peoples' lives. Mounir and the eleven other young people I interviewed for this research are from lower and lower-middle class

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[6] Names and some identifying details have been changed to protect respondents' privacy.

backgrounds, which are particularly influenced by religious discourse in Morocco. Most young Moroccans have applications on their phones to read Qur'an and hadith and for prayer time reminders. If prayer time falls during the middle of class, at least seven or eight phones will play the call to prayer, each phone slightly off sync with the others.

Mounir grew up in Rabat and is the youngest of five children. He was popular in high school and played basketball, went to parties, and had a lot of friends. Girls were drawn to Mounir and he said that he liked "having fun" but was uncomfortable with the peer pressure to date and would push girlfriends away if things got serious. In his last year of high school Mounir began to think more deeply about his faith. After studying the Qur'an independently Mounir became very religious and describes religion as "foundational" to every aspect of his life.

When he enrolled in the English Department at university and met Laila, he was intrigued by her from the beginning. She was more modest than the other female students and often spoke more formally. Laila avoided shaking hands with male students and wouldn't greet them with a kiss on the cheek, as many of the other female students did. She also didn't speak the Moroccan dialect of Arabic very well and used more standardized, formal Arabic, since she'd grown up in Saudi Arabia. Mounir noticed that even once she became more comfortable in Moroccan dialect, she used a lot phrases invoking God in her everyday speech.

Other Moroccan girls he'd met tried to distance themselves from religion to appear cool, but for Mounir, Laila's dedication to religion was an important part of their relationship. Mounir and Laila dated all through college and even after they graduated, but they hit a few rough patches. One of the things Mounir loves about Laila is that she has strong opinions. During a fight, Mounir saw a picture of Laila on Instagram wearing a veil and was surprised. When they first met in college, she kept her hair short in a pixie cut and even when she was in Saudi Arabia with family, she didn't usually post pictures of herself wearing a veil. Mounir called Laila immediately to ask her if she had decided to start covering. Laila explained that yes, she had been rethinking her position on veiling and had decided to start wearing hijab. It was a decision in part related to her upbringing in Saudi Arabia as well as a sign of her religious principles.

Nonetheless, for Laila to transition from a pixie cut, which is extremely rare in Morocco and an indication of her modernity and stylishness, to wearing a veil was a drastic change. During Mounir and Laila's discussion Laila said she didn't mind Skyping or chatting with Mounir while not wearing her veil; he had seen her previously and this was a decision she made that would affect outsiders, not Mounir. However, Mounir took a more rigid stance and told Laila he didn't want her to show him her hair anymore. If she was going to wear hijab, Mounir wanted Laila to wear her veil in front of him, since they weren't married yet. He also planned to delete the pictures Laila sent in which her hair was showing. Nevertheless, Mounir kept a few pictures of Laila without her hijab and showed them to me during our interview.

Religion plays a large role in respondents' choices of potential marriage partners. Eleven of twelve respondents described themselves as religious or very religious. Several respondents directly connected religious belief to good morals and being a good person, citing "a good understanding of religion" as the foundation for their lives.

Many indicated their knowledge of and tolerance for Judaism and Christianity, but when asked about dating outside of their faith said that "it would definitely be easier to marry another Muslim," and "I don't think I could marry a non-Muslim." Even when they were exposed to other religious beliefs through university education or individual research, Islam was a central part of their lives and a guiding force in their search for a partner. For many young people, especially those in long-distance relationships, the widespread use of technology did not impede or erode their religiosity, but became a mechanism for deeper conversations about religion and their beliefs.

Gender Shifts

Over the past several decades, women's status in Morocco has changed legally and socially. Through large-scale legal reforms, Moroccan women have more rights with regards to marriage, divorce, child custody, and dowry payments (Charrad, 2001). Sex-segregation in public spaces has lessened, and while women and men still maintain some traditional gendered divisions of space (Kapchan, 1996), there are many more opportunities for men and women to interact, particularly in the classroom and on university campuses.

Due to rising rates of education among young women (World Bank, 2014) and campaigns against early marriage, young people are getting married much later (HCP, 2010). Although young people are delaying marriage, the expectation that children will quickly follow after a couple gets married is still firmly in place. Several female respondents specifically mentioned wanting to get married at a later age in part to delay having children.

Through public awareness campaigns (Sadiqi, 2008) and access to higher education, young people are aware that women's status in Morocco has changed. Interestingly, both male and female respondents mentioned women's equal rights, specifically with regards to choosing a marriage partner, the right to education, and the power to negotiate family matters with their future partner. Two female respondents indicated their interest in getting a Master's degree in in gender studies, while one male and one female respondent stated they were feminists and believed in women's full equality.

Many of the female respondents discussed the importance of working after marriage. While their mothers hadn't necessarily worked or continued to work after marriage, these young women mentioned maintaining their independence, having a career, and achieving their own goals. Another woman I spoke with, Fatima, is 22 and extremely conservative. Fatima met her fiancé Yassine through Facebook last year. They began chatting in a public group for English speakers in Morocco and switched to sending private messages. Almost immediately, it was clear they were in a relationship and it was serious. Within a week, they met in person even though Yassine lived in a different city. He was going to the UAE for a year-long work contract but came to meet with Fatima for an hour on his way to the airport. They keep in touch daily via Facebook and WhatsApp and are planning to marry next month. Fatima and Yassine talk about religion, values, their future family, and send regular messages to one another – she likes watching animal videos.

However, they disagree on one subject: Yassine doesn't want her to work after they get married. Fatima said she doesn't want to "waste her education" and that she wants to teach for several years. Fatima was determined not only to marry Yassine but to find a way to work after they got married. She admitted to me that she might end up taking several years off to have children but that she would go back to work after they entered kindergarten. She was confident she and Yassine would work out their differences. Fatima told me that "divorce is not an option" and that she wasn't worried about it – they would negotiate a solution after marriage.

Nonetheless, the male respondents maintained the importance of being able to provide for their future wives. When Mounir discussed his plans for the future, he said he wants to marry Laila but that he would have to wait until he is able to support the two of them financially. Mounir's cited the Qur'an to explain this, saying "*ar-rijālu qawwamūna ʿala - n-nisāʾi bimā faḍḍala - llāhu baʿḍahum ʿala baʿḍin wa bimā ʾanfaqū min ʾamwālihim …*" ("Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women)) (The Qur'an, *An-Nisa 4:34*).[7]

His use of the Qur'an to describe his relationship to Laila and his responsibility to provide for her emphasizes the importance of Islam in structuring their relationship. This particular verse of the Qur'an has been used to justify both men's power over women and their responsibility for their wives and female relatives. This interpretation, which is predominant in Morocco, states that women and men have complementary roles in society and in their relationship to one another. It is used to define separate but not equal rights for women and men under legal codes that draw from Islamic law.

All of the respondents discussed gendered norms of behavior in relationships and gendered stereotypes about dating in Morocco. For example, respondents noted critically that women aren't supposed to send the first text message or to call the man first, and that women are perceived to be both more talkative and more sensitive. Ten of the twelve respondents also avoided the topic of premarital sex, instead opting to discuss public displays of affection.

They argued that taboos around premarital sex and public affection are still much more strongly held for women than for men, which supports Dialmy (2014) and Davis and Schaefer-Davis (1995)'s work in rural and urban areas. They maintained that sex before marriage was not acceptable within Islam and that sex should only happen between a man and a woman in the context of marriage. While dating, holding hands was sometimes accepted, depending on the location and time of day but anything more was taboo. One respondent mentioned his discomfort at seeing his sister holding hands with a guy in the street. He said he got upset and confronted the guy, embarrassing his sister in the process.

As for marriage, the majority of respondents stated they wanted their relationship to be equal. However, respondents openly discussed jealousy, problems with trust, and poor communication skills as frequent problems in their relationships. When Mounir and Laila

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[7] This verse and its meaning is highly contested, particularly among feminist scholars of Islam. For more, see Kecia Ali's arguments in *Sexual Ethics in Islam* or Amina Wadud's *Qur'an and Women*.

fought, she regularly blocked his social media accounts, screened his phone calls, and deleted his emails. In order to get in touch with her during one of their fights, Mounir created a new Twitter account specifically to send Laila a direct message and threatened to call her father and tell him about their relationship if she didn't respond to him. She responded immediately, terrified that her parents would find out about their relationship. When Mounir told the story he laughed about it, but at other times, he spoke seriously about the need for good communication and trust in their relationship. Other respondents discussed similar instances of blackmail or coercion, and several admitted to going through a partner's emails and text messages to ensure they were faithful. In young Moroccans' relationships, distrust and jealousy are common themes and several respondents discussed friends who had been cheated on, although none reported personal stories.

Despite their changes in attitude and theoretical discussion of gender norms and stereotypes, the majority of respondents still conformed to traditional expectations of how Moroccan men and women should behave with one another – at least publicly, as anthropologist Rachel Newcomb has described elsewhere (Newcomb 2009). While they were willing to spend time in mixed gender groups, couples spent alone time secretly, they didn't share plans with family members or other friends, and often lied about where they were going. While 4 of the male respondents lived in independent apartments, the rest lived with their families and did not disclose their relationship status or how often they went out on dates, instead preferring to discuss group outings and their classes at the university.

Moreover, these twelve young Moroccans all planned to choose their partners for themselves. None of the respondents said that they would accept an arranged marriage. They were quick to emphasize that this was not a criticism of their parents' marriages; ten of twelve respondents said their parents had happy marriages and were a good match, but that they would not be interested in meeting in the same way their parents did. However, almost all were amenable to a type of semi-arranged match in which family members would suggest a potential partner, but the individual would have the final say over whether or not the set-up would lead to marriage. Several female respondents mentioned being proposed to in this way, but none had accepted – these suitors had not been a good fit.

Conclusion

These respondents are representative of the dramatic demographic shifts that have taken place in Morocco related to urbanization, greater access to education, the introduction of new technology, and important legal changes – shifts identified by scholars as transformative of courtship and marriage. Distinct from previous generations, they date and interact with each other both socially and via a variety of social media. None of the respondents was a member of an online dating site, but all of them extensively used Facebook, WhatsApp, Skype, Instagram, and Twitter to communicate with their significant others, and five respondents had met previous or current partners online without having any friends in common.

As they live with families and other students or shared rooms with siblings, young Moroccans consequently rely on texting, chatting applications, and voice messages to communicate with one another. These technological innovations allow relationships to flourish when partners live in different cities, regions, or countries. Several respondents chatted with multiple prospective partners at once, trying to find the best option available.

However, traditional Moroccan norms around dating and marriage are still at work in these technologically informed relationships. Mounir, Fatima, and several others explicitly mentioned the Qur'an and religious values as important parts of a serious relationship, and framed a good partnership as one with complementary roles for husband and wife as defined in Islam. Every respondent planned to marry someone they loved, and valued the stable, loving relationships they saw in their communities. Higher education has given respondents a broader set of references with which to articulate marital ideals and technology has allowed long-distance relationships to flourish. Nonetheless, these young Moroccans are maintaining traditional religious and community values in their search for a marriage partner.

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A Strange Kind of a Relationship
New Possibilities for Thinking about and Experiencing Love in Urban North India

Jennifer Koester

This paper is an exploration of how contemporary, urban, middle-class and upper caste Hindu and Sikh women[8] in North India navigate new opportunities to create, explore, and (in some cases) experience love and romantic relationships. New opportunities include both the geographical (co-educational schools, universities, and workplaces) and the technological (dating/marriage websites, mobile phones, and social media). Through the presentation of the love stories of several urban, middle-class women in Jaipur, Rajasthan, I examine the different ways contemporary Indian women are shifting their expectations for relationships and marriage in light of these new opportunities. At the same time, these young women must navigate potential conflicts between their "modern" expectations and the realities of family and community norms. The result is often a cultural hybrid, with "traditional" courtship being achieved via social media or through consultation with a formally educated and trained astrologer who utilizes computer software to chart her clients' charts. Similarly, new ways to talk about love are often in English or inspired by international media, yet are adapted to the urban Indian context. While focused on urban, middle-class and aspiring-middle class young women, my data nonetheless demonstrates that although all express familiarity with the changing possibilities for understanding and experiencing love (especially before marriage), not all of these

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[8] In this paper, I refer to most of the individuals as (young) women or men when I am writing, but when I reference the words of the individuals with whom I spoke with, I use boys and girls or men and women based on their usages.

women have access to the same possibilities for its achievement. This especially true for women whose families are most concerned with caste, although issues of caste and religion are of concern for all of the women discussed in the paper.

Contemporary, urban, middle-class and upper caste Hindu and Sikh women in North India are navigating new opportunities to create, explore, and (in some cases) experience love and romantic relationships. New opportunities include both the geographical (co-educational schools, universities, and workplaces) and the technological (dating/marriage websites, mobile phones, and social media). While anxious to take advantage of these new developments, young women in North India are nonetheless mindful of potential conflicts between "modern" expectations and the realities of family and community norms. The result is often a cultural hybrid, with "neo-traditional" forms of courtship being achieved via social media or through consultation with a formally educated and trained astrologer who utilizes computer software to chart her clients' charts. Similarly, new ways to talk about love are often in English or inspired by international media, yet are adapted to the urban Indian context. Although all young women express familiarity with the changing possibilities for understanding and experiencing love (especially before marriage), not all of these women have the same prospects for its achievement, especially those women whose families are concerned with caste.

Through the presentation of the love stories of several urban, middle-class, high caste women in Jaipur, Rajasthan, this paper examines the different ways contemporary North Indian women are shifting their expectations for relationships and marriage in light of new social and economic possibilities. It is important to point out that North India is distinct from South India in significant ways. A result in part of radically different historical trajectories, the South is culturally, economically, religiously, and linguistically differentiated from the North Indian states. Sikhs are relatively rare in the South, but common in Punjab in North India and found in other states in North India (although in low numbers). North Indians themselves view the South as relatively more "modern." They point, for example, to the fact that South has historically been more accepting of women working in various public sectors and pursuing advanced educations. One expression of this different social and cultural trajectory is that the possibility for romantic relationships emerged much earlier in South India for women and men (Lukose 2009). In recent years, economic transformations in South India have allowed women to make even more significant gains in employment with the expansion of new industries, often in technology like call centers.

North India, by contrast, is imagined as more traditional with regard to gender norms and practices. Nonetheless, in recent decades, similar changes historically experienced in the South are beginning to occur in the North. Women are increasingly finishing school, attending college and even graduate programs; they socialize outside of the home and educational settings; and they are now taking on employment outside of the home. Anthropologist Nancy Netting, writing about her recent field research in Gujarat (the North Indian state close to Rajasthan), argues that as a result of these and other developments, many young, North Indian youth are pursuing egalitarian, loving

relationships within a companionate marriage. They are doing so, however, within the structure of traditional courtship and marriage.

> Empowered by high education, fluency in 21st-century communication, and professional careers promising affluence and prestige, they [young people] confidently enter negotiations with their parents. With their commitment to guard against unchecked emotion, match horoscopes, and bring a bride into her husband's family, youths show they will preserve family continuity. In return, parents increasingly allow youths to choose their own partners, provided these are presented to parents for approval. Youths have committed themselves to support their parents and their families' cherished customs while maintaining a conjugal partnership that is intimate, egalitarian, and loving. These results complement those from earlier studies, which also found couples combining hegemonic and romantic values (Netting 2010: 721-2).

My discussions with young women in Jaipur, reflect and complement Netting's findings. These women want caring, romantic relationships, approved of and accepted by their parents. In those cases in which young women had fallen in love with someone of whom their parents did not approve, the women were willing to drop their love interest in favor of a parentally approved match. Increasingly, however, there are those who hope and believe that their parents will come to accept their chosen partner, like Kavita, whose case I take up below.

Finding Love at School or College: New Educational Opportunities lead to New Romantic Possibilities

North Indian love matches reflect David Lipset's findings on love among young people in the United States. Citing Bourdieu, Lipset argues that love "is not subject-centered, but is rather the work of class endogamy" (Lipset 2015:164). The women in my research most often find their boyfriends within their social group, their school,[9] college, or through friends. Kavita, for example, is a 19-year-old student at an all girls' college in Jaipur, who attended a coeducational school. Kavita is Hindu and relatively high caste; her family is from Jaipur. She is finishing her last year of a BA in Business Administration. Her first dating experience was with one of her best friends from school, during their last year of school. Before he asked her out, they had spent time together, eating together and going to the movies. This led to him asking her out, or "proposing" to her, saying "I really love you and want you to be my girlfriend" at a mutual friend's birthday party.

Kavita says she and her boyfriend Ajay kiss and hold hands, but they do not go further. Kavita once tested Ajay by telling him that she "wanted to lose control" (meaning engage in sexual intimacy of some sort), but he responded by saying that he felt they should wait until after they were married to have sex. If their parents learned about it, he

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[9] Most Indians of this class and caste group will attend English medium, private, non-state schools, which are also selections toward class exclusivity.

said, they would feel guilty for not having raised their children to know better. Kavita reported that Ajay had successfully "passed her test." She pointed out that he also supports her education, something critical in her view. She says a boyfriend should be "someone who supports us, who forces us to work hard." Like Kavita's parents, her boyfriend agrees that education for women is important. I will elaborate on their relationship and their relationship with her parents below. The couple hopes to marry, but must overcome Kavita's father's objections based on Ajay's caste,[10] which is somewhat lower than Kavita's family (as mentioned above—castes are often endogamous and intercaste marriage is usually highly discouraged especially if it involves hypogamy by women—see section below on Finding Love Online) ("Flight from Marriage").

Unlike many of their mothers, the young women I interviewed attended school until they graduated and then went on to college. By staying in coeducational schools, contemporary North Indian women have ample opportunities to interact with males outside of their families even after they had reached puberty. This is the time when traditionally girls were expected to stay at home and learn homemaking—including cooking, cleaning, and childcare—from their mothers. Yet, the women I interviewed have continued their educations beyond high school; some are pursuing or have pursued advanced degrees. They are strongly encouraged and supported by their families and especially by their fathers. Some of these young women also plan to go on and work (although their jobs may be concluded at marriage by their husbands or in-laws as discussed below). Neetu is glad that it is taking time for her sister-cousin to marry, "I am happy because I don't want to get married so early." She is thinking about working in tourism or possibly joining the army after college. Many of her relatives have been in the armed forces. Several of her sister-cousins are in the Air Force.

Kavita's father is very supportive of her education; he told her that she can wait to marry until she has finished her undergraduate degree and can even go on to pursue her dream of obtaining an MBA. Saanya, a 21-year-old, high caste Hindu[11] and a student in her third year of a BA/MA in engineering at the University of Rajasthan, has similarly experienced a great deal of family support. She was permitted to go to a school outside of her village in Haryana when she was a child. It required that she take a bus and then walk three kilometers to school every day. When she entered college, her brother brought her from the village to Jaipur, where she lives with six other girls in an all-girls hostel. Her parents say that she can wait to marry while she finishes her degree, which will take another six years, but that after that she will need to marry and not wait until she spends some years working. Whether she will be allowed to work after marriage will be up to her in-laws, a common situation for many Indian women. In return for their support of her education, Saanya trusts her family's ability to find her a good and caring husband.

Importance of Caste

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[10] The Varna system lists four caste categories, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishya, and Shudra. Jatis are subcaste categories. When discussing caste, one can refer to the varna system, jatis, or subcastes. All can be endogamous.

[11] Brahmins are the top caste in the Varna system. See footnote 3.

Even though there are many more opportunities to meet, socialize with, and date men for young middle-class North Indian women, relationships are not always possible and many times these relationships do not work out, especially as a result of caste. Neetu is from a high caste Hindu Rajput[12] family. She is twenty and is in the third and last year of her BA in business administration in a girl's college. She is attracted to boys and has started dreaming about them, but is not dating -- mainly because her parents will not allow her to have a boyfriend. In her last few years of school, Neeta's friend reported that four or five boys started "proposing to" Neeta (which is a common way for North Indian young people to say that a boy asked a girl to date him exclusively and that he loves her). Other boys, she said, were "crazy for Neetu" and if Neetu talked to them, they would propose. Neetu's parents were upset when they heard this and now explicitly forbid Neetu from dating. They argue that if "boys see that girls are dating or going with boys (especially of other castes) there will be issues with their future wedding," which must be with a suitable member of their caste.

Even when young women meet someone from their own caste, parents may not agree with their choice. Neetu's sister-cousin[13] started secretly dating a boy from her caste, a Rajput,[14] who was very wealthy. Yet, despite the caste and class match, her parents did not allow her to date him. The couple did so anyway, in secret. When neighbors learned about their secret relationship, they told her parents, who punished her. Her family didn't approve of the young man's family and did not want the relationship to jeopardize her future arranged marriage. Note that it is not just the women of the family who are not allowed to date; Neetu's brother is also forbidden from dating. It is expected that Neetu will marry a wealthy Rajput (chosen by her family), sometime after her sister-cousin marries.

New Leisure Spaces for Youth Socializing

The young women in my study utilize newly opened cosmopolitan spaces in exploring "modern" romantic possibilities. Spaces like cafés, malls, western style restaurants, and movie theaters allow young people to meet and socialize outside of the home and school and without parental oversight. These coeducational spaces are increasing in response to growing middle class demand. Before these spaces opened up there were few respectable places for young men and women to meet, especially those from the middle and upper class. Youths could meet at street side stalls like chai stalls, but those spaces are very public. They also attract a very mixed class, caste, and gender clientele making them somewhat undesirable or even impermissible for young high caste women. Couples could and still do meet in public parks, especially those looking for physical and sexual intimacy. Yet, this type of behavior is heavily stigmatized. A friend described couples who meet in in public places like parks and gardens as "very cheap." In *Liberalization's Children*, Ritty Lukose, describes the case of a young woman, "forever marred by a romance…she went a little too far, meeting [her boyfriend] in a park, alone" (Lukose 2009: 112). The new socializing spaces are notable because they

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[12] A high caste/jati in Rajasthan, historically the jati of the rulers of Rajasthan. Rajputs are Kshatriyas, or warriors.

[13] Because many Indians still live in a joint family system, many young people feel as close to their cousins as their siblings and denote that by calling them sister or brother, or sister-cousin or brother-cousin.

[14] See footnotes 3 and 5.

are not only permissible, but desirable spaces in which youths, female and male, can spend time together. Even conservative, upper class and caste parents are more likely to allow their daughters to spend time in "modern," middle class spaces with friends. Over nachos and pizzas at Tapri, one such popular café that offers a mix of Indian and Western snacks, Kavita and Neetu explained to me that it's becoming somewhat normal to meet with boys in public. At the same time, Kavita observed that, although there are lots of young couples in Jaipur, "some people still make fun when a boy and girl go out together."

Kavita met her current boyfriend at a party and they currently meet weekly at cafés like Tapri and chai (tea with milk) stalls—utilizing a blend of the old and new spaces. Yet, although Kavita's parents allow her to socialize and they know about her friendship with her current boyfriend, her father does not know Kavita and Ajay have a romantic relationship. Kavita's mother found out recently that Ajay is her boyfriend, and not just a friend, after a distant relative had seen them at a café and told her mother. Although these new spaces allow women and men to socialize outside of the home or school, and pursue activities like kissing and holding hands in a more private setting then on the street or in public parks, they are still public. And as one of my respondents said when I asked if she had a preferred pseudonym, India can be a very small place. Gossip is a problem. One of the pressures on young people, especially young women, is the constant conversation going on in their community—their neighbors see and comment on their movements, their clothes, their friends, etc. Susan Gal discusses the fractal nature of the public and private spheres, "Whatever the local, historically specific content of the dichotomy, the distinction between public and private can be reproduced repeatedly by projecting it onto narrower contexts or broader ones. Or, it can be projected onto different social "objects"—activities, identities, institutions, spaces and interactions—that can be further categorized into private and public parts. Then, through recursivity (and recalibration), each of these parts can be recategorized again, by the same public/private distinction" (Gal 2002:81). The café may be a private space in comparison with the more public parks or gardens; but it is still public in the sense that the possibility remains that one will be seen and remarked on by someone one knows.

New Technology and Relationships

Technology—dating/marriage websites, social media, and access to cell phones and the internet—is another space these young women utilize for pursuing or exploring romantic relationships in new ways. The result is often a cultural hybrid, with "traditional" courtship being achieved via social media or through consultation with a formally educated and trained astrologer who utilizes computer software to chart her clients' charts. Neetu's parents do not allow her to have a facebook page or to her own phone (she must share a phone with the rest of her family). They are worried she will use a facebook page or private phone to make friends with boys, and possibly secretly date them. After marriage, they say she can have facebook account and her own phone based on her husband's and in-law's wishes. However, despite their efforts to constrain their daughters, parents only have so much control over new technology and how their daughters use it. This limited control, has not only led to parental bans, but prompted an attempted ban on cell phone ownership for young women by a local conservative political party in Haryana, a neighboring state (Khatry 2014).

The increasing use of social media and the internet supports the increasing use of English or Hinglish (a combination of English nouns and Hindi[15] grammar and/or verbs) by youths in North India. They use English terms or phrases to communicate about new concepts or practices, many having to do with love and romantic relationships. In fact, the language of love is most often in English or Hinglish. North Indian young women use English words like "sex," "love," "propose" (meaning to date), and "boyfriend" to talk about their relationships and explorations of new ways to engage in romantic relationships. One also finds these words widely used in songs, movies (especially Bollywood movies), online chats, and in conversations among young people. Young people work to define what these words mean to them using their own experiences and social context. After Saanya's failed romance, she says she doesn't believe that love exists, that what she felt was "just attraction" (in English) and for her, attraction is not love. The English term "boyfriend" may be used for one's partner before one is officially engaged. Whereas the European term "fiancé" is not used until one is formally engaged and a wedding date has been set. In this case, the word fiancé means someone officially accepted by one's family as described to me by Tina (see next section). It implies a societal acceptance and weight, in a way that boyfriend does not. There is not even a very good translation of boyfriend into Hindi. The closest term is *cas dost*, but if someone uses the term people will laugh, because it is so uncommon and literally translates to "special friend."

"A Strange Kind of Relationship": Finding Love Online

Tina is a Sikh woman in her late thirties, a freelancer, with an MBA. When talking about her relationship, she says "it's a strange kind of a relationship." She met her boyfriend online, when she was looking for someone—a well off, employed, and educated Sikh—to marry. She dated after getting her MBA and before looking for a man online, but did not have much success. Her experiences can be read an example of the trend in South Asia (and Asia in general) for well-educated women to face particularly "dim wedding prospects" ("Flight from Marriage" 2011:8), because "non-marriage has always been more prevalent among women with more education….[and] marriage rates are also lower in cities" ("Flight from Marriage" 2011:5). The more educated a woman is, the "fewer potential partners" ("Flight from Marriage" 2011:5), because women often marry their caste, class, and educational equals or superiors. They do not marry down. Tina, who is of a high class and educational background and from a relatively small religious community[16]—has few local options for an acceptable match.

After meeting online Tina and Sunhil started talking and "got to like each other." They wrote often, but then they decided not to write anymore. After a couple of years, they got back in touch and found they were going to be in Delhi on the same day. They met up and decided to be together again. That was five years ago. Since then, because he lives and works in Bangalore, and she lives in Jaipur near to her family a few hours

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[15] This is one of the official languages of India. The other is English, because the South does not use Hindi or Hindi related languages. Hindi and related languages are common in the North and often the medium of education, government, and business in the North.

[16] Sikhs are only 1.72% of the Indian population and very limited geographically. For example, Sikhs are only 1.27% of the population of Rajasthan as of the Indian census in 2011: http://www.census2011.co.in/religion.php

away in another part of Rajasthan, they have a long distance relationship. Like people the world over, this is becoming a more common relationship pattern, aided by technology. Tina has gotten to know him through their frequent chats on the phone. She feels like she can say anything to him, and "If I don't like something, I tell him." Yet, even as this type of relationship is becoming possible, it is still not common, which is part of what makes it "strange" for women like Tina.

Conclusion: Hybridity in North Indian Relationships and Marriages

Based on these narratives of young, middle class North Indian women, I argue that what one finds in urban, middle class and upper caste North India is that contemporary patterns of courtship are hybridic, combining both modern and traditional elements. Many women still expect or want their family to arrange their marriage, but they engage in this marriage occasionally after dating or socializing with potential boyfriends or spouses. According to Jyotsna Kapur, the new romantic ideal across India is most clearly depicted in the popular Bollywood film, *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun*[17] (Who Am I to You?) (Kapur 2009). In this film, when the protagonist is asked what kind of marriage he would like—an arranged or a love marriage— and he replies without a moment of hesitation, an "arranged love marriage" (Kapur 2009: 228). Kapur defines this new ideal as marrying someone who has the approval of one's family but is also one to whom one is romantically attracted, "a match between families of equal social status where sexuality is sublimated in the acquisition of goods and the maintenance of traditional hierarchies; where free market meets the hierarchies of caste, class, and gender; and all contradictions of capital are happily resolved by a voluntary return to patriarchal tradition" (Kapur 2009: 228). Kapur writes that although this is a new hybrid form of marriage, it is not radical or in opposition to older "traditional" arranged marriages, and in fact "women are prepared for such an arrangement through numerous calls to combine the tradition with the modern, the ethnic with the global" (Kapur 2009: 228). Yet even those who would like to marry their boyfriends typically give them up if the young men are deemed not to be a good fit for the girls' families. This is because in North India, the long-standing belief that marriage is between two families is still very strong.

My stories demonstrate the varied and multiple new opportunities North Indian women—urban, middle-class, upper caste, and Hindu and Sikh—are exploring to find and experience romantic relationships before marriage. These new opportunities include both new geographical opportunities -- co-educational schools and universities, and new leisure and socializing spaces -- and new technological opportunities -- dating and marriage websites, mobile phones, and social media. Traditional arranged marriages have not been replaced by love marriages. Instead, like the use of Hinglish to discuss romance, these new spaces and methods for potentially finding boyfriends have led to hybrid practices and beliefs. Women hope for arranged love marriages, which could mean approval from their families of their boyfriend or facilitating their own appropriate match when their family has not been able to do so. In some cases, failed relationships reinforce the value of arranged marriages over love matches, yet not an abandonment of the ideal of an affectionate and loyal spouse. These women's experiences demonstrate that although there are new ways to explore love and

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[17] A very popular Bollywood, Hindi language film from 1994.

romance, not all of these opportunities are equally available (or even desirable), especially based on family and community norms around caste.

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Virtual Love: Technology and the Struggle for Gay Romance in Contemporary Vietnam

Dat Nguyen

Since the mid-2000s, the widespread usage of the Internet, social networking sites, and messaging applications has enabled young Vietnamese to engage in forms of relationship-building beyond the parental control and governmental censorship (Nguyen 2007). This is particularly significant for gay men in Vietnam who generally find little support for their lifestyles in their families and communities and have turned to cyberspace as a means to find and connect with men of similar sexual orientation. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with gay men in Ho Chi Minh City and media posts on various Vietnamese gay sites and forums, such as Gay 18+ Confession, this paper explores how virtual communication and social networking sites/applications contribute to the configuration and experiences of romantic courtship and relationships among gay men. In foregrounding one extended gay romance story, the paper examines how advancements in communications technology, while facilitating connections among gay men, also pose difficulties for the maintenance of their romantic relationships. It highlights (1) the potential discrepancy between the model of romance and affect promoted by social networking sites/applications and that imagined by many Vietnamese gay men, and (2) the emotional and moral struggle that Vietnamese gay men experience in situating and maintaining their relationships.

The introduction of Internet services in the early 2000s and its subsequent expansion in Vietnam have provided Vietnamese youth with new resources and spaces to socialize. According to statistics from the World Bank, the percentage of people using the Internet in Vietnam has increased from 1.2 percent in 2001 to 48.31 percent in 2014. While the fall in the cost of Internet services and the expansion of Internet cafés in urban centers in late 2001 allowed more and more young people to access Internet forums and chat rooms, the introduction of smartphones since 2008 has brought about the development of social networking applications that enable them to find and connect with others in close proximity and over long distance. The availability and increased accessibility of these technological resources have contributed to new patterns of romance and courtship among Vietnamese youth, offering young people not only greater privacy for engaging in intimate affairs, but also a connection to the global community. Nguyen (2007) documents that the Internet has not only provided a means for young people to connect and chat without being overheard by their parents, but also allowed them to engage in relationships with multiple individuals at once. More generally, Ngo et al. (2008) have shown that the Internet has facilitated an open sharing and discussion of sexual experiences and knowledge, and that young people in Hanoi incorporate this information into their understanding and experiences of love and romance.

In facilitating and enabling connections beyond both parental control and governmental censorship, these technological advancements are particularly important for the LGBT community in Vietnam. Since 2012, Vietnam has been recognized by the international community for having instituted progressive measures when it comes to LGBT rights. In 2013, the Vietnamese state formally removed the provision in the Vietnamese Marriage and Family Law of 2000 that explicitly prohibited same-sex marriage, even though it still has not legally recognized same-sex marriage (Saner 2013). Moreover, since 2008, various Vietnamese non-profit organizations (VNGOs) have developed various programs to support LGBT youth and to publicly advocate for LGBT rights. These organizations, with the permission of the local government, have successfully organized large-scale gay pride parades and flashmobs across the country, focusing on combating social stigma and encouraging LGBT youth to embrace their identity (Newton 2015: 264). Despite this new visibility, homosexuality in Vietnam is still perceived with ambivalence. The media, individual families, and the educational system in Vietnam continue to enforce heteronormativity and portray homosexuality as a sexual deviation (Horton 2014; iSEE 2011; Khuat et al. 2009). As such, LGBT youth in Vietnam have found refuge in the virtual world, where they can safely connect with people of similar sexual orientations.

Against the backdrop of the exploding popularity of the Internet and social networking sites/applications and the continued hegemony of heteronormativity in contemporary Vietnam, one can ask: what does gay romance in contemporary Vietnam look like? Specifically, how do technological advancements and the prevalence of heteronormativity figure in the conceptualization and experiences of romance among gay men? In what ways do gay romance and relationships resemble or differ from heterosexual ones? While the majority of research on gay men in Vietnam has focused on the relationship between homosexuality and HIV/AIDS (Blanc 2005; Colby et al. 2004), on the construction of LGBT spaces and community in Vietnam (Aaronson 1998; Newton 2012), and on the historical construction of homosexuality in Vietnam (Proschan 2002; Tran 2014), little has been written on contemporary Vietnamese gay romance. Drawing on data collected from several semi-structured interviews with gay men in Ho Chi Minh City and from media posts on Vietnamese gay Facebook groups, this paper is a preliminary exploration of some of the basic contours of gay romance and relationship in contemporary Vietnam. In foregrounding a single love story of Khoi and Minh, a gay couple in Ho Chi Minh City, I hope to highlight how virtual communication and social networking sites/applications contribute to the shape and experience of romance and "modern" gay relationship among gay men in Vietnam today.

The love story of Khoi and Minh:
I first met Khoi in a chic coffee shop on a rainy afternoon in June. Khoi was introduced to me by a former student of mine. A jovial individual, Khoi was 30 years old and had recently finished a Master's in Environmental Sciences from Holland. Over a cup of cappuccino, Khoi revealed that he first came out to his parents in 2006. After consulting many books and magazines on homosexuality, he had come to realize early on that

homosexuality was not simply a phase for him, and there was no internal conflict, as he recalled. Khoi's first introduction to the gay dating scene was through an online forum called *Táo Xanh* (Green Apple), one of the earliest forums dedicated to all matters pertaining to homosexuality in Vietnam. Created in 2005, *Táo Xanh* contained various discussion threads allowing people not only to share their experiences with gay romance, but also to make new gay friends. At the time of the interview, Khoi had been in a 5-year committed relationship. The relationship had started in 2011. Between 2006, when he first came out, and 2011, Khoi had had a couple of one-night stands, four short-term relationships (each lasting around 4 months), and one three-year relationship. All of these previous romantic engagements were with people whom Khoi had met on the gay forum above.

His current relationship, however, was something different. Khoi met his current boyfriend, Minh, at a play in 2011. The meeting was purely accidental: an online acquaintance of Khoi had bought a ticket to the play, but he could not go, so Khoi asked for the ticket. Khoi saw Minh at the play and struck up a conversation. "It was not love at first sight or anything. I don't believe in that," Khoi remarked. Khoi noted something different between the way he interacted with Minh and those guys he met online. To begin with, Khoi admitted that Minh was not the type of guy that he normally found attractive physically. While Khoi, being a tall person himself, tended to like people who are at least 5"7' tall, Minh was only about 5"2'. When meeting guys online, Khoi could easily find people who fit his series of criteria regarding age, height, weight, and educational status and bypass others. The meeting with Minh was not planned, and there was no screening process involved. Moreover, compared to the other guys online, Khoi did not feel the strong need to engage in sweet talks with Minh; he simply enjoyed Minh's company. After that first meeting at the play, he and Minh exchanged contact information and started to hang out rather often. Whenever Minh went out to do something, Khoi would find an excuse to join him. At the time, Khoi was a high school teacher, and Minh was a freelance graphic designer. After work, Khoi would grab dinner with Minh, whenever possible.

The transition from "like" to "love" occurred about one month after their first meeting. Khoi was the one that proposed to make the relationship official. For Khoi, the transition was marked by what he described as a feeling of "emotional selfishness" on his part. In the first two weeks of getting to know each other, Khoi did not care if Minh was hanging out with other guys. By the third week, however, Khoi developed a distinct sense of discomfort whenever Minh was going out with other people and not with him. At the end of the fourth week, Khoi confessed his feelings for Minh and asked him to be his boyfriend. Minh said yes, and they announced it to their close friends. Khoi also changed his Facebook status to "in a relationship," but he could not specify with whom he was in a relationship because he did not want his school to know.

Compared to many gay couples in Ho Chi Minh City, Khoi and Minh were not particularly "romantic." Whenever they were together in public, they did not hold hands, hug, kiss, or spoon-feed each other. They did not call each other "anh/em" or "chồng/vợ" (husband/wife) like many young gay couples in Ho Chi Minh City now do. In

fact, because Khoi and Minh are of the same age, they called each other with the informal second and first person pronouns "mày/tao."[18] For Khoi, romance is not in the cute words, but it is rather in the things you do to show that you care. In addition to the routine of having dinner together and driving each other to work, Khoi and Minh visited and checked on each other's family. Minh had not come out to his family yet, and Khoi never pressured him into doing so. Khoi's parents came to know Minh very well from all the times he slept over and attended important family's events like birthdays.

The height of their relationship was when Khoi and Minh decided to open a small café together in Ho Chi Minh City in 2013, two years in their relationship. "That coffee shop was a child of both of us," Khoi remarked. They decided to open the shop because Minh was slowly quitting his freelance work, and both decided that the café would provide him a degree of stability and security. While Minh was mainly responsible for running the café, Khoi dealt with other "arising costs" associated with the shop since he still had his stable job as a teacher. The coffee shop also provided a place for Minh to stay in the city, since his family was in Tien Giang, a province about 43 miles south of Ho Chi Minh City. After the shop was opened, Khoi stayed over with Minh several nights a week.

Khoi and Minh's relationship did hit several rough patches along the way. In late 2013, there was a short period of time when Khoi and Minh both neglected each other's feelings. It started when an ex-boyfriend of Minh, who happened to live close to Khoi, began to hang out more with Minh. This ex-boyfriend would come over to Minh's house and pick him up to go to the gym, the same gym where Minh and Khoi usually went. In fact, all three of them tended to work out at the gym around the same time. Despite knowing that there was nothing going on between Minh and the ex-boyfriend, Khoi was annoyed that Minh seemed to neglect him. It was during this time that a few gay men on Facebook started friending and chatting with Khoi. Khoi enjoyed the attention and flirted with some of them through texting, all the while making clear that he was in a relationship and was not seeking a lover. Unfortunately for Khoi, Minh somehow managed to find these flirty texts and got angry. Minh ran away for a few days without telling Khoi, leaving Khoi frantically searching for him.

The biggest challenge to Khoi and Minh's relationship was in late 2014 when Khoi went to Holland on a UNESCO scholarship. This was the first time that Khoi and Minh were separated by great physical distance for an extended period of time. They texted and skyped each other regularly during the first nine months of their long-distance relationship. Things started to change around June of 2015, when they communicated less and less. This pattern continued for another three months, resulting in Khoi and

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[18] In Vietnamese, the pronoun "anh" is used to designate someone who is older in age compared to the speaker, while "em" is for someone who is younger in age. In a heterosexual relationship, "anh" is used to refer to the man, while "em" is used to refer to the woman. As such, "anh" tends to have the connotation of masculinity, while "em" refers to femininity. When being applied to a homosexual relationship, assuming that the two persons are of the same age, "anh" and "em" usually correspond to the "masculine" (typically designated as top) and "feminine" (bottom) respectively. Among young gay couples in Vietnam, many also use the pair "chồng (husband)/ vợ (wife)" to designate the masculine and the feminine gay men. If "anh/em" and "chồng/vợ" perpetuate heterosexual gender differences and hierarchy, "mày/tao" designate a much more equal relationship. "Mày/tao" are usually used for friends of the same age or of the same status.

Minh breaking up with each other in September of 2015. Khoi initiated the break-up. During the first month after the break-up, Khoi was using some gay chat apps, including Jack'd and Grindr, to meet people around. He found two friends with benefits, but he was not keen on developing anything long-term with these guys. However, after that first month, Khoi stopped using these apps because he realized that he might have been too hasty with the break-up, that he felt guilty, and that he wanted to rebuild the relationship with Minh.

In late December of 2015, Minh arrived in Spain to start his own study-abroad program. Khoi and Minh reconnected and agreed to meet each other in Holland in January of 2016. Khoi found out that the reason why Minh had communicated less and less a few months earlier had been because he did not want to burden Khoi with many of his problems. Saving to study abroad for Minh was no easy feat because his family was not wealthy, and he had to rely solely on the financial help of his sister. Khoi apologized for his hastiness and asked Minh if he wanted to get back together. Minh did not decide to get back with Khoi until four months later. During these four months, they communicated more regularly, even though they were still technically broken up. Khoi also found out that Minh, during this time, had "fun" with a couple of guys while traveling around Spain and Holland.

Not long before Khoi's graduation, Khoi and Minh got back together. As Khoi was preparing for his return trip back to Vietnam, Minh asked Khoi what would happen to their once-again long-distance relationship if one of these days, he could not keep to himself (*giữ mình*) and had sex with other men. "I told him to do whatever he needs to," said Khoi, "because I don't want him to feel bad about it." Khoi continued:
"At the end of the day, sex is human's natural need. I wrote Minh an e-mail one day after he asked me, saying that if he ever needs human contact and sex, don't feel bad doing it. I might feel a bit hurt by it, but what can you do, right? Even I am afraid that I cannot keep to myself sometimes. It's something you have to accept in a long-distance relationship. However, I am almost certain that no matter who Minh hangs out with, he cannot find a person like me. I don't express my love for him by words, but by my actions. Nobody can care for Minh the way I do." (Interview on 06/07/2016).

And care for Minh, he did. When Minh was abroad, Khoi continued visiting Minh's parents in the countryside. More importantly, Khoi sent all of the left-over money from his UNESCO scholarship to Minh so that he could pay for rent and all of his traveling in Europe. Upon returning to Vietnam, Khoi was given a research position at the National University in Ho Chi Minh City. While the money that he made from the research job was not significant, once converted into Euro, Khoi nonetheless continued to send Minh money monthly for various expenses. Khoi also contemplated applying for a scholarship to pursue his Ph.D. in Europe in order to help Minh out financially. He explained,
"To be honest, if I apply to pursue the Ph.D., I will only do it because the scholarship money will help Minh a lot and not because I want to study more. I have poured too much energy into my Master's thesis, and I need a break...But I support Minh because I am his partner. I feel like I have a responsibility (trách nhiệm) to do so, even if Minh does not ask me to. I don't have any plan or any expectations for the future [for this

relationship]. All I care about at this moment is to support Minh financially and to support his dream." (Interview on 06/07/2016).

To be monogamous or to be open: Competing Gay Romance Scripts

Among gay men in Vietnam, advancements in communicative technology enable individuals to connect with one another, while at the same time, posing new challenges to their relationships. As the story of Khoi and Minh above demonstrates, technology figures in many of the important turning points of their relationship.

To recap, Khoi's first exposure to the gay dating scene was through a forum called *Táo Xanh* (Green Apple), the first forum that was dedicated to all matters pertaining to homosexuality in Vietnam. Created in 2005, *Táo Xanh* provides a safe space for gay men to connect with one another, without parental control and governmental censorship. In addition to its consulting columns where members give each other advice on how to deal with family pressures and social stigmas, the forum features a section where gay men can post pictures and information about themselves in hope of finding new friends and potential connections. During the interview, Khoi revealed that the cyber structure of the forum provides a certain "script" to the process of relationship building: a person first selects men in whom he is interested, chats with them using Yahoo! Messenger, and if everything goes well, exchanges number and sets up a date.

The online environment allowed Khoi to develop a process of filtering for potential dates. In addition to pre-selecting people based on criteria like height, age, educational status, Khoi paid attention to how a person represented himself in photos and in writing, particularly word choices. "You can tell a lot about someone's character depending on the words they chose to use," Khoi remarked. As such, forums like *Táo Xanh* and instant messaging clients like Yahoo! Messenger encourage gay men not only to disclose themselves to a certain degree prior to the actual meet-up, but also to select people based on certain criteria.

As of 2016, forums like *Táo Xanh* are considered somewhat obsolete. The explosion of Facebook and the eventual introduction of smartphones and their applications since 2008 have increased the level of instantaneous connectivity among gay men. Compared to the existing forums, Facebook is a much more powerful social networking site due to its ability to search for people, to send instant messages, and to connect with gay men outside of your network through Facebook's "Friend Suggestion" function or gay groups dedicated to "match-making" users. As gay Facebook groups slowly replace existing gay forums due to their much wider-reaching network of users, gay male social networking applications (GMSNAs), such as Jack'd, Tinder, and Grindr allow those who have smartphones to instantaneously connect to gay men within certain geographical proximity using Global Positioning System (GPS) technology. On these GMSNAs, a gay man can see the pictures of potential partners who are close to him and send instant messages to those in whom he is interested. On Jack'd and Grindr, for instance, gay men are given the option to select and filter men based on the criteria of preferred sexual positions (top vs. bottom), ethnicities, "gay tribes" (e.g. twink, bear, daddy), and

the type of relationship they are looking for (e.g. long-term dating, friends with benefits, hookups). Some of these GMSNAs, such as Tinder, can also "streamline" the selecting process by asking users to swipe right on those they like and left on those they do not and then only connecting people who happen to like each other.

As such, what Facebook and GMSNAs present to gay men in Vietnam is essentially a sense of the multitude of available options, even in a social context where heterosexuality is still the prevalent norm. With this sense of options comes a certain script for how gay romance should be conceptualized and experienced. Going back to Khoi and Minh's story above, Facebook and GMSNAs played a major role in the configuration of their relationship at two turning points. The first turning point was when in late 2013, Minh started hanging out more with his ex-boyfriend, thus leaving Khoi feeling annoyed and frustrated. As Khoi was feeling neglected, a few gay men started adding and flirted with him on Facebook. Khoi enjoyed the attention and responded with some flirting himself. When Minh found out about these texts, it drove a wedge in their relationship, resulting in Minh leaving Ho Chi Minh City for a few days without telling Khoi. Another important turning point in their relationship was during the break-up from late 2014 to early 2016, both Khoi and Minh used GMSNAs in Europe to connect and hook up with other gay men. When they decided to get back together just right before Khoi's preparing to go back to Vietnam upon his graduation from the Master's program in Holland, they talked about the terms of their relationship, and Khoi decided that it was acceptable for Minh to have sex with other gay men, as long as they still maintained a sense of emotional commitment.

Khoi and Minh are not the only gay couple in Vietnam who have expressed ambivalence and frustration towards social networking sites and applications. Doing a quick search on *Gay 18+ Confession*, a Vietnamese gay Facebook groups dedicated to gay men sharing their romantic and sexual experiences, one is immediately struck by the commonness of gay men feeling angry, frustrated, and troubled that their boyfriends are using GMSNAs. On these self-confessional posts, many gay men recount stories of how they are either aware of or taken aback by the fact that their boyfriends have been using GMSNAs to flirt and/or to hook up with other "lovers," how they have to create a fake account to expose their boyfriends' lies, and how they are distraught that their boyfriends do not seem to respect their commitment to each other. At the other extreme, some gay men who are still single and currently looking are frustrated that all of the guys they talk with online, while already taken, are still interested in flirting and hooking-up. One such user posted, "What the f***? Why do gay men who already have 'husbands' continue using Jack'd, Grindr, Hornet? They are that deprived? Them f***ers keep getting me interested and then later confess that they are already taken"[19] (03/20/16, post on Gay 18+ Confession). Another user questioned, "Does real love exist in the gay world? It seems like everybody only wants sexual pleasures. Having fun like that, aren't they afraid of HIV/AIDS or STIs?"[20] (03/02/16, post on Gay 18+ Confession).

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[19] https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/g17744?source=feed_text&story_id=464818670380442

[20] https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/g17588?source=feed_text&story_id=458250671037242

Khoi and Minh's story and these brief Facebook posts highlight the fact that Facebook and GMSNAs promote a certain model of relationship, one that focuses on the appeal of the multitude of options, of potentiality, and of experimentation. This can be contrasted with the ideal of the monogamous and long-term committed relationship that many gay men, both in interviews and through online posts, have expressed. It is important to note, however, that in many cases, the appeal of GMSNAs does not reside so much in the actual act of meeting with gay men in real-life. Tziallas (2015) argues that gay men are attracted, even addicted, to GMSNAs because they "'gamify' socio-sexual interaction, ultimately doubling as do-it-yourself amateur porn platforms" (2015: 761). GMSNAs make the interactions legible and controllable, while replacing the typical goals of achieving high scores in computer games with the promise of accumulating and acquiring erotic images and chats. Tziallas poignantly points out that GMSNAs are built on a sense of choreographed frustration, that is, a frustration that is temporary and that motivates the users to try harder and harder as in video games (2015: 766). This correlates with the sentiments expressed by the gay men on *Gay 18+ Confession*: Vietnamese gay men are generally frustrated by GMSNAs and by the fact that their boyfriends use them, but they continue to use them.

The discrepancy between the model of relation promoted by social networking sites and applications and the ideal of the monogamous committed relationship engenders tension and struggle within the relationship between Khoi and Minh and those of many other gay men. At the same time, these two models are not mutually exclusive, evidenced by the fact that Khoi and Minh did reach some sort of compromise. Khoi, upon his return to Vietnam, agreed that Minh should be able to meet with other guys while in Europe because a person needs his sexual desires fulfilled sometimes. Khoi was convinced that Minh's hooking up with other guys would not undermine the facts that they were still in a committed relationship. In navigating and negotiating the two models of relationship, Khoi makes a distinction between physical and emotional fidelity in which emotional fidelity is more central to the continuation of the relationship than the physical aspect. Emotional fidelity, as Khoi conceived, is sustained by his commitment to caring for Minh and to providing both moral and financial support for him. Khoi felt a strong sense of responsibility as Minh's partner and was willing to make sacrifices for him, even if that meant letting Minh have sex with other men. One can argue that the distinction between physical and emotional fidelity is rendered a possibility, not simply because of the long-distance nature of Khoi and Minh's relationship, but also because of the impact of communication technology in shaping the contour of gay romance.

Conclusion: Technology and the Configuration of Gay Romance in Vietnam
It is important to note that the love story of Khoi and Minh cannot be taken as representative of how all gays experience and conceptualize romance in contemporary Vietnam. At the same time, their story does reflect certain common elements of Vietnamese gay romance as shown through the different Facebook posts by other gay men. Through the analysis of their love story and of public posts on *Gay 18+ Confession*, this paper has explored some of the new ways that gay romance is conceptualized and experienced in contemporary Vietnam. I have demonstrated that while advancements in communication technology have allowed gay men to connect

with one another more easily, they have also posed new struggles in the experience and sustainability of romance. Social networking sites and applications promote a model of relationality that emphasizes sexual open-ness and experimentation, a model that is in tension with the ideal of the monogamous committed relationship that many Vietnamese gay men have. At the same time, these two models of romance are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and gay men can negotiate between these two models to create a new structure of feeling, that is the possibility of remaining emotionally committed, while engaging in physical promiscuity.

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