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Her Milkshake Brings Out The Girls In Amman: Examining Questions about Sexual Desire and Societal Influences Among Same-Sex Desiring Women in Jordan

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By

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In the Middle East and in many majority Muslim nations, homosexuality, including homosexual acts, identities, desires, and discussions of those, is considered taboo. Utilizing a feminist theoretical orientation, this project examined the ways in which same-sex desiring women in Amman, Jordan view the concept of sexually desiring and its relationship to identities. It also examined the pressures placed on them to abide by and navigate familial and religious expectations that conflict with their sexuality. This project drew upon 15 interviews from Muslim and Christian women in Amman using semi-structured and unstructured interviews and participant observation. After analysis, it was concluded that the majority of informants believe in innate sexual desires and sexuality and that all people sexually desire in similar ways. It was also concluded that informants face more pressure from family than from religion, and therefore, find it easier to balance religious obligations than familial obligations with their sexuality.

DEDICATION

       To Brandon: You gave me the courage to start this program, but you weren't able to see me finish it. In honor of your memory and our friendship, I dedicate this thesis to you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

From religious debates to discussions about equal rights, the topic of homosexuality is perhaps one of the most controversial and widely debated topics globally. Many people consider their sexuality to be central to their personhood, but how sexuality is understood and experienced varies drastically within and across cultures and time. As Valentine (2003) notes, "Being 'gay' or 'lesbian'…is experienced by different people in radically different ways depending on their racial identification, location, age, social class, personal history, and so forth" (Valentine 2003, 125). Valentine suggests that what I will call the "gay experience" is different depending on, for example, a person's culture, age, or religion. These societal factors, along with same-sex desires, shape how a person experiences "being gay." In this thesis, I utilize Valentine's notion that to understand identities, we must understand desires. He suggests that by listening to how desires are discussed, scholars can see how people construct cultural identities based on beliefs about sexuality (Valentine 2003). Using the term "desire" helps to get around the hardened identity categories that have emerged from the West, such as lesbian, gay, and bisexual. Valentine suggests that anthropologists need "to listen to talk-about-desire to see what that talk can tell us about identity categories" (Valentine 2003, 126). This approach fosters a better understanding of how cultural ideas about sexuality vary. Thus,

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listening to people talk about their desires allows anthropologists to see the ways in which people define what their identity means to them and how it is expressed.

My project attempts to understand the "gay experience" for Muslim women who identify as gay or lesbian and/or have same-sex desires in Jordan. This research specifically focuses on same-sex desiring women[1] in Jordan's capital city, Amman. Jordan is a majority Muslim country and ruled by a monarchy, the Hashemite Kingdom. As well, it is a tribal society whose population is tightly linked through patrilineal ties. The influence of patrilineal ties demonstrates the significance of the role of the man in the family structure. Tribes today can consist of Bedouins and families who live in Amman and claim a common ancestor. It is surrounded by nations that are experiencing political turmoil, including Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine.

I specifically chose Jordan because it is one of the more liberal Muslim countries for gay, lesbian, and same-sex desiring people, regarding political policies that do not legally condemn homosexuality. I use the term 'same-sex desiring' to refer to the women in Jordan who may not take on the identity of gay or lesbian. As well, this term does not presuppose an identity of the women in Jordan. In Jordan, homosexuality is decriminalized; however, it is morally prohibited and stigmatized because of the strong influence of Islamic views on homosexuality. In most other Middle Eastern countries, homosexuality is punishable by law.

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[1] Throughout this proposal, I will use the term 'same-sex desiring women' to refer to the women in Amman in this project who identify as romantically or sexually attracted to women. The term 'same-sex desiring women,' as opposed to gay or lesbian, or queer does not presuppose an identity of the women in Jordan. I am also including the terms 'gay' and 'lesbian' as potential markers of identity for these women.

It should be noted that since Jordan is a Western-leaning nation, Western formulations of homosexual identities and behaviors (i.e. "gay" and "lesbian") hold strong influence. When a person identifies as gay, there is a certain Western expectation of how that person should fulfill that identity. In fact, the concept of homosexuality is often associated with the West (Keci 2006). Therefore, I anticipated finding Western definitions of homosexuality in Jordan, but this was not always the case. As Chabot and Duyvendak (2002) argue, cultural diffusion is not homogenous, meaning that forms of homosexuality differ cross-culturally. They critique scholars who believe that ideas that spread from the West through transnational diffusion do not change (Chabot and Duyvendak 2002).

This research project explores two broad questions about same-sex desiring women in Amman, Jordan. First, how do same-sex desiring women in Jordan identify sexually? This question aims to understand the various factors that influence the construction of homosexual identities in Jordan, particularly in relation to the West and Islam. Do these women claim a homosexual identity (gay or lesbian) that is in line with Western constructions of homosexuality? Or do they have same-sex desires without a Western homosexual identity that reflect a more fluid sense of sexuality, so that they are not confined to an identity category? And, in terms of sexual identification, do they believe their same-sex desires are innate and that they were born with them? What does it mean to them to sexually desire, and how does that affect the way they behave and the reasons they identify the way they do?

Second, how do same-sex desiring women in Jordan balance their sexual identities and desires with religious and societal pressures, particularly in relation to

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Islam and family? This question aims to understand how same-sex desiring women conceptualize their sexuality in relation to the many societal and religious pressures placed on them. How do they negotiate their sexuality and desires with familial and religious obligations? How do same-sex desiring women handle the discussion and practice of marriage? Do family members know about their same-sex desires? Do same-sex desiring women in Jordan express their sexuality around family members in different ways than they do around their friends? How do they account for being a good person of faith and also a person who is same-sex desiring?

Over two and a half weeks of ethnographic study in Amman, Jordan, I used semi-structured and unstructured interviews and participant observation to examine these questions. Participating with and observing the women in everyday activities allowed me to make observations about how same-sex desiring women in Jordan conceptualize their sexuality. I observed same-sex desiring women when they were with their friends. This allowed me to hear discourse relating to how they conceptualize their sexuality, drawing on Valentine's (2003) idea about the importance of listening to people talk about their desires. Utilizing Valentine's approach to understanding identities also allowed me to observe the ways in which they expressed their sexuality and when they expressed it. To address the first research question, I mostly relied on semi-structured interviews. To answer the second question, I relied on unstructured interviews and participant observation at functions where friends got together and cafes. For both research questions, interviewing these women allowed me to get answers from them about their sexual desires, their beliefs about sexuality, and how societal factors influence their sexuality. Listening to their stories about their experience being gay, having same-sex

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desires and being Muslim provided insight into the struggles they sometimes face in balancing identities and desires that seem to outsiders to be contradictory and prohibited.

This study contributes new anthropological perspectives on female same-sex desires and female homosexuality. These are both areas of study that are significantly lacking in existing anthropological literature, as most ethnographic studies of sexuality and, more specifically, homosexuality, have focused on males (Boellstorff 2007; Murray and Roscoe 1997). Studies of female homosexuality can offer important new perceptions of homosexuality as it exists cross-culturally because women are faced with different cultural expectations than men, which in turn affect their sexual desires, identities, and beliefs. These perceptions are important to understanding variation in homosexuality, especially among females. As Blackwood (1985) argued over 30 years ago, it is important to study female homosexuality and how it differs from male homosexuality– in particular without the application of Western definitions of lesbianism and homosexuality (Blackwood 1985). This study of female-same-sex desires can add different cultural ideas of desires and identities to the literature.

This study also adds to the literature on essentialism and constructionism by examining beliefs about sexuality and desire in Jordan. There has been an ongoing debate in sexual theory about whether sexuality is determined by nature or nurture, essential or constructed (Epstein 1998). Constructionism states that sexuality is constructed and not innate (Harding 2003; Foucault 1990). A constructionist approach is problematic to the validation of same-sex desiring people's sexuality because, when applied to the study of homosexuality, it proposes that homosexual behavior can be chosen (DeLamater and Shibley Hyde 1998). An essentialist view of sexuality proposes that sexuality is natural,

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biological, and innate (Broido 2000; Harding 2003; Rubin 1998). However, a problem with essentialism is that it confines people to categories and fails to acknowledge the fluidity of sexuality (Fausto-Sterling 2003). This study is also important because it will contribute a cross-cultural example of the different ways in which same-sex desiring people conceptualize their sexuality as being innate or constructed. Understanding how same-sex desiring people conceptualize their own sexuality could be informative to those who attempt to theorize sexuality because it will add ethnographic examples of how other cultures debate essentialism vs constructionism.

Finally, this study addresses the ways in which same-sex desiring women in Jordan view their own sexuality through religious and familial frames. A woman is expected to fulfill roles of being a mother and wife, making her a more pious Muslim (Mahmood 2004), while contributing to society (Boellstorff 2005). That being said, this study delivers an expanded and open view to the field of sexuality--and to the public-- about other forms of sexuality and, specifically, other forms of homosexuality that are not found in the West. It offers an ethnographic example of how Islam sometimes shapes sexual identity and desires as well as female Muslim desire and eroticism – all topics that have been missing from most anthropological studies of the Middle East and Islam (Deeb and Winegar 2012; Murray 1997). As well, Habib (2007) argues for the normalization of female homosexuality as a subject of study and as a cultural phenomenon in the Middle East because of how same-sex desiring women have been left out of theory and methods and because of how their existence has been disregarded. Following up on this suggestion, this study will attempt to normalize female homosexuality by showing its existence in the Middle East.

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This study contributes to the ethnography on homosexuality in the Middle East, particularly homosexuality in Jordan, which is less than abundant. Jordan is an important place to conduct this research for several reasons. Jordan is a Muslim-majority country where homosexuality is decriminalized, but where homosexual identities are still being contested and debated, specifically in the past year or two. An example of this could be demonstrated with my internship in the summer of 2016 in Jordan, with a liberal, online-based magazine, *MyKali*. This magazine discusses LGBT issues, gender, and dating in the Middle East. Before my arrival, I was informed that *MyKali* no longer had their office space because of the uncomfortable work environment and a conflict between the owner and the founder of the magazine. As well, around this time, *MyKali* also created political controversy when it published in Arabic for the first time because the magazine was thought to be propagating taboo subjects to a much larger population of people now in the Arab world.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will review literature covering social science approaches to the study of sexuality. Two of the most common, and often opposing, theoretical approaches to sexuality are social constructionism and essentialism. It will also give an overview of the anthropology of sexuality, specifically related to key approaches used in anthropology to study sexuality, the study of homosexuality within anthropology, and the emerging field of queer anthropology. The next section will examine homosexuality in Islam. It will focus on homosexuality in Islamic history, the theological discourses on homosexuality in Islam, and ethnographic accounts of lived experiences of Muslims who have same-sex desires and who may identify as gay or lesbian. The next section will examine women and morality in Islam. The last part of the chapter will focus on a brief description of Jordan as well as anthropological works about Jordan.

Social Science Approaches to Sexuality: The Essentialism vs. Constructionism Debate

The study of sexuality in the social sciences has long been rooted in the constructionism vs. essentialism debate (Epstein 1998). In early sexuality studies, sexology, the study of human sexuality, played a prominent role, especially in psychology and medicine, by claiming that sexuality and the study of it were purely

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scientific. Sexologists thought that sexuality was natural, innate and biological (Harding 2003).

Essentialism, as it pertains to the understanding of sexuality, is a theoretical approach that is closely related to sexology, as sexology is a type of study that is rooted in the idea of an essence of sexuality. Essentialism understands sexuality as an instinctual force, where sexual desires are innate and natural, and where these sexual drives influence a person and a culture (Broido 2000; Harding 2003; Rubin 1998). Essentialism relies on the biological determinism of sexuality (DeLamater and Shibley Hyde 1998). When it comes to the study of homosexuality, an essentialist stance can be limiting because it confines people to sexual identities, such as lesbian or gay, by failing to acknowledge the fluidity of sexuality. An essentialist point of view holds that people are not expected to change their sexuality, even though some may experience changes in their sexuality throughout their lifetime (Fausto-Sterling 2003).

On the other side of the debate is social constructionism. Social constructionism, in regard to sexuality, is a theoretical approach that maintains the stance that there is no essence to sexuality and that sexuality is cultural (Harding 2003). However, there are variations of social constructionism that include some more radical notions of constructionism, such as the idea that there is no biological basis to sexuality or sex drive. Constructionism on a basic level suggests that the meaning of sexual acts over time has differed. A slightly different take on constructionism suggests that sexual desire is constructed and not inherent at all. The most radical stance rejects the biological basis of sex drive and lust, thus suggesting that there is absolutely no biological essence to sexuality (Vance 1998). Blackwood (2003) describes the kinds of stronger and weaker

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constructionist views: "The strong constructionist view holds that a general sexual potential is constructed into particular desires, meanings, and behaviors by culture" (274), whereas a "weaker view states that culture shapes or constrains the form sexuality takes but 'natural' desires set the baseline of sexuality" (274).

In anthropology, famous social constructionists of sexuality include Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, both of whom valued the social role and cultural factors in one's culture over the innateness of sexuality in determining behavior (Blackwood 1985). The argument between constructionism and essentialism, as suggested by Mead and Benedict's logic of constructionism over essentialism, is rooted in the nature-and-nurture debate, where nature represents essentialism and nurture represent constructionism.

One famous constructionist whose approach has been very influential in anthropological studies of sexuality is Michel Foucault. Foucault (1990) takes a nurture stance on sexuality and argues that sexualities are not natural and are constantly being reconstructed. Along with this, Foucault said that society has inevitably created the concept of desire and what it means to desire. The concept of desiring did not exist in nature before the social (Rubin 1998). He also held that there is no such thing as sex drive as he believed that discourse on sexuality is solely constructed and that there is nothing innate or biological about the sex drive. In other words, to have a sex drive is not a biological phenomenon but rather a cultural one (DeLamater and Shibley Hyde 1998). However, when applied to the study of homosexuality, a constructionist view is limiting because it proposes that homosexual desire and behavior can be chosen and therefore that homosexuality can theoretically be eliminated from society because it is not innate or naturally occurring (DeLamater and Shibley Hyde 1998).

There are some scholars, though, who do not side exclusively with constructionism or essentialism, but rather attempt to take a middle ground by merging both approaches. Dykes (2000) believes that sexuality needs to be examined through the mediation of the natural world and social world, considering both natural and social factors that may influence sexuality. Other views that attempt to utilize social and natural components call for an examination of the body as a product of both nature and nurture (Fausto-Sterling 2003). Ross and Rupp (1981) argue that sexuality should be studied as if there is a biological basis to sexuality, but that it is "experienced culturally" and "expressed socially" (51). Scholars who do not choose a side in the debate do propose a biological or natural basis of sexuality that suggests that sexual desires and drives are innate, but that how and when they are expressed is determined socially and culturally, thus suggesting that sexuality and sexual behavior, while universal in some ways, vary cross-culturally.

The Anthropology of Sexuality

Anthropological studies of homosexuality emerged out of the literature on the anthropological study of sexuality, which has been growing as a field of study since the 1960s. In this section, I will examine key anthropological themes and approaches to the study of sexuality, including: the role of culture in shaping sexual identities; the emergence of homosexuality as an anthropological subject of study; and the influence of queer studies in anthropology.

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Key Anthropological Themes and Approaches to the Study of Sexuality

Early anthropological studies of sexuality tended to focus predominantly on cultures and people outside of the West through ethnographies portraying them as very different than Western cultures and peoples (Blackwood 1985). Foundational ethnographic works from the early 20th century include Malinowski's study of sexual practices among the Trobriand Islanders (Howe 2015; Malinowski 1929) and Mead's study of sexuality among adolescent girls in Samoa (Howe 2015; Mead 1964). Both works highlighted the cross-cultural variability of sexuality. In particular, Mead's work, which argued that Samoan girls had more freedom to explore sex than adolescents in the West, influenced both popular and disciplinary understandings of sexuality (Mead 1964).

In the 1970s, anthropological studies of sexuality were influenced by second-wave feminist theoretical approaches to sex, sexuality and gender. In particular, feminist theory in this period critiqued the conflation of sex and gender as well as the assumption of a biological basis to sexuality and sex (Rubin 2006; Vance 1991). Anthropological works from this time focus on the separation of sex from gender, suggesting that sex, and a sex's assumed sexuality, and gender may be interrelated but that this interrelated relationship differs cross-culturally as well as historically. For instance, Rubin (1975) utilizes psychoanalysis, Marxist theory, and structuralism to explain how the oppression of women is linked to Western conflations of gender and sex. She argues that the sex and gender social system, where sex equals and determines gender and vice versa, needs to be eliminated in order to have a more egalitarian society (Rubin 2006).

More recent work in the anthropology of sexuality focuses on the ways in which new and existing identities have been shaped by new and changing political and social

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dynamics. For example, Allen (2011) looks at how the global economy affects Cuban identities, which are composed of erotic and racial components. Borneman (2007) provides a deeply personal and reflexive narrative of his experiences as a gay anthropologist in Aleppo, Syria, and the ways in which politics, kinship, and sexuality structure the lived experiences of Syrian men.

Theoretical approaches to the anthropology of sexuality have also changed over time. One of the biggest debates within the field has emerged from questions over how to frame sexuality as either an essential part of human nature or as a constructed category produced by culture, in the vein of the essentialism versus constructivism debate presented above. Constructionist models highlighting the important role of culture in shaping and in influencing sexual behavior and identity have dominated the field. Vance (1991) proposes that studies in the field through the 1980s resemble what she calls a "cultural influence model" in which "sexuality is seen as the basic material—a kind of Play Doh—on which culture works, a naturalized category which remains closed to investigation and analysis" (878). Additionally, though early anthropological studies of sexuality recognize variation of behavior, most assume that all same-sex behavior is homosexual-- in terms of identity-- and that all opposite-sex behavior is heterosexual, imposing an idea that behavior is equal to a universal meaning (Dykes 2000; Elliston 1995; Herdt 1984; Vance 1991).

In recent years, scholars have addressed the ways in which globalization has spread ideas about sexualities and sexual identities from the West. For example, Boellstorff (2005b) describes how gay men and women in Indonesia are thought to be victims of a sort of cultural imperialism from the West because they come to terms with

their sexualities through the media. Boellstorff suggests that gay men and women in Indonesia are actually localizing gay and lesbian identities, turning Western homosexual identities into their own cultural versions of sexualities (Boellstorff 2005b). In this study, when referring to Western homosexual identities and constructions, I am referring to the larger, modern, homosexual institution (Rubin 1998) found in the West. This consists of an arena where lesbian and gay people are identified (Rubin 1998), usually by their behavior and sexual desires and preferences. These are people who identify as gay or lesbian and who also seek out a public identity (Altman 2001). Seeking a public identity is also associated with the concept of 'coming out.' 'Coming out' makes identity formation known to others (Kugle 2013).

Altman (1997) examines how globalization of Western sexual identities, specifically in Asia, has helped to create a sort of global homosexual identity that is shared among all who identify as gay or lesbian (Altman 1997). Bereket and Adam (2006) discuss how globalization, since the 1990s, has been replacing more traditional forms of homosexuality with more Western understandings of being gay. In the past, homosexual behavior existed, but now men in Turkey – particularly those who are younger and more educated – are choosing to proclaim a gay identity and in so doing align themselves with global LGBT movements (Bereket and Adam 2006). Similarly, Massad (2007) points to the ways in which globalization has forced particular labels and identities onto same-sex desires and practices in the Middle East. Altman's (1997), Boellstorff's (2005b), Bereket and Adam's (2006), and Massad's (2007) ethnographies document the appearance and adoption of Western homosexualities in non-Western parts of the world.

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Some scholars have detailed the time and place these Western discourses of sexuality have emerged (Connell and Dowsett 2007; D'Emilio 2007; Weeks 2007). The 1970s were a revolutionary time for gay and lesbian people in the US that was supposed to signify the end of their oppression. The gay liberation movement and the inclusion of gay rights in the rhetoric of the Democratic Party were catalysts that led to the gay male subculture gaining visibility and expansion in larger cities (D'Emilio 2007). One ideology that empowered gay and lesbian people was that gay men and lesbians have always existed and are everywhere. D'Emilio (2007) argues, though, that even though this idea was comforting, it is not accurate; instead, gay and lesbian identity categories are recent inventions that emerged with capitalism. Along these lines, Weeks (2007) considers how desires may be different from Western-rooted sexual identities (e.g., 'gay,' 'lesbian,' 'straight') in that desires transcend social identity. These identities emerged during different times and places, and they are also different in their composition of desires. With that being said, sexual desires are not created by being around other people but rather are intrinsically rooted in people, unlike social identities (Weeks 2007). Weeks' idea suggests that desires are natural, but the concept of desiring is developed by society. The innateness of desires mirrors discussions about the essentialism and construction debate.

The Anthropology of Homosexuality

In the past few decades, there has been an emergence and a legitimization of the anthropological study of homosexuality (Howe 2015). Early ethnographic studies of homosexuality tended to consider the cross-cultural construction of sexuality while also examining same-sex acts through the lens of Western ideologies of homosexuality

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(Elliston 1995). As such, non-Western homosexuality was perceived to exist mainly as ritualistic or deviant. Herdt's study of the Sambia in Papua New Guinea, for instance, found that Sambia boys ingest the semen of older men in order to grow, in a highly ritualized act of "age-structured homosexuality" (Herdt 1984, 1999). Herdt's study has since been critiqued as problematic because it suggests a Western definition of homosexuality as his study assumes that the acts performed in the ritual are homosexual and not simply same-sex acts (Dykes 2000; Elliston 1995).

Another early example is Blackwood's (1985) edited volume, which includes some ethnographic examples that could be critiqued for using Western homosexual identities that may not fit the same-sex practices observed in non-Western cultures. This edited volume focuses on ethnographic examples of how female homosexuality is constructed cross-culturally. She emphasizes how important it is to study lesbians since, until that point, most anthropological work had focused on men and because female homosexuality is not comparable to male homosexuality (Blackwood 1985). Another contribution to the field is Weston's (1991) ethnography of gay men and women in the San Francisco Bay area. It examines how gay men and women create their own families and ideas of kinship along with cultural spaces where they find comfort and support, essentially challenging ideas of biology and families (Weston 1991). Weston's study shows how kinship practices can vary cross-culturally because of varying ideas regarding sexuality and family. Gutmann's (2007) work in Mexico is also an example of various kinship practices and their relationship to sexuality. Gutmann shows how men in Mexico navigate changing social ideas of macho masculinity with sexuality, specifically the

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prominent appearance of homosexuality, and gendered roles, including family and the task of fathering.

Queer Anthropology

In the past two decades, anthropological studies of homosexuality have become increasingly aligned with the interdisciplinary field of queer studies. Anthropological works in queer studies distinguish themselves from previous work on the anthropology of homosexuality. Anthropological works in queer studies differ because they utilize the term 'queer,' which is "…a designation for many 'alternative' configurations of sexuality, gender, and desire" (Howe 2015, 3) with a focus on non-heteronormative categories and ways of being that defy social norms (Allen 2016; Weis 2016). As well, queer anthropology has taken a reflexive turn in examining how the sexual identity of anthropologists conducting fieldwork on sexuality affects their studies. This is a key component of postmodern and queer anthropological paradigms (Howe 2015), whereas prior work in gay and lesbian anthropology did not do this. Being reflexive about an ethnographer's sexuality brought up "discussions of how sexual identity helps or hinders the research process" and, in turn, "raised broader concerns about how sexuality has (undoubtedly, always) conditioned the subjectivity of field researchers as well as how they are interpreted by their interlocutors" (Howe 2015, 3).

As evidence of the growing impact of queer studies in anthropology, a 2016 special issue of the journal *Cultural Anthropology* features articles that examine the aims, methods, and theoretical approaches of queer anthropology. Some of the pieces in this issue pose critical questions about the aims and relevance of queer anthropology. Weiss (2016), for instance, discusses queer theory and claims that "queer is not an identity—it is

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a critique, an analytic" (Weiss 2016, 628). To do anthropology in a queer way is different than to study people who are queer. However, she notes that the shift to queer from who we study to how we study, has not happened yet. When describing queer anthropology and the future of it, she writes that the study of: "…identity, normativity, and desire" are topics that have been studied, where identity was studied much in the past, then the focus shifted to normativity and anti-normativity and informants' relationships to these categories, and now, and hopefully in the future, there will be more queer desires studied (Weiss 2016, 629).

In another example from this special issue, Lewin (2016) poses multiple questions for anthropologists to consider about the theories and methods of queer anthropology. One central question she poses is: is there such a thing as queer anthropology? Questions related to this ask if queer anthropology is simply just feminist anthropology. Lewin calls for anthropologists to examine the methodological framework of queer anthropology and notes that queer anthropology seems to be simply the study of subjects deemed as 'queer' with methodological frameworks that resemble feminist anthropology.

In regard to queer anthropology, Lewin (2016) points out that there is no clear framework for doing queer anthropology. Queer anthropology offers nothing unique or novel that feminist anthropology hasn't already offered. Lewin (2016) asks:

> Aren't those of us who dedicate ourselves to presenting the voices of persons who are otherwise erased and disparaged basically working along the lines of feminist anthropology? Is there a good reason for us to attribute these innovations to the insights queerness provides or to declare ourselves practitioners of queer anthropology? Aren't we just doing ethnography? And don't our interlocutors deserve our respect, even if they don't embrace outrageousness or seek to separate themselves from normative social and moral standards in a way we find exciting (Lewin 2016, 605)?

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Lewin (2016) raises a valid point that feminist anthropologists have always done ethnographic research regardless of whether informants claimed to be queer or represented queerness. Nothing new is presented in doing fieldwork under queer anthropology.

With these critiques of queer anthropology in mind, the theoretical orientation for this project instead utilizes tenets of feminist anthropology. Feminist anthropology has changed throughout time, but there has always been a focus on agency, particularly in scholarship of the Middle East (Sehlikoglu 2017). Sehlikoglu (2017) separates these theoretical and methodological changes via waves. The first wave dealt with addressing male bias and studying women because anthropological literature had neglected these topics. Marxist feminist approaches were applied to examine power and status in relation to women and their place in patriarchal societies. The second wave focused on post-colonial critique. There was also a rise in gender and sexuality studies. The third wave used theoretical tools to write against stereotypes of Muslim women. This was done by examining agency and displaying it using the voices of informants. The fourth wave, the current wave, inspects agency but in relation to how it pertains to the everyday lives of Muslim women. Fashion, youth culture, and desire are some topics explored. Theoretically, the fourth wave also looks at non-religious parts of Muslim women's lives.

When considering the many aspects and waves of feminist anthropology, particularly in the Middle East, I would argue that this study draws on the many waves of feminist anthropology. This study focuses not only on Islam, but also sexuality studies,

agency, and other aspects of women's lives, specifically their sexual desires that go against normative notions of sexuality.

Methodologically, drawing on a feminist anthropological approach involved utilizing a constructivist paradigm. I employed a constructivist approach by looking at individual patterns and constructions from informants that were formed during interviews and participant observation and creating an overall construction (Guba and Lincoln 1994). For example, when learning about the ways in which informants define desire, I was able to see that individual discourse on sexual desire was in fact composed of three themes that all informants individually discussed.

Approaches to Desire

Few anthropologists have attempted to understand the relationship between desires and identities, instead focusing on the composition of desires. Many scholars have noted this crucial, yet missing, area of research in the social sciences (Green 2008; Tolman and Diamond 2012; Valentine 2003). However, there have been studies conducted that do examine the concept, meaning, and role of desires. In anthropology, studies have consisted of examinations of desire, the role desire plays in the lives of people, and historical and sociopolitical factors of desire (Boellstorff 2005a; Valentine 2003; Curtis 2004; Zhang 2007). And, the area of sex research has focused on problems in the field with desire and determining the origins of desire (Giles 2008; Shaffer 1978).

Anthropological Approaches to Desire

Perhaps two of the most dominant anthropological works concerning desire that I will focus on in this section are Valentine's (2003) and Boellstorff's (2005a) ethnographic

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studies of desire. Both works include a discussion of desire as it relates to their informants with each of their informants demonstrating different conceptualizations of desire and how to navigate their desires.

Valentine (2003) uses an example from his ethnographic fieldwork with an 'alternative lifestyles' support group in New York City. He describes how there are often problems with neglecting to examine people's gender and sexual desires, frequently holding that these two factors are entirely indicative of their sexuality, especially when it comes to transgender people. One informant sees another's desires as incompatible with the many identities they used to describe themself. This informant was put on the spot and asked to coalesce her desires and put them into an identity category.

Valentine's argument, as he demonstrates with this ethnographic piece, is that there needs to be more of a focus in anthropology, and especially in linguistic anthropology, on trying to understand informants' desires instead of taking emic terms of identification for granted. As Kulick (2000) says, studies need to look more at desire rather than the idea that sexuality equals identity (Valentine 2003). A focus on desire would first force researchers to study "culturally grounded semiotic practices" rather than identities (Kulick 2000, 273), meaning that focusing on desire rather than identity would help researchers to understand "sexual" behaviors and the cultural meaning behind them. People desire different things as well as express their desires in different ways, and this is because of their culture. A focus on desire would also enable analysis "…about what desire is, how it is structured, and how it is communicated" (Kulick 2000, 273). This particular study enforces the importance of examining desires in my own study, along with inspecting those desires that give meaning to people's particular identities.

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Valentine (2003) discusses how, in order to understand sexuality, we must look closely at how people express their desires. Foucault suggests that sexual identity has been one of the ultimate determinants of who a person is (Valentine 2003). Because of Foucault's argument and impact on sexuality studies, many scholars have focused on the idea that "…the erotic is not expressed as particular desires but, rather, as discrete identities" (123, 124). However, Valentine (2003) demonstrates the idea that identities do not always explain desires. Valentine argues that desires that are nonnormative and do not fit into the gender binary are incomprehensible to most people and are seen as nonsensical. Cisgender people are sometimes confused and fail to see and understand transgender people's sexualities. This study shows how people often assume the sexualities of others, and view people who have desires that do not seem to fit their expectation, standard, or image of what is congruent with their identity as illogical and wrong.

Another key anthropological work on desire is Boellstorff's (2005b) ethnography on gay Muslim men in Indonesia. Boellstorff's discussion of desire is less about the analytical category and meaning of desire and more about how his informants find a way to balance their same-sex desires with their religion. Boellstorff discusses desire in terms of the conflict that might be produced by being a gay man and being a Muslim.

Most of Boellstorff's informants understand that in Islam, it is key that one gets married and has children. This is a practice that leads one to live a pious life. One does not get married solely for the expression of sexual desires. Marriage is important because engaging in these practices (i.e. having children) makes you a more pious Muslim (Boellstorff 2005a; Mahmood 2004). In general, same-sex desires are considered to be

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sinful by many Muslims. However, many of Boellstorff's informants said that they did not consider themselves to be sinning because of their belief that God gives each person desires and thus God gave them these same-sex desires.

Boellstorff also found that many of his informants also had other desires: one being that they had a strong desire to enter into a heterosexual marriage because of religious and familial pressures. Some of his informants said that they will choose or already have chosen to enter into a heterosexual marriage while sometimes remaining in contact and seeing their male lovers. This piece demonstrates how gay Muslim men attempt to navigate and find commensurability between same-sex desires and Islam in their own ways (i.e. maintaining the idea that their desires are sinful, or God-given). However, at the time this article was written "…no point of commensurability between the 'languages' of Islam and gay subjectivity has been reached. Yet gay lives exist and are lived every day; what exists is a habitation, not a resolution, of incommensurability" (Boellstorff 2005a, 582).

Other works in anthropology have focused on historical and sociopolitical factors of desire as it relates to informants (Curtis 2004; Zhang 2007). Zhang's (2007) study focuses on men's medicine (*nanke*) in China. He describes how in the Mao era, it wasn't common for men to seek treatment for impotence or any other sexual matter and thus the focus on the community overshadowed any individualism, which included individual sexual desire. However, in the post-Mao era, sexual desire was no longer a taboo and *nanke* emerged to help with impotence and other sexual matters. Curtis's (2004) work examines women in Rhode Island and their participation in sex-toy parties. She links capitalist desires and sexualities, suggesting that capitalist desires drive sexualities. She

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perceives capitalism to be its own entity that creates individual human desires through the use of purchasing sex toys. These two studies show the different ways that desire is conceptualized and utilized, and what role desire plays in the lives of informants cross-culturally.

A Sex Research Approach to Desire

Sex research is another area that has attempted, perhaps more successfully given its central focus, to analyze the meaning of desire. However, the field still could improve in its quest to analyze desire. Tolman and Diamond (2012), for instance, note that sex research hasn't focused much on what sexual desire is or its meaning cross culturally. The authors note that just studying behaviors and identities fails to "tell us anything about the origins of sexual orientation" (61). Because sexual desires are not stable, a fixed sexual orientation of a person cannot be determined, especially if we hold the belief that there may be an inherent basis to sexual orientation. They do not set out to construct an argument of the origins of desires and whether they are biological or cultural. Their aim is to look at the role of social and biological factors. The authors note:

> … sexual desire represents, in many ways, an ideal "laboratory" for interactions between biological and sociocultural aspects of sexuality. … Thus, sexual desire is a particularly apt topic for investigations into how internalized sociocultural norms regarding sexual feelings and experiences *interact* with biological processes that are not part of our conscious awareness of our bodies. (Tolman and Diamond 2012, 36)

This article shows that studying sexual desires helps us understand same-sex desires and the diversity of expressions and experiences of these desires cross-culturally and among genders.

Closely examining sexual desires is critical to understanding the construction of identities. Examining desires can help scholars understand how people conceive of their desires, the different ways they desire, and how they use their conceptualizations of their desires to navigate their sense of personhood with their roles in society. Examining desires also allows scholars to see how people perceive their own sexuality, particularly regarding beliefs about innateness and potential cultural and social influences on sexuality.

Homosexuality in Islam

Homosexuality in Islamic History and Theology

Studies of homosexuality in Islam have focused overwhelmingly on the place of male homosexual practices and ideologies in historical and literary contexts, with little regard for female homosexuality. Dunne (1990), for instance, notes the prevalence of homoerotic acts in Persian and Arabic poetry and argues that male homosexual behavior was commonplace throughout Islamic history (Dunne 1990). He argues that "homosexual practices…have indeed been commonplace, generally involving asymmetrical relations that reflect age, status or class differences between 'partners,' and may have involved variations along class lines" (Dunne 1990, 59). Similarly, Murray and Roscoe (1997) argue that many accounts of homosexuality in Islamic history portray the importance of active and passive roles in male homoerotic acts that tended to follow along age and/or class lines. Both of these historians note that even though these acts were commonplace, the taboo of homosexuality was so strong that same-sex behaviors and desires were kept private.

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Habib's (2007) book – a combination of historical, literary, and theological research as well as cultural study of Middle Eastern societies – is one of the few studies of female homosexuality in the Middle East. Habib (2007) argues that attention needs to be brought to the ways in which women in the Middle East engage in female homosexuality in order to show that it is not unusual or uncommon, either historically or in contemporary societies. As she notes, "when one encounters material on the study of homosexuality in the Middle East, female homosexuality is treated, if at all, as some kind of secondary and unusual phenomenon" (Habib 2007, 3). Through an examination of literary, historical, and sociological sources, she argues for the normalization of female homosexuality both as a subject of study and as a common cultural phenomenon in Middle Eastern societies, past and present.

The debate over constructionism and essentialism finds its way into Islam through the common theological interpretation that the Qur'an and the hadith (sayings from the Prophet Muhammad that act as guidance to moral and religious decisions) posit sexuality as something that is innate because it is given to people by God (Ali 2006; Boellstorff 2005a; Kugle 2013). For instance, several hadith declare that sexual desire is natural and that it is important to get satisfaction, but only licitly (Ali 2006). Licit sex is defined as being either between a man and his wife or a man and his female slave (Ali 2006). Sexual relations between people of the same sex are, in this sense, considered illicit. Sexual desire, though, is not limited in this way: in essence, same-sex desire may be considered natural and innate but acting upon that desire is prohibited (Ali 2006). As such, a tension exists for many gay Muslims in how to balance being gay with being a good Muslim.

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Being Gay and Muslim

Anthropologists (Bereket and Adam 2006; Blackwood 2010; Boellstorff 2005a; Massad 2007; Merabet 2014) have examined how gay identities and desires have been formed among practicing Muslims using queer, transnational, and sociocultural approaches. Boellstorff's (2005a) article proposes the idea of 'incommensurability' to account for the various ways in which gay Muslims in Indonesia navigate the conflict produced by being both gay and Muslim. Gay Muslim men in Indonesia attempt to reconcile and negotiate within themselves how it is possible to have these two identities. Blackwood (2010) utilizes a transnational queer feminist approach in looking at how Muslim lesbian women in Indonesia take on the identity of *lesbi*, which is an identity that is more fluid than the term 'lesbian.' In Indonesia, some *lesbi* may desire men in addition to women, though in a way that does not conform to Western understandings of bisexuality. Ultimately, these women challenge global ideas of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender identities by negotiating their sexual identity with behavior because they do not follow Western constructions of sexuality. They challenge these global identities because their behaviors defy social norms of how a lesbian should act. People in the West would typically consider a person who desires both men and women to be bisexual. And, lastly, Merabet (2014) discusses how gay Muslim men in Beirut create separate urban spaces, both physically and in "non-architectural terms" (112), for their identities. Specifically, queer space "designates the geographical, along with the socio-cultural and mental, fields in which various homoerotic practices take place and are being integrated into the respective lives of different individuals" (Merabet 2014, 112). Using the terms 'queer' and 'queer head' to describe his interlocutors and the way they think "outside the normative box and

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against the dominant paradigms" (Merabet 2014, 7), Merabet examines how queer men conceptualize their existence within various traditional, religious, and urban contexts.

In Kugle's (2013) book, gay Muslim activists who were working with support groups in democratic countries (such as the U.K. the U.S., and South Africa) talk about challenging anti-homosexual rhetoric found in Islam by saying that homosexuality is normal and innate and that they were born that way. Kugle found that gay Muslims want to act upon the sexual desires that God gave them, but that doing so conflicts with most interpretations of homosexuality in Islamic religious text. Rather than cutting Islam from their life, though, the gay Muslims in Kugle's study looked for progressive forms of Islam that would allow them to act upon their homosexual desires, even if this ultimately meant rejection from their family and community. Kugle concluded that his informants' Muslim identity is the primary identity and it is the identity through which all other identities are mediated (Kugle 2013). He found that the journey to discovering oneself and one's identity was a form of silent activism (Kugle 2013). Islam encourages Muslims to live full lives, to search for one's true self, and to let God be the judge (Kugle 2013). Kugle's informants believed that by discovering their true self and true identity, that they would be able to be closer to God because God, not their community nor even their family, created them (Kugle 2013). Kugle's study discusses the importance of listening to informants' navigation of having a Muslim identity with a gay or lesbian identity.

Women and Morality in Islam

Literature regarding moral practices and their relationship to Islam has focused on Muslim women's education, Muslim women's agency, and Muslims' modification of Islamic practices. Adely's (2012b) ethnographic work focuses on an all-girls public high

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school in Jordan and the education the students are receiving. She demonstrates that the girls' education is directly linked with piety movements associated with political Islam, which are movements rooted in historical efforts "to shape young minds, beliefs, and practices through school" (108).

Educators at this school work to teach female students to be better Muslims and to be good and moral people, as suggested by the values of piety movements. However, these educators often have differing beliefs regarding what proper Islamic faith looks like. As Adely describes, "Competing interpretations of the proper modesty and comportment of women, of the proper Muslim family, and of legitimate gender roles and relations are all central to religious discourse in Jordan today" (108). Female students are exposed to various interpretations of modesty, as brought forth by their educators. Educators come with their own experiences and views of gender and gender roles. Students challenge their educators' teachings from the religious text, in turn sometimes attempting to redefine gender meanings. The challenges they make are often regarding morality more than Islam in general. Education has transformed the ways in which "basic conceptualization of successful personhood, morality, and progress" (Adely 2012b, 134) are viewed, specifically in relation to female empowerment.

Similarly, Mahmood (2012) explores agency and its relationship to morality and ethics among Muslim women in Cairo, Egypt. She examines what she calls an "urban women's mosque movement" (2). Mahmood discusses how Muslim women's involvement in the Islamist movement via the mosque movement challenges preconceived notions held by Western feminism – for instance, that Muslim women are oppressed and that all women want to be "free" as defined by Western feminist ideals.

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Involvement in the mosque movement and the women's presence in the public sphere suggests a change in traditional boundaries where women are becoming more active in teaching and interpreting Islamic doctrine.

Mahmood makes the argument that modern politics and the ideas of freedom should not be equated with human agency, or that human agency, in the feminist sense, is the ability of women to resist men's domination. Regarding Muslim women, specifically, she says that "…what may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility from a progressivist point of view, may actually be a form of agency—but one that can be understood only from within the discourse and structures of subordination that create the conditions of its enactment" (15).

Mahmood additionally describes the relationship between agency and ethics regarding the Muslim women involved in the piety movement. Agency and ethics are related in that these women's interpretations of Islamic morality are demonstrated by their ethical practices. Thus, engaging in practices derived from their own system of ethics give them, as Mahmood argues, a sort of agency. The women involved in the mosque movement follow foundational Islamic moral principles in their practices in teaching other women in the public sphere, even though those ethical practices challenge the predominant interpretation of fundamental Islamic views.

Lastly, Jeldtoft (2011) explores how non-organized Muslims in Europe have different interpretations of Islam and spiritualities they combine with some Islamic traditions, thereby reshaping and negotiating an Islam that makes "sense for them at a personal level" (1141). One informant discusses how Islam is about being a good person

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and having good values. This informant seems to suggest that one does not have to follow Islamic principles exactly in order to be a good Muslim.

Studies on morality, like the ones above, show how Muslim informants in these studies utilize different conceptualizations of Islam and follow Islamic principles and moral beliefs as they think is right. Most argue, in the studies above as well as in this study, that they are good and moral people even though they may not follow Islam like some people think they should follow.

The Anthropology of Jordan

Jordan is a Western-leaning, majority Muslim country and is fairly liberal in comparison to other Middle Eastern nations in regard to the legal regulation of conventional Islamic principles. Though it is surrounded by political turmoil in the neighboring countries of Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, and Israel, it has remained politically stable, even through the transformative democratic uprisings of the Arab Spring, which swept through the region in the early 2010s. The capital, Amman, is a metropolis that is diverse because it represents the multiple groups of people that have been displaced from Palestine and Syria that are now living in Jordan.

Anthropological research in Jordan has focused on Bedouin groups, nationalism, Islamic teachings, how to be a good Muslim, and the importance of the family unit. Shryock's (1997) ethnography of Jordan's Balga Bedouin tribe examines shifting tribal identities within the modern nation-state of Jordan. He argues that modern ideologies of historiography give preference to the "textual authority" of written history, which are in conflict with the oral historical traditions of the Balga. Shryock's later work (2012) examines the important place hospitality has played in national and tribal identities in

Jordan. Jordanians believe that hospitality is central to a person's moral character, and that to be a good host is central to what it means to be Jordanian (Shryock 2012). If one wants to be a good Muslim, then they must be a good host to all of their guests. Guests have the power of defining a host's reputation based on the quality of hospitality they receive.

Also, in relation to Bedouin, Layne (1989) examines how, in the 1980s, the Jordanian government attempted to unify local Bedouin groups by proposing that they agree to a national heritage. This was done by having Bedouin take their local customs, for example, and form them into a more unified and national representation of the state. Adely's ethnographic study (2012b) of an all-girls high school, as discussed above, examines the ways in which the Jordanian state promotes particular religious and national ideals by teaching girls how to be good Muslim women and citizens. Underneath the teachings lie Sunni Islamic ideals about the best way to be a Muslim in Jordan (Adely 2012a). Finally, Shryock and Howell (2001) discuss how the essential unit of society is the family, and how family supersedes any ideals of individualism. Families are units ruled by patriarchs. Social and political systems are patriarchal, with men in positions of power and leadership. This leads to patriarchal rule at the larger scale, wherein the king is the overall patriarchal figure of Jordan, and his family (the Hashemite royal family) serves as the quintessential family.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

Setting

This thesis is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Amman, Jordan over two and a half weeks beginning the middle of June 2017 to the beginning of July 2017. This research focused on same-sex desiring women in Amman, Jordan. Jordan is an ideal place to study same-sex desiring people because it allows researchers to see how same-sex desiring women, specifically, navigate their same-sex desires and gendered duties in a majority Muslim country that is fairly liberal and Western-leaning. Jordan is also a country where homosexuality is decriminalized but also very punishable by members of society because homosexuality is still morally prohibited and stigmatized due to strong Islamic views pervading the country.

Sample

For this study, I interviewed fifteen women in Jordan who were at least eighteen years of age or older, identified as lesbian, or gay, or said that they had same-sex desires. A few of these women were women I knew from summer 2016. Other women I interviewed were women I met via snowball sampling. Before I arrived in Amman, I contacted the women I knew already via messaging apps and planned times and dates to meet with them. These women then referred me to other informants. Some women were referred to me by workers at bookstores or cafes who knew women who met the criteria

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for my research. Some women were referred to me by other researchers who had studied this population.

The majority of semi-structured and unstructured interviews were conducted in a few local cafes located in a more liberal part of Amman. However, a few informants preferred to talk in a more private place. A few of the semi-structured and unstructured interviews were carried out in informants' homes, in their room away from their parents.

Before interviewing these women, I was careful to explain the purpose of the research project and that participation was voluntary. As well, I provided a consent form to every woman I discussed my research with and asked them if they agreed to participate in the research knowing that they did not have to respond to any questions they did not want to answer. They were provided a consent form where only oral consent was needed before starting the interview. Considering the sensitivity of this topic in this area of the world, I took the necessary steps to ensure the confidentiality of my informants. All data collected from interviews and participant observation was kept on my laptop computer in a password protected Microsoft Word document as well as backed up with password protection in Google Drive. The laptop was kept in my locked apartment. I used pseudonyms in my fieldnotes to protect the confidentiality of my informants. After the data was collected, I transferred the data to an external hard drive and erased the information from Google Drive.

Demographics

The fifteen informants interviewed were asked their age and, in an open-ended way, how they would describe their gender, their sexuality, their religious upbringing, and their current religious affiliation (Table 1). Each informant's age, religious affiliation, religious upbringing, and educational background were obtained during semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Based on the research questions posed in the beginning of this project, I deemed these factors as relevant in attempting to answer these questions.

Table 1   Demographics of Each Informant Interviewed

Informant	Age	Gender identity	Sexuality	College educated	Religious upbringing	Current religious affiliation
Nadya	29	Female	No identity	Yes	Muslim	Atheist
Layla	25	Female	No identity	Yes	Muslim	Muslim
Rania	31	Cisgender Woman	Lesbian	Yes	Christian	Christian
Zeena	25	Gay	Gay	Yes	Muslim	No religion
Muna	19	Female	Bisexual	Yes	Christian	Christian
Yazmin	20	Female	Bisexual	Yes	Christian	Agnostic
Huda	26	Female	Lesbian	No	Muslim	Believes in God
Yara	23	Female	Lesbian	Yes	Muslim	Muslim
Maha	29	Female	Lesbian	Yes	Christian	Atheist
Amina	23	Female	Lesbian	Yes	Muslim	Muslim
Lina	23	Female	Bisexual	Yes	Muslim	Atheist
Karima	27	Female	Lesbian	Yes	Muslim	Muslim
Khalila	26	Woman	Lesbian	Yes	Muslim	Muslim
Basima	35	Girl	Lesbian	Yes	Muslim	Spiritual, believes in God
Nour	42	Female	Heterosexual	Yes	Muslim	Spiritual, believes in God

Interviewees ranged in age from 19 to 42 years, with the average age being about 27 years old. The majority (11/15) of women described their gender as female. When it comes to sexuality, there's variation in how women described themselves. Most women (13/15) took on a common Western sexual identity such as lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, and gay. The other two said that they do not like labels. With an exception of one woman, all are college-educated, having attended university for four years. Four women who were interviewed were raised in a Christian household. Eleven women who were interviewed were raised in a Muslin family. Interviewees were also asked about their religious affiliation. I compared this answer to their religious upbringing and found that seven women's beliefs are similar to the religion with which they were raised. Eight women's beliefs are different from their religious upbringing. Some women said that their religious affiliation differs from their upbringing because their religious affiliation doesn't follow every principle of Islam, but they still identified as Muslim. Some Muslim women said that they are spiritual, suggesting that they do not have a religion, but still believe in God.

Qualitative Methods

This study utilized qualitative methods, including participant observation and semi-structured interviews, to collect data. To gather data through participant observation, I engaged in social activities with same-sex desiring women. Some of these activities included meeting with them at cafes and attending parties. At these activities, I was often introduced to other same-sex desiring women.

Participant observation was done in cafes, usually after interviews. Sometimes we would have juice or smoke hookah, and I would watch as the women interacted with their

significant others or with other people at the café. At one place I observed multiple times, about four informants would chat, paint, do homework, play cards, and order food from the man who works at the café. These four informants also engaged in these activities with other friends who were not same-sex desiring. The owner of the café is well-acquainted with these informants and is often interacting with them. Another time of participant observation was when I went to a party near the Dead Sea. The same-sex desiring women here cooked together, drank alcohol, swam, belly-danced, and celebrated someone's birthday. I was able to see how this large group of friends acted around their friends, away from their families and other social pressures.

Another aspect of qualitative data collection consisted of unstructured and semi-structured interviewing. Unstructured interviewing involved talking with women and hanging out with them, usually after the interviews. Semi-structured interviewing involved using an interview guide to ask questions. These interviews lasted about thirty to forty-five minutes. Informants were not hesitant to add additional comments that were or were not directly related to the question. The complete interview question schedule can be found in Appendix A. All interviews were conducted in English, which was limiting. At times, there were same-sex desiring women I was not able to interview because they are not fluent in English and I am not fluent in Arabic. I attended parties with some women who did not speak English well. Because of this, I was not able to conduct interviews, but I was able to observe and speak with them. However, all the women I interviewed were fluent in English. This specific population consisted mostly of young, college educated women who typically have LGBT friends. Because most of them are well-educated, they have most likely had more schooling in English than those who did

not attend university. I did not audio record the interviews out of respect to the women who were willing to participate in the study, but I did take thorough, hand-written notes that I typed up and elaborated on after each interview. Questions focused on how women define their sexuality, what homosexuality means to them, what their same-sex desires mean to them, how they identify religiously, and how they negotiate their same-sex desires with familial duties. Many questions I asked informants could be considered quite personal and the answers difficult to obtain; however, I found that most of the women I spoke with were open to talking about many aspects of their sexuality. There were no problems in gaining answers to the questions I posed.

Analysis

After I completed interviews and participant observation in Amman, I returned to the United States and analyzed the qualitative data. I employed components of both thematic analysis and narrative analysis. Utilizing thematic analysis involves "…identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke 2006, 6). Simultaneously, I applied narrative analysis to search "for regularities in how people, within and across cultures, tell stories" (Bernard 2011, 416). I used both these methodologies to look for patterns in responses from women in informal interviewing, participant observation, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews. I looked back at my research questions for this project, and then I read through all interviews and notes gathered from the interviews and participant observation. I picked out themes present in these sources that coincided with my research questions. Sometimes themes were present that did not match with questions I had aimed to answer. I color coded the themes an patterns, and then I made a list of what was said specifically and how many times

informants, or how many informants, discussed something related to the theme. This technique was utilized in order to see patterns in how women talked about specific topics related to sexuality, religion, and family life. Conclusions were drawn regarding what themes meant and how they answered the research questions.

The results from the analysis of participant observation and interviews answer some of the questions I developed before going to Jordan to conduct my fieldwork. Other results were collected by finding patterns in the discourse, specifically patterns in personal stories and experiences about what it means to same-sex desiring women in Jordan to sexually desire, and how these women balance their desires with their familial, religious, and gender roles. Participant observation proved to be useful in answering these questions because the observations provided insight into how and when women negotiate their multiple identities and expectations.

Conclusion

Fieldwork was conducted over two and a half weeks in Amman, Jordan in Summer, 2017. Fifteen women were interviewed about their same-sex desires. These interviews, along with participant observation notes, were analyzed to find discursive patterns about desires, family life, and religion related to the research questions originally proposed in the beginning of this project. The results from the interviews informed my analysis, because I knew that themes were present simply by hearing different women talk about certain themes repeatedly. These themes were confirmed after closely examining the written accounts of the interviews. The next chapter presents the results from the interviews and observations.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS & RESULTS

In this section, results are presented on the data collected from interviews and observations. Findings are presented in tables as well as in narratives. These results answer the research questions posed in the beginning of this project as well as show additional information relevant to this study.

Sexual Variation and Factors Informing Knowledge About Sexual Desires

This section explores the fluidity of sexualities and sexual identities of same-sex desiring women in Amman, Jordan. First, results are given regarding the sexualities and identities of the women interviewed. Next, results are given regarding how age and religion affected the women's knowledge about same-sex sexuality and desires. This was done in order to see if age and/or religion affected informants' sexual identities and their knowledge about same-sex desires.

It should be noted that in the interviews, I distinguished between homosexuality (as the Western conception) and same-sex desires. At times, I asked about "homosexuality" and in other questions I asked about "same-sex desires." The purpose of mentioning homosexuality was to get an understanding of how the women I interviewed perceived the Western notion of homosexuality. It was also asked in order to see how informants defined Western labels to see if they shared the same identities or beliefs

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about desires that construct those identities. In this thesis, I use the terms "same-sex desires" or "same-sex desiring" in order to not place Western labels on informants.

Sexuality Variation

To understand same-sex desiring women's sexuality and identity and how their sexuality might reflect their desires, I asked informants questions about how they would describe their sexuality and why they would describe it as such. I compared their responses to their religious upbringing and whether they exclusively have same-sex desires. Table 2 presents these general responses.

Table 2   Responses to Questions Regarding Sexuality

Informant	Religious upbringing	Only desires same sex	Sexuality
Nadya	Muslim	No	No identity
Layla	Muslim	No	No identity
Rania	Christian	No	Lesbian
Zeena	Muslim	Yes	Gay
Muna	Christian	No	Bisexual
Yazmin	Christian	No	Bisexual
Huda	Muslim	Yes	Lesbian
Yara	Muslim	Yes	Lesbian
Maha	Christian	Yes	Lesbian
Amina	Muslim	Yes	Lesbian
Lina	Muslim	No	Bisexual
Karima	Muslim	Yes	Lesbian
Khalila	Muslim	Yes	Lesbian
Basima	Muslim	Yes	Lesbian
Nour	Muslim	No	Heterosexual

When it came to desiring people of the same sex, eight informants said that they exclusively desire people of the same sex. All eight identified as gay/lesbian. Seven out informants said that they do not only desire women but also desire men. Out of those, one identified as heterosexual, two chose not to identify, one identified as lesbian, and three identified as bisexual.

I compared their responses to why they took on certain sexual identities with whether they have exclusive same-sex desires and found that some women either chose not to take on an identity or they took an identity that did not match up with Western definitions. For example, Rania identified as lesbian but said that she also desires men. She said that she identifies this way because this is who she is now. Sexuality is fluid to her and, because of this, her sexuality could change later in life. As for Nour, who identified as heterosexual, she desires women as well as men but said that she is heterosexual with same-sex desires. Same-sex desires have always been part of her fantasy, but she has "never acted on them." Though, she said, she is "considering acting on them now." She described her sexuality as "dirty, passionate, beautiful, forbidden." Typically, in the West, a lesbian is a woman who exclusively desires women. It is common in the West for identity to follow desires, in regard to the social construction of sexual identities and the desires and behaviors that are expected from those who identify in such ways. Identities, behaviors, and desires do not always coincide. However, in the West, although identities may be more fluid sometimes, those with LGBT identities present themselves, for political reasons, as having hardened identities. The lesbian and gay movement is an example of a situation where LGBT identities are employed in order to fight gay and lesbian rights (Berstein 1997).

Another example comes from Nadya. Nadya chose not to describe or define her sexuality. She said that she doesn't like labels. She doesn't use labels on herself because she isn't "entirely sexually and emotionally attracted to women." She is attracted to people's brain and "women just happen to have the brain." Amina said that she's only ever been attracted to women only. She said that she only desires people of the same-sex,

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"*alhamdulillah*" (meaning, thank God). These examples suggest that the emphasis on hardened identity categories for political reasons tends to not be the case with same-sex desiring women in Jordan.

Age and Religious Related Knowledge about Sexuality

Informants were asked questions regarding when they first learned about homosexuality to better understand what factors might have played a role in when and how they learned about homosexuality and how they perceive the term "homosexuality." In this part of the interview, I asked about homosexuality as opposed to same-sex desires in an attempt to understand their perceptions of "homosexuality" and its meanings. This aimed to answer when informants first had same-sex desires in relation to when they learned about homosexuality. This was done in order to understand their sexuality formations and some of the factors that may have influenced their knowledge about their sexuality. Other factors that could have affected their knowledge about their sexuality include their religious upbringing, the age of their first same-sex desire, and the age they first learned about homosexuality.

The majority of informants in my sample (12/15) reported that they learned about homosexuality after or around the same time they had their first same-sex desire. Ten informants who learned about homosexuality after having their first same-sex desire were Muslim. Two out of the three women who learned about homosexuality before having their first same-sex desire were Christian. The average age of learning about homosexuality was 15 years old, which is about two years after their first same-sex desire at 13 years old. Informants who were brought up in Muslim households learned about homosexuality later (ave. age 16) than informants brought up in Christian households

(ave. age 13). This suggests that informants, in general, were having same-sex desires before they even learned about an identity to describe their sexuality. Many informants describe in detail, specific instances when they discovered they desired people of the same-sex. Then, they later discuss how they eventually came to learn through media or through friends, that there was a name, a label for who they are.

When asked what they thought about the term "homosexuality," most informants did not like the term, and mentioned that they also did not like sexuality labels. Informants mentioned nine times that labels are not good and seven times that homosexuality is basically a curse word. Many informants did not say why they think labels are not good. Some informants, though, did. Their reasons for not liking labels include: "people should not be labelled based on who they are having sex with," labels can change (this particular informant identified as trans last summer and now identifies as a lesbian woman), "sexuality is fluid, so we don't need labels," "no labels, just love," and "labelling is not a good way to approach things." Most of the women who said that homosexuality is a curse word referred to it in English. Only one informant mentioned the Arabic word and that was after she discussed the bad connotation behind the term "homosexuality." As Basima said, *mthlya*, an Arabic term that refers to gay people, means "not normal" and "not natural." The word "homosexual" in English is often used as a curse word in Jordan. Layla also said that the word has a negative connotation in society. Zeena said that the word is "not fair," and that it is only used to describe "the people society thinks are abnormal."

The Question of Innateness of Sexual Desires and What it Means to Sexually Desire

This section investigates the variation in beliefs regarding the innateness of sexuality and conceptualizations of sexual desires. First, data are given regarding the fifteen women's age of first same-sex desire, their religious upbringing, and whether they believe desires are innate. Their reasons for their beliefs regarding innate sexuality and desires are also presented. Next, informants' views regarding definitions of what a lesbian is and what those definitions mean are presented. Finally, their views on what it means to sexually desire someone of the same sex are given in order to see how their conceptualizations of desire are similar or different to other conceptualizations of desire, and what types of desires constitute their innate and same-sex desires.

Innate Desires and Sexuality

To understand what same-sex desiring women in Jordan believe about the innateness of sexuality and sexual desires, I asked the fifteen informants whether they thought they were born with their sexuality and whether their desires are innate. I compared their responses to this question with the age at which they had their first same-sex desire in order to see if there was a relationship between believing desires are innate and the age at which informants had same-sex desires. I hypothesized that people who had same-sex desires at an earlier age may be more likely to believe that those desires are innate compared to those who had desires at a later age.

When asked about the innateness of desires and sexuality, more than half of informants said that they believe they were born the way they are. The average age of informants when they first had same-sex desires who believe in innateness is 14 years old. Conversely, only two said that they were not born with their sexuality and same-sex

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desires (ave. age 14). Four informants said that they are not sure about the innateness of their sexuality and desires (ave. age 11). This shows that age of first same-sex desire may not be relevant in thoughts about the innateness of same-sex desires, but it does show that the majority of informants believe sexual desires are innate.

Informants also responded to this question by elaborating on the reasons why they held their beliefs about the innateness of sexuality and desires. Informants mentioned eight times that everybody has the capacity to like people of the same sex. Those who said this believe that desires are innate (five informants), desires are not innate (1 informant), and they are not sure about the innateness of desires (2 informants). They also mentioned four times that sexuality and desires are things that develop and grow with you. Those who believe this said that desires are innate (2 informants), desires are not innate (1 informants), and they are not sure if desires are innate (1 informant). And, lastly, a common discourse among informants was: why would I choose to be like this [lesbian] in this part of the world? This was mentioned four times.

One informant, Khalila, said that she doesn't think that she was born with her sexuality. She asks: why would she choose to be gay? Rania, a woman who is not sure about the innateness of sexuality and desires said she "doesn't know and doesn't care." Lina was also unsure about being born with her sexuality and desires. She said that she doesn't know but she knows "it isn't a gene in the body but that it also isn't a cultural thing." She compared it to "liking Jazz music and not Heavy Metal. It is a personal preference that you cannot change," she said. In general, it appears that informants' reasoning for the beliefs they hold about innate desire and sexuality are varied.

Sexual Desire and Behavior

Next, informants were also asked how they would define what a lesbian is. This was asked in order to find out how informants viewed this Western identity to understand the desires they thought constitute this identity. For example, what characteristics define a woman who exclusively desires people of the same sex? And, what does this say about lesbian desires? Informants were also asked what it means for them, with their identity and/or sexuality, to desire someone of the same sex. This information was gathered in order to see the beliefs on what thoughts, desires, and behaviors constitute lesbian sexuality to answer questions about same-sex desires and Western identities. The responses from informants regarding the characteristics of being a lesbian are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3   Responses to Definition of Lesbian

What is a lesbian?	# of times mentioned
Attraction (w/ emotional/physical/sexual/romantic)	5
Desire (w/ sexual, romantic)	3
Interest (w/ sexual, romantic)	2
Sleeps with women (w/wo identity)	3
Likes a female	1
Fighting for rights	1
No definition	1
A person who says they are	2

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Informants mentioned five times that in order to be a lesbian, women must be attracted to women (attractions including: emotional physical, sexual, or romantic attraction). Informants also mentioned five times that lesbians are women who must desire or be interested in women (whether in a sexual way or in a romantic way). Informants responded three times that it is necessary for women who say they are lesbians to "sleep" with women or at least want to "sleep" with women. It doesn't matter whether they take on an identity of being a lesbian, as long as they want to be intimate with women.

Nour, a woman who identifies as heterosexual with same-sex desires, said that she would not consider herself a lesbian because even though she has same-sex desires, she has "never acted on them." She said that she has "kissed another woman before but never anything beyond this." Amina, a woman who proudly takes on the identity marker 'lesbian,' said that "a person doesn't have to act on their desires to know they are gay. One can have desires and not act on them, but only if they are out to themselves and honest with themselves about their desires." It appears as though behavior and desire play an important role in defining a lesbian identity.

Informants were also asked what it means for them to desire a person of the same sex in order to understand their conceptualizations of desire. These conceptualizations show that the act of desiring is something that is experienced by many people, specifically, in this case, same-sex desiring women in the Arab world. I first asked this question and then I rephrased it, as most informants were not clear what I was asking them. To clarify, I asked them to define desire and then to tell me when they know they are desiring. Because of how I rephrased the question, I believe that the same-sex

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component that existed in the original question was lost and ignored in the rephrased question. Informants discussed three common aspects when talking about what desire means to them. Informants' responses seemed to fall into three categories: emotional/physical response, control/intention response, and internal/physical response. The relevance of these separate conceptualizations of desire will be discussed in the discussion section. The responses in quotation marks represent direct quotes from informants. These responses are responses that did not fit well into other categories and were responses only stated once. The other responses were said more than once and proved to be a common phrase or theme among informants. These responses were paraphrased and grouped into themes as discussed below.

The first common feature in the responses was a discussion of physical and emotional desires. Informants would typically first make a remark about how desiring a person is about both physical desire as well as emotional desire. This type of discourse regarding desire was brought up five times among informants. For example, Basima said that she wants the whole person, which includes desiring and wanting them emotionally, sexually, and physically. Other responses include: making them happy sexually and emotionally, being physically attracted with or without an emotional connection, being with someone physically and emotionally, desire being part sexual and emotional, and desire being sexual, emotional, and psychological.

The second commonality in the responses was a mention of physical, internal reactions when desiring someone. Informants would discuss how they felt when they saw a woman they desired, suggesting that these responses were internal and natural. This sort of response was brought up eleven times total. Karima said that, to her, desire means

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something that is inside her. For Lina, desiring means getting nervous, shy, and sweaty around the person she is desiring. Other responses include: "staring at someone's ass," being horny and on fire, fast heartbeat, sex, kissing and touching, thinking about the person night and day, being nervous, shy, and sweaty, having butterflies, making eye contact, red cheeks, can't stop thinking of a person, hungry, it's something inside her, and an "explosion in her pants."

The third common feature in the responses was a reply that alluded to controlling a desire. This included discussion of desires that focused on wanting something or someone and/or trying to get something or someone. Responses that suggested an aspect of control to desire were mentioned eleven times as well. Nadya, for example, said that there is sadness in her culture because people with same-sex desires cannot announce it. Desires "have to live in the closet." Yara said that there are limits to certain relationships, like friendships, and it could be common to desire your friend because of how intimate friends are in the Middle East. There is a difference between desires and action, though, and knowing when it is okay to act. Other responses include: not being able to announce desires because of society, lust—what you think you want and need, it's hard to get what you desire—once you start you cannot stop, when you can't think of anything but that person, wanting to be with someone in a sexual way, wanting something/ someone so much, wanting to be intimate with someone, desire is want and need, longing, alcohol and/or drugs, and it is a case of desire versus action—something you want versus something you can do.

The Balancing of Sexuality with Religious and Familial Pressures

This section explores the pressures informants face from religion and family and how they balance their sexuality with their religious and familial roles. First, data will be presented on how women understand their religion. Next, the specific pressures they face from their religion and family will be presented. Then, data will be given on whether informants can balance their sexuality with their religion and with their family expectations and roles and the ways in which they navigate their sexuality and their expected roles. This analysis is important because it helps to answer how same-sex desiring women conceptualize their sexuality and religious affiliation and how they use those conceptualizations to navigate the roles expected of them from their family and religion (religious upbringing and societal religious expectations). It should be noted that in this study I distinguish between religion and family. This is done because research questions were aimed at understanding how informants view the difference between the two. As well, informants often distinguished between the two and rarely, explicitly linked together religion and family. However, it should be acknowledged that religion and family are often intertwined in that religion is prevalent in family beliefs, pressures, and expectations.

Pressures from Religion and Family

To understand the pressures informants might face from religion, information was collected on informants' religious upbringing, their religious affiliation, and whether they mentioned that they are a good person regardless of their religious beliefs. I am interested in the correlation between religion and beliefs about being a good person because I believe it gets at the how interviewees make space for their religious beliefs and their

sexuality. This is relevant because the discourse used by some informants of being a good person shows how informants want to convey that they are good people even though they do not follow their religious upbringing and are same-sex desiring. Table 4, below, shows this information.

Table 4   Responses to Religious Identities

Informant	Religious upbringing	Current religious affiliation	Mention of being a good person
Nadya	Muslim	Atheist	No
Layla	Muslim	Muslim	No
Rania	Christian	Christian	No
Zeena	Muslim	No religion	No
Muna	Christian	Christian	No
Yazmin	Christian	Agnostic	No
Huda	Muslim	Believes in God	No
Yara	Muslim	Muslim	Yes
Maha	Christian	Atheist	No
Amina	Muslim	Muslim	Yes
Lina	Muslim	Atheist	Yes
Karima	Muslim	Muslim	Yes
Khalila	Muslim	Muslim	No
Basima	Muslim	Spiritual	Yes
Nour	Muslim	Spiritual	Yes

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The table shows that about half of informants who were raised Muslim now have views about formal religion that differ from their religious upbringing. It also shows that half of Christian raised informants have different beliefs about formal religion compared to their religious upbringing.

When asked about religious beliefs, women tended to talk about how their beliefs differ from the beliefs of their families and from how they were raised. Women also discussed how even though their beliefs may differ from conventional Islamic beliefs, such as not praying five times a day, or not wearing hijab, they believe that they are still good people. All six informants who mentioned being a good person despite religious beliefs were raised Muslim. These informants mentioned being a good person on their own. This was not a question I asked them. Some informants' responses to their religious affiliation are described in the paragraphs below.

Lina, a self- proclaimed Atheist who was raised in a Muslim household, thinks "gender constraints go against commonsense. It doesn't make sense to be punished by God for not wearing hijab." She said, "they make it seem like a choice but it's not because you will still get punished." She's not religious but thinks she is a good person so she would pass [and get to go to heaven]. It should be noted that young, educated women, like the women I interviewed have more variance in whether they wear it or not. A few of the informants I interviewed consider wearing a hijab a sign of suspect to one's family. Basima, who was Muslim raised but now considers herself spiritual, said that she's not religious but she has "many beliefs that line up with religion." She believes in God but doesn't think "religion helps with healing." Recently she stopped wearing hijab around

her family. She doesn't see this as a problem because she said that she is a good person. She doesn't "lie, steal, or cheat."

Yara, who was raised Muslim and currently identifies as a Muslim, said that she needs to believe God exists because she needs someone on her side. Her Muslim faith is a bit different from the faith in which she grew up, but she does good deeds and considers herself a good person. Her faith is different in that she doesn't follow all the Islamic principles her family follows. She said she depends on God because he made her this way. "Many Muslim people who are gay back away from religion because they think they do not go together." I asked her about the small headpiece she was wearing that resembled a beanie. She said that she faced a lot of indirect pressure to wear hijab when she went to her Islamic school. When she graduated she met many who were surprised that she wore hijab to bars while she was holding and drinking beer. She wanted to show that "wearing a hijab is a choice and drinking a beer is a choice." However, she "became tired of explaining this to people" so she stopped wearing it. It took her awhile to feel comfortable not wearing it when she was around her family, but she has compromised by wearing a small beanie in order to suit her personal beliefs and to continue "to respect her father."

Informants were also asked about the pressures they face from their faith (religious upbringing) and their family to act a certain way (particularly to act "heterosexual"). Informants were asked whether they faced pressure from their faith and their family to marry or desire a man.

Informants seemed to be split on whether they face pressure from their faith or not. Muna, for example, who is Christian (specifically Catholic) said that she does not

face pressure from her religion because "the Pope recently defended gay rights." Layla, a Muslim who said that she faces pressures from her faith, said that it is forbidden to have relationships with people of the same sex: "There are stories about homosexuals being punished by God." Khalila said that she faces a significant amount of pressure: "Being Muslim and lesbian don't match. They will cut your head off." Karima, who was raised Muslim, said that she doesn't face religious pressures because "God wouldn't have let her desire someone of the same gender" if he didn't want her like that. She had to accept her sexuality "in order to achieve peace because God is about peace." Amina said that she faces some pressure. She believes in God and claims to be a Muslim. She also said that "many think homosexuality is forbidden according to the Qur'an, but this is not necessarily clear. Islam is about peace and love and God wouldn't have created people gay if it is forbidden." Rania, who was raised Christian, said that she doesn't face pressure. She doesn't "believe that religion condemns homosexuality." She has had girlfriends who were afraid to be seen with her even though they were not religious. She wonders if she would feel the same way if she had been raised Muslim.

Next, the results about pressures from family to desire or to marry a man are presented. Informants were asked if they face pressure from their family. This was paired with their religious upbringing in order to see if there is a relationship between religious upbringing and whether informants feel pressure from their family.

The majority of informants said that they feel pressure from their family to marry or desire a man. As Yazmin said, she faces some family pressure. Her family really wants her to marry a Christian man. Half-jokingly, she said that her family would be happier with her marrying a [Christian] woman than a Muslim man. If she married a woman,

though same-sex marriage is not legal in Jordan, it would take a while for her family to accept it, but she thinks they would. Nadya said that she feels "pressure because most Middle Eastern families want their daughters to get married and have kids. It is looked down upon for women to be independent."

Amina said that it is her mom's dream for her to get married and have children. She is considering a cover marriage. Yara also discussed the idea of having a cover marriage to appease her family. A cover marriage is a marriage between a gay man and a gay woman. The man proposes, and it is essentially a fake marriage.

Maha discussed how she definitely feels pressure from her parents. She believes that if she doesn't get married and have kids then her "mom will blame herself and think that she has done something wrong" when she raised her. Her mom is always showing her pictures of people getting married and hinting, asking her when she is getting married.

However, Huda said that she faces no pressure because everyone in her family knows about her same-sex desires. She is the only informant to say that everyone knows about her sexuality. As well, Nour said that she doesn't face pressure because she told her parents when she was younger that she had different religious beliefs than them and that they would have to accept her, and they did. "This is not common for Muslim parents."

Negotiating and Balancing Sexualities with Religion and Family

Informants were asked if they are able to balance their sexuality with their religious roles and with their familial roles. Seeing if and how women balance their sexuality with their religious and family roles helps to understand the navigation of their sexualities and religious and family roles in a Muslim nation. This analysis shows the importance, or

lack thereof, of religious upbringing in the lives of informants and how different religious upbringings, such as Muslim or Christian, may play a role in whether or not informants face pressure.

The majority of informants said that they can balance their sexuality with their expected religious roles. Two informants said that they do not need to or do not want to, and one said that she cannot balance her sexuality and religious expectations. Karima said that there is no need to balance these things. "Our relationship with God is not defined with being gay or straight. People are supposed to be kind and respectful to others." She asked what sexuality has to do with that. "I'm a regular person who wants to sleep with girls."

Eleven informants said that they are not religious, and this is the reason why they can balance or don't want to balance their religious roles with their sexuality. It seems that most women are able to balance their sexuality with religion. The lack of struggle for informants to balance their religious identity with their sexuality comes from discourse in Islam which declares that sexual desire is natural (Ali 2006) and that sexuality is given by God (Ali 2006; Boellstorff 2005a; Kugle 2013).

Regarding family, half of informants said they can balance their sexuality with their family expectations because either a) their family cares about their education and doesn't prioritize marriage and/or cares about their happiness, or b) they must have two lives and act differently around their family. The other half of informants said that they cannot balance their sexuality with their family roles. They are not able to balance these roles because a) their family expects them to get married, b) they are expected to care for their family, or c) they would have to leave Jordan if they found a woman. It is apparent

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that it is harder for women to balance their sexuality with their family roles and expectations than with their religious expectations. Yara, a woman who sometimes struggles with balancing, discussed the idea of having a cover marriage to appease her family. Yara said "If find a female partner, I will do a cover marriage. A cover marriage would be for my mom; fuck the community." Yara also talked about the idea of a "whorehouse." A "whorehouse" (the English term used by the informants) is typically an apartment that groups of friends rent for a certain amount of time (be it a few days or a few months) so that they can have parties and hang out with their friends. As Yara said, "It is a house where we do whatever we want, wear whatever we want, kiss whoever we want, talk, and express feelings." "Whorehouses" provide a safe space for informants to escape the pressures of family at home. I learned more about "whorehouses" when I was invited to a party with a group of Karima's friends. At this party, they drank alcohol, danced, and swam. Couples were there and often showed affection to each other. These types of activities would not be allowed at family houses. "Whorehouses" provide a safe space for informants to escape the pressures of family at home. The tongue and cheek naming suggests that these places are open to expressions of sex and sexuality.

Karima says that she can balance her sexuality with family expectations because she does what her family wants already. She said that "some parents measure their kids' worth based on if they get married and the number of kids they have." Her parents focus on what matters, which is "being independent and going to school" and focusing on her career. She noted that "sexuality is just a small part of a person and it is no one's business. You should be respectful to your parents and not tell them about your sex life

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regardless of if you are straight or gay. They wouldn't care [to know] if you are sticking your fingers in someone else's vagina."

Some women said they cannot balance their sexuality with familial expectations and still live in Jordan. The only way then for these women to be able to balance their sexuality with family is to leave Jordan and be with a woman (most likely in secret). This way, their family would not know about their same-sex desiring lives outside of Jordan. By doing this, they would also not be bringing shame to their families. Leaving Jordan provides some informants with a way to express their sexuality, but this does not allow them to fulfill familial expectations.

Conclusion

This chapter presented basic demographics on the composition of informants' age, sexual identity, gender identity, religious upbringing, current religious affiliation, and college education. It demonstrated that there is variation in how women identify sexually that at times is not consistent with Western definitions. It also demonstrated that age and religion are important factors in contributing to how and when learned about sexuality in relation to their same-sex desires.

This chapter also presented the varying ideas on how informants view sexual desires and sexualities as being innate or not while considering other factors that may play a role in their views such as religious affiliation and age at which they had their first same-sex desire. Information was also presented on how informants defined what it means to be a lesbian. Responses were also provided regarding what informants said desiring means to them with three characteristics defining their responses.

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Lastly, this chapter displayed how informants view their religion. Information was presented on the religious and familial pressures placed on these women showing that family pressures are more prevalent than religious pressures. Data were also presented on how informants balance their sexuality with expectations and roles of religion and of their family. Once again, compared to religion, family played a bigger role in affecting how women balance their sexuality with family expectations.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In the previous chapter the results of the research were presented as well as other
patterns found in the data using qualitative analysis. This chapter will first discuss the
research questions posed prior to fieldwork. Then, this chapter will discuss the patterns
found in informants' responses. These responses to the semi-structured interview
questions address the larger research questions of this project.

Research Questions

This project aimed to examine two questions regarding same-sex desiring women
in Amman, Jordan. The two overarching questions can be summarized as such:

1) How do same-sex desiring women in Jordan identify sexually? This question
looks at what factors influence knowledge about the construction of
homosexuality and homosexual identities in Jordan, particularly in relation to the
West and Islam.

   a. Do these women claim a homosexual identity (gay or lesbian) that is in
      line with Western constructions of homosexuality? Or do they have same-
      sex desires without a Western homosexual identity where behavior and
      identity are not consistent with Western understandings of homosexual
      identities?

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b. What factors influence the construction of their homosexual identities and their concept of homosexuality? What is the relationship between when they learned about homosexuality and when they first had same-sex desires?

c. Do they believe they were born with same-sex desires? Do these women believe in the innateness of same-sex desires and how do they use these beliefs about their desires to challenge religious ideas about same-sex sexuality?

d. What does it mean to these women to sexually desire? How does desiring and the concept of desire relate to making choices and being in control of action, and how does that relate to beliefs about innate desires?

2) How do same-sex desiring women in Jordan balance their sexual identities and desires with religious and societal pressures, particularly in relation to Islam and the family? This question aims to understand the conceptualizations of same-sex desiring women's sexuality and how they balance those with societal and religious pressures.

a. Do same-sex desiring women in Jordan face pressure from their family and religion? Is there a relationship between pressures faced and informants' religious affiliation? If pressures are faced, what kinds of pressure specifically?

b. How do these women negotiate their sexuality and desires with familial and religious obligations? How do they account for being a good person of faith and a person who is same-sex desiring?

Sexuality Variation

To address the question of how women identify sexually and if they take an identity that is in line with Western constructions of homosexuality, I asked informants questions about how they would describe their sexuality. These women were also asked what "lesbian" means to them in order to find out how they conceptualize this identity and the desires they perceive to compose this identity They were asked how they define "lesbian" to see what characteristics and behaviors they thought constituted lesbian sexuality. Most informants said that a woman needs to be attracted to another woman or must desire another woman in order to be a lesbian. Three informants said that women must have sexual relations or want to have sexual relations with other women in order to be a lesbian. This suggests that, because some informants' responses indicated that their identity does not match up with their behavior, some of these same-sex desiring women do not follow Western conceptions of sexuality. Behavior, identity, and desires do not have to match.

As Valentine (2003) notes, examining "desire-beyond-identity" (124) is not something most anthropologists have done. They have neglected to analyze the meaning behind the identities that informants have used to describe themselves. Valentine contends that many anthropologists have also discussed how we must understand non-Western practices and desires on their own, without using Western identity categories to understand non-Western practices and desires. Identities, as Weeks (2007) says, exist to help people organize their desires in order to attempt to simplify their desires. But, categorizing desires into identities isn't always as simple as it seems (Weeks 2007).

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Desires are much more complex and fluid. These same-sex desiring women in Jordan proved this to be true.

Weeks (2007) also considers how desires may be different from Western-rooted sexual identities because desires transcend social identity. Desires are not created by the social, but identities are. These women may have desires similar to people with other homosexual identities around the world, but the identity categories they place on themselves can be different than Western notions of these identities. It can be argued that some of these women are taking some global identities and localizing them, inevitably transforming them into their cultural versions of sexualities (Boellstorff 2005b). This is not to say that homosexuality didn't exist in the Middle East before the global influence on homosexual identities. There were same-sex desiring people before the appearance of Western versions of homosexuality (lesbian, gay, etc.) (Dunne 1990, Murray and Roscoe 1997). In fact, before such a huge global influence, there were, and continue to be, locally driven non-normative sexualities and gender identities. For example, in Oman, the *xanith* are biological males who dress as and take on the role of women and act as homosexual prostitutes in order to have a safe sex outlet for themselves while also preserving the piety of women. This role as a homosexual prostitute conforms to the gender roles of neither men nor women in Oman (Wikan 1977).

In terms of lesbian identity specifically, informants' answers reveal that a person can choose their identity regardless of their behavior or desires, as long as they at least have some sort of attraction to or desire for women and want to have sexual relations with women. This is also suggested when my informants discuss how a woman need not to act on her desires, nor consider herself a lesbian, to know that she is attracted to

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women and wants to be intimate with them. As Lockard (1985) says, women can be lesbians if they say they are. Their identity doesn't have to be based on sexual activity with other women. She notes that "Lesbian identity is not solely dependent on sexual feelings and activities; it is also a response to emotional feelings, psychological responses (Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard 1953), social expectations and pressures (Blumstein &Schwartz, 1974), or the individual's own choices in identity formation (Ponse, 1978)" (Lockard 1985, 84,85). Many informants discussed emotional, physical, and psychological feelings for women that differed from their feelings for men, when applicable. As one can see, identity, desire, and behavior can vary in their meaning. A person who is homosexual may never engage in sexual acts with a person of the same sex but would consider themselves homosexual still (Kugle 2013). The beliefs regarding sexual identity and desire among some of the same-sex desiring women in Jordan I interviewed resemble those beliefs of Blackwood's (2010) Muslim informants in Indonesia. These women took on an identity of *lesbi*, which is an identity that is more fluid than the Western identity of lesbian. These *lesbi* women also desire men but they do not identify as bisexual. The same-sex desiring women in Jordan I spoke with, in a way, resemble the *lesbi* in Indonesia because they challenge global ideas of sexuality because their sexual identity and behavior do not follow Western understandings about sexuality.

It can be concluded that these same-sex desiring women in Jordan do not always follow Western conceptions of sexual identities. Their easy manipulation of identity categories could be a result of their understandings of less hardened sexual identities and more fluid desires. They seem to suggest that it is not necessary that a woman take on a "lesbian" identity, as long as they desire women, are attracted to them, or want to "sleep"

with them. One informant didn't hesitate to note that even though she is a lesbian, she also desires men. The heterosexual woman wasn't afraid to voluntarily say that she is heterosexual but also desires women. Informants may also take these global identities and make them local and culturally specific in order to navigate the societal pressures placed on them. An example of this would be a lesbian identified woman who decides to have a cover marriage in order to appease her family. She would be engaging in heterosexual behavior (via a cover marriage) to please her parents. However, she would still consider herself to be lesbian even though to someone else, her behavior would suggest that she is not lesbian.

Age and Religious Related Knowledge about Sexuality

To address the question of how women identify sexually, how they define homosexuality, and what factors impacted when they formed their homosexual identities, I asked informants questions about when they first had same-sex desires and when they learned about the Western notion of "homosexuality." The Western notion of homosexuality means learning about Western homosexual identity categories and realizing that there are Western identity categories for their same-sex desires and attractions. Learning about Western notions of homosexuality also includes anything from hearing the word for the first time to hearing talk show hosts or actors in the West discuss their sexual identities.

I found from the interviews that these women, in general, were more likely to have same-sex desires before or around the same time that they learned about "homosexuality." The role of age is important to acknowledge here because most of these women had same-sex desires before they learned about homosexuality, suggesting that for many, their desires led them to further investigate what they were experiencing.

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But, specifically, Muslim informants were more likely to learn about homosexuality later than Christian informants probably of Islam's strict rules about speaking about sexuality and, specifically, homosexuality (Ali 2006). It is more common for Christian dogma to discuss the sinfulness of homosexuality compared to Islamic texts. Christian teachings are less likely to avoid discussions about homosexuality and sexuality, in general.

Religion can be said to play a role in when informants learned about homosexuality. Islam is strongly against discussing sexual practices that deviate from "normative" sexual behavior. The concept of "don't ask, don't tell" (Ali 2006) is prevalent in Islamic discourse. It is neither common nor appropriate to ask about people's sex lives. As Murray and Roscoe (1997) note, "there is a common Islamic ethos of avoidance in acknowledging sex and sexualities" (14). Knowing this, it is understandable that Muslim informants would learn about homosexuality later than their Christian counterparts since Christianity does not avoid discussions of the sinfulness of homosexuality.

It can be concluded that Christianity, Islam, and age played a role in when and how these same-sex desiring women in Jordan learned about homosexuality in relation to their first same-sex desires. Islam is very passive when it comes to discussing sexuality whereas Christianity was, and continues to be, very active in educating people about the sinfulness of homosexuality (Foucault 1990). As Foucault describes, one code that dictated which sexual practices were illicit and which were acceptable included "the Christian pastoral" (Foucault 1990, 37). Any sexual act that did not lead to marriage and the obligations of marriage were seen as perverse. As well, the engagement in those

activities (such as homosexuality and sodomy) would lead to condemnation (Foucault 1990).

Innate Desires and Sexuality

How do women's sexual identities correlate with their beliefs on the innate nature of sexual desire? Informants were asked why they thought their desires are innate. This was done to examine the reasonings behind their beliefs. About half of the informants said that everybody has the capacity to like someone of the same sex. This discourse could be used to justify to society and to their cultural surroundings that same-sex desires, much like opposite-sex desires, are innate in people and that everyone has the capacity to desire someone of the same-sex. This implies that they are not unique and that anyone could be a same-sex desiring person (though not necessarily exclusively) and they just may not know it yet. The ones who know it are just the ones who are, as one informant said, "brave enough" to speak about their same-sex desires. Another common discourse among informants was: why would I choose to be like this in this part of the world? It would be difficult to be non-heterosexual in the Middle East because of the strong and prominent Islamic values that inevitably socially stigmatize any identities, desires, and behaviors that deviate from heteronormative. This justification can be seen as a way of letting others know that having same-sex desires is not a choice. It is something innate and not something chosen by them.

It is not the aim here to contribute another theoretical approach to sexuality that would be competitive with essentialist and social constructionist approaches. It is important, though, to see how informants' discourse on the innateness of sexuality plays a role in the essentialism and constructionist debate. An essentialist stance is problematic

because it forces people into categories and doesn't allow for sexual fluidity (Fausto-Sterling 2003). For example, the informant who said she was a lesbian but also desires men also noted that her sexuality could change at any time. An essentialist approach would question her sexuality and if her same-sex desires are truly innate if they are able to change. However, the constructionist approach says that sexual desire is constructed and not innate at all (Vance 1998). This is a slightly more radical approach to constructionism. The problem with constructionism is that it treats same-sex desires as a choice, suggesting that people can choose to have same-sex desires. The informants I interviewed do not agree that their same-sex desires are a choice. As mentioned earlier, many informants believe that everybody has the capacity to like someone of the same-sex, suggesting that it is innately biological and is possible for everyone, and also that they wouldn't choose to have same-sex desires in this part of the world if they could because the social stigma of homosexuality is great in Jordan.

Dykes (2000) does not agree exclusively with either framework and takes a more middle-ground approach. He says that sexuality needs to be examined through the mediation of the natural and the social, meaning that both biology and culture should be considered when investigating sexuality. Similarly, Ross and Rupp (1981) say that there is a biological base to sexuality that is "experienced culturally" and "expressed socially" (51). In the case of the women interviewed, many think that their desires are innate or biological. It is important to see that how they interpret their desires is because of their cultural surroundings and when and how they express their desires is dependent on their social environment. Taking a nature stance on sexuality attempts to show others that same-sex desiring people are not in control of their desires. It attempts to make people

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more tolerant of same-sex desiring people (Fausto-Sterling 2003). This rational is particularly true of gay, lesbian, and bisexual Muslims who try to argue that their sexuality is innate and even given to them by God. As Ali (2006) notes, same-sex desire may be considered innate, but Islam does not allow people to act on their same-sex desires. Same-sex desiring people often use religious explanations to legitimize who they are and the sexuality they have (Ali 2006).

It can be concluded that about half of informants interviewed believe that their same-sex desires are innate. Two informants said that they do not think their desires are innate and four said they are not sure about the innateness of sexual desires. These women seem to be split on their beliefs regarding the innateness of sexuality and desires. Common rhetoric among these women, though, is that everyone has the capacity to like someone of the same sex. This statement also implies an innateness to sexuality. These women's sexualities can best be understood by acknowledging that they believe there is a biological basis to their sexuality and that this biological basis is mediated by society and culture. How and when they choose to express their same-sex desires is determined by their cultural setting, Jordan, a majority Muslim nation.

Sexual Desire and Behavior

To address how informants view the concept of desire and how the act of desiring relates to beliefs about innateness of sexuality, I asked what it means to them to desire someone of the same sex.

What I found from the interviews is that there are three themes from informants' responses to what it means to sexually desire: emotional/physical response, control/intention response, and internal/physical response. Emotional/physical responses

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given by informants suggest that physical and emotional attraction is key to their understanding of what it means to desire a person. Control/intention responses include wanting something, wanting to do something, wanting to be with someone, or lusting for someone. They also described desire as wanting something or someone so badly you think you need it. These responses indicate that informants see sexual desire as a phenomenon that they recognize they are capable of controlling. The desires can control them, but they can control the actions they take by deciding whether to act on their desires. The last theme involves internal/physical responses, which include discussions of physical reactions and things that occur inside their bodies when they desire, such as kissing and touching and being shy and nervous. These responses given by informants suggest that there is an internal, biological reaction.

In fact, their discourse about sexually desiring is similar to philosophical discourses on sexual desire, for example. Sexually desiring is often equated with a multitude of things such as a desire for "…erotic pleasure, orgasm, companionship, love…" (Giles 2008, 5). These are desires to which many informants alluded. Desiring is also used to describe an awareness of an attraction (Giles 2008).

In relation to intention and control, Giles (2008) discusses how the object of desire is something we want "so badly" (6): "In fact, sexual desire is nothing more than our wanting of this object" (Giles 2008, 6). Shaffer (1978) says that people often associate or describe sexual desire with being hungry. It is described as being a force that drives a person. However, Shaffer notes that sexual desire differs from hunger and an appetite because sexual desire's satisfaction "is not necessary to keep the body alive or even healthy" (187). Informants' responses to what it means to sexually desire in fact

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resemble Giles (2008) and Shaffer's (1987) descriptions of desires. Sexual desire is thought to be a need or a strong wanting of something or someone. This response is also an awareness of a desire and attraction.

Regarding physical and biological responses, Shaffer (1987) describes that sexual desire involves feeling horny and having sexual tension that is directed to a person. Informants described the internal responses they have when they are sexually desiring that suggest a sort of naturalness of their reactions of desiring. Even Islam proposes that all sexual desires may be considered innate and natural. However, for same-sex desiring people, acting on them is not allowed (Ali 2006).

Concerning emotional and physical responses to desiring, Shaffer (1987) notes that desiring and emotions are two very different things. Sexual desires can presumably be satisfied whereas emotions cannot. Some informants described an emotional response to desiring a person, but physically desiring the person, as well, was included with the emotional attraction. In this regard, an emotional attraction and desire, or emotions related to a particular desire, could be fulfilled with a physical desire.

To supplement the importance of informants' narratives concerning physical and emotional reactions, internal/physical reactions, and control/intention and reactions, I will utilize Tolman's (1994) article where she describes how societal expectations and sexual desires of adolescent girls with different sexual preferences, play a variable role in how they perceive their bodies and desires. Tolman's bisexual informant describes how her body reacts when she is desiring. She also talks about fearing that she might lose control to her desires and face the societal repercussions that follow. The lesbian-identified informant describes her feelings of desire as consisting of wanting and needing but

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knowing that her desires may put her in a position of vulnerability because of the ways society expects girls and women to act.

Much like Tolman's informants, my informants described their desires as being something they wanted and needed, but some also mentioned that desires need to be controlled because they cannot be announced. They also described desiring as having an internal and physical response, such as having butterflies or being horny. It can be concluded that these (some not exclusive) same-sex desiring women have beliefs about sexual desire that suggest that there are innate forces causing them to react in a certain biological way when they are sexually desiring; however, these women can choose whether to act on their desires. Having physical and emotional attraction to a person also suggests that responses are internal. Informants' conceptualizations of sexual desire show that their arguments about what it means to sexually desire are consistent with their discourse about innate desires. Both arguments can be related to how these same-sex desiring women navigate their sexuality with their religious and familial pressures and responsibilities. The following section will discuss in detail the pressures and navigation these women face with family and religion.

Pressures from Family and Religion

I will now discuss the second overarching question and the multiple aspects of that question. In order to understand how same-sex desiring women in Jordan balance their sexual identities and desires with religious and familial pressures, I first asked informants specifically about the pressures they face from their family and religion to conform to "normative" standards of sexuality and living.

In doing this, I found out three things from the interviews: 1) The majority of Christian informants said that they do no face pressure from their religion; however, Muslim informants were split regarding the importance of religious pressures in their lives; 2) The majority of informants who were raised Muslim and consider themselves now to be Muslim or spiritual or atheist, said that they are good people regardless of how closely they practice Islam and regardless of their same-sex desires; and 3) The majority of informants said that they do face pressure from their family.

The majority of Christian informants said they do not face pressure from their religion. In fact, religion can be said to be less of a source of pressure for Christian and Muslim informants than family. As well, about half of informants who grew up in a Muslim household now say that they do not follow the same religion as their family, meaning they either consider themselves to be spiritual, atheist, or not having a religion. Some Muslim informants said that they are Muslim but do not have religious beliefs that perfectly align with their families. This can be because when gay and lesbian Muslims become more independent from their family, they start to rethink their own religious ideology, which allows them to look for more progressive forms of Islam (Kugle 2013). Jeldtoft (2011) explores how non-organized Muslims in Europe mix their own spiritualities with their interpretations of Islam to fit Islam in their lives. Thus, the practice of my informants searching for a more progressive Islam is not uncommon. Multiple informants discussed how they searched for Islam that was more progressive. They do not cut Islam out of their lives. They alter their beliefs as their sexuality changes because of how they come to internalize and understand their own sexuality as something

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God-given or innate. Because these women's religious beliefs changed, the pressures they felt from religion also changed.

The reasons why these women do not feel as though they face pressure from their faith is because they use the discourse that their sexuality is essentially out of their control. Some women said that God made them gay or that God wouldn't have let them desire people of the same sex if that wasn't how they were supposed to be. This kind of discourse is common among other Muslim informants from other studies about same-sex sexuality. Studies like these reinforce existing work on same-sex sexuality (Ali 2006; Boellstorff 2005a; Kugle 2013).

Even though religion, specifically Islam, dominates Jordanian culture, religion is not a significant source of pressure for these women. It is interesting to find that about half of the women who grew up Muslim who were interviewed said that even though their religious views do not line up or differ from their families' religious views, and they are same-se desiring, they are still good people and would "pass" (go to Heaven). These women claim to do things "good" people do such as perform good deeds.

This discourse of being a good person, even without the exact orthodoxy and orthopraxy of Islam, is not uncommon. In Adely's (2012b) ethnography, girls at a Jordanian high school are taught to be good and moral people. However, educators at the school often bring their own interpretations of Islam, and students do not hesitate to challenge teachings from religious texts. The students challenge the ideas of morality presented to them more so than challenging Islam. The multiple interpretations and ideas of morality as it relates to Islam help to redefine new meaning of what it means to be a moral and good person. Similarly, Mahmood (2012), through her ethnographic studies,

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explores how ideas of morality and ethics among Muslim women are reimagined as different than dominant conservative discourses about Islam. In Egypt, women involved in Islamist movements have their own interpretations of Islam and morality that shape their ethical practices. Agency and ethics are related in that these women's interpretations and thus ethical practices give them agency. The women in these studies present the idea that there are a number of interpretations of Islam and religious morality that challenge dominant notions of what it means to be a good person. Muslims in these studies suggest that they do not have to follow normative Islamic principles to be a good Muslim (Jeldtoft 2011).

Religion may not be a great source of pressure on informants, but family is. The majority of informants said they face pressure from their family to marry a man or to desire a man. Regardless of their religious upbringing or their current religious affiliation, family is important to them. These women have may have changed their religious ideologies, but they do not abandon their family. The Arab world revolves around the family unit (Roscoe and Murray 1997). The essential unit of society is the family, and family supersedes individualism (Shryock and Howell 2001). These women may also say that they do not face pressure from religion as much as family but in Muslim nations, the family is often understood through Islam (Ali 2006). When informants said that religion does not pressure them, they probably do not feel direct pressure from their own faith but do feel the religious pressures put on them indirectly from family values and beliefs.

It can be concluded that these same-sex desiring women do not face as much pressure from religion (their religion) as they do from their family. This could be because they have formed their own ideologies that differ from those of their families. However,

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they may face indirect religious pressure from their families. Having their own religious beliefs that differ from those of their families puts much pressure on these informants. When discussing religion, then, about half of the women said that they are good people regardless of how their religious beliefs and, inevitably, sexuality differ from formal religious standards, such as those they were raised with. The discourse of being a good person can be seen as a mechanism to justify and navigate their sexuality with their family and, indirectly, with religious pressures and standards.

Negotiating and Balancing Sexualities with Religion and Family

To understand how same-sex desiring women in Jordan balance their sexual identities and desires with religious and societal pressures, I asked women if they are able to balance their sexuality with family and religion and, if they are able to, how they navigate these identities. I found from talking with the women that 1) most women can balance their sexuality with their religious roles and expectations; and 2) it is more difficult for these women to balance their sexuality with familial roles and expectations.

The reasons informants gave as to why they can balance their sexuality with their religion include being at peace with their religion and not being religious. These women most likely consider themselves to not be religious because their religious beliefs do not align with the religious beliefs they were brought up on that most likely ban same-sex desires and homosexuality. Most informants seem to agree that religion does not place as much pressure on them and it is therefore easy to balance with sexuality. Even though some may practice Islam or Christianity, and may consider themselves good people, they don't necessarily think this makes them religious.

For most of informants, balancing their sexuality with their religious identity is not a problem. However, many Muslims do struggle to balance these two identities. Boellstorff (2005a) discusses "incommensurability" to talk about how gay Muslims in Indonesia balance being gay and Muslim. Similarly, Merabet's (2014) study of gay men discusses how gay Muslims in Beirut feel the need to create specific spaces for their two identities to coexist. Some of the informants in this study navigate their religion and sexuality by claiming to not be a religious person, but, rather, a good person. However, it should be noted that the difference between my study and the two just mentioned is that there are different religious pressures for Muslim men and Muslim women. Muslim men and women are expected to aspire to different things in life. Familial expectations differ for Muslim men and women. Merabet's (2014) study is similar to this study in that his informants create spaces in order to balance sexuality and religion.

Balancing sexuality with familial roles and expectations proved to be more difficult for informants. Half of informants said that they can balance their sexuality with their family expectations because their parents care about their education and happiness and do not care about marriage. The fact that informants can balance their sexuality with family shows that the balancing of family and sexuality, in this case, is dependent on their families' expectations for them. Going to a university allows informants to express their sexuality as long as they go to school. This is because they might not be living at home and are most likely hanging out more with their friends. A university provides a temporary escape from some family pressures. Going to school also gives these women an outlet for the expression of their sexuality. Familial expectations of going to school allow these women to balance their sexuality with family.

Informants said they can balance their sexuality with family expectations by having two lives. The need to have two lives was a common discourse among informants. Strategies they use to balance their sexuality with their family expectations include, as discussed before, the use of cover marriages and "whorehouses." Having a cover marriage would be difficult for informants because they said they would themselves and their family. These women, however, do not prefer to get a cover marriage and thus see it impossible for them to have their sexuality and fulfill family expectations and roles. "Whorehouses" are places rented by younger people in Jordan who have either non-normative and normative sexualities. These strategies and the intimate environment that exist among same-sex desiring people in Amman, provide networking space for young people in the capital city. As an example, the strategic use of "whorehouses" and provides safe spaces where these women can balance their desires and identities. The strategic use of cover marriages between two same-sex desiring people provides an outlet for both parties to attempt to fulfill family expectations while being allowed to have and act on same-sex desires. Family pressures and expectations sometimes force informants to consider lifestyle options that do not allow them to be their true, same-sex desiring selves.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Research Conclusions

The first overarching question of this project aimed to answer was: How do same-sex desiring women in Jordan identify sexually? Specifically, 1) do same-sex desiring women claim a homosexual identity (gay or lesbian) that is in line with Western constructions of homosexuality? Or do they have same-sex desires without a Western homosexual identity where behavior and identity are not consistent with Western understandings of homosexual identities? I found that they take on identities such as gay, lesbian, and bisexual, though some of their desires that construct some of their sexual identities do not necessarily align with Western social constructions of the alignment of desires with identities. 2) What factors influence the construction of their homosexual identities and their concept of homosexuality? What is the relationship between when same-sex desiring women learned about homosexuality and when they first had same-sex desires? Analysis showed that religion proved to be one factor that influenced when these women first learned about "homosexuality" and thus when they started to form their own sexual identities in relation to their same-sex desires. In fact, Muslim women experienced same-sex desires before or around the same age they learned about "homosexuality." 3) Do these same-sex desiring women believe they were born with same-sex desires? Do they believe in the innateness of same-sex desires and how do they use these beliefs

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about their desires to challenge religious ideas about same-sex sexuality? The majority of informants do believe that their desires are innate, and/or they were born the way they are. More than half of informants added that everyone has the capacity to like someone of the same sex. Five of these informants believe that desires are innate. Discourse on the innateness, yet fluidity of desires shows that informants are making statements about how they are not unique desiring beings and that their desires are essentially out of their control, in response to religious upheaval about homosexuality. Lastly, 4) What does it mean to these same-sex desiring women to sexually desire? How does desiring and the concept of desire relate to making choices and being in control of action, and how does that relate to beliefs about innate desires? I found that they see the act of desiring as having physical reactions to their desires, wanting and needing something or someone, but also maybe having to control their actions, and emotional desires. Physical reactions to desiring shows that these are innate reactions that cannot be controlled; however, informants have the ability to control how they act in order to conform to societal expectations. This also shows that same-sex desires are fluid in that, regardless of their identities and whether they have exclusive same-sex desires, everyone can desire someone.

The second overarching question of this project aimed to understand how same-sex desiring women in Jordan balance their sexual identities and desires with religious and societal pressures, particularly in relation to Islam and the family. Particularly, 1) do same-sex desiring women in Jordan face pressure from their family and religion? Is there a relationship between pressures faced and informants' religious affiliation? If pressures are faced, what kinds of pressure specifically? These women do face some pressure from

religion and family, but they face more pressure from their family. Pressures include marrying a man and having kids. Christian informants were more likely to say they don't face pressure from faith, but Muslim informants were split. Religion didn't play a role in whether informants faced more family pressures. 2) How do these women negotiate their sexuality and desires with familial and religious obligations? How do they account for being a good person of faith and a person who is same-sex desiring? The majority of women said that they can balance their same-sex desires with religious obligations. Six women accounted for being a good person of faith as well as a same-sex desiring person by expressing that they are good people regardless of whether they follow conventional Islamic dogma. Others said that there is no need to balance because they are not religious. About half of informants said they can balance their sexuality with family expectations because their family is only concerned about their education. Other informants said they have to live two lives via the use of "whorehouses," or cover marriages, or by leaving Jordan.

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Jordan is unique place to study same-sex desiring women because it is a more liberal and Western-leaning Middle Eastern country. Because of this, and because homosexuality is decriminalized in Jordan, informants feel comfortable discussing their same-sex desires in public. However, announcing non-normative identities is very much frowned upon because of the Islamic religious climate in Jordan and the negative association of homosexual identities with the West. Desires are allowed, in a way, as long as they are not acted upon and as long as Western identities are not announced.

Informants seem to suggest that they see same-sex desires and identities as fluid. Their desires may not align with Western constructions of LGBT identities, but these identities might not be as important because of the lack of political activism and LGBT movements in Jordan. As well, they seem to suggest that it is not necessary that a woman take on a "lesbian" identity, as long as they desire women, are attracted to them, or want to "sleep" with them. Identities do not seem as important as same-sex desires. Their discourse that everyone can desire a person of the same sex suggests that desiring is fluid. It also suggests that people may not yet be aware of their desires. Informants also suggest that one need not to act on desires in order to consider themselves part of an identity.

Another way they show the fluidity and innateness of desires is by discussing their physical responses to desires. This shows that even though they might desire any sex, the physical responses are the same regardless of what identity they take. These physical responses to their desires are internal and out of their control, though they can control if they act on them. Controlling the desire to act on desires is vital because of the stigma on homosexuality.

The discourse of being born with desires or being born with only same-sex desires is a statement informants make that suggests they are not in control of their desires. These types of statements are made in response to negative attitudes about homosexuality from their political and religious climate. Some informants have made peace with religion, with many saying that God gave them their desires, hence why they do not face pressure to balance their desires with their religion.

In the case of family and religion, many informants have modified religious beliefs as a result of their attempt to reconcile their sexuality with formal religion which

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shows the importance of interpretation in Islam. Most often, these same-sex desiring women find ways to navigate their same-sex desires with religious beliefs by looking for more progressive forms of Islam or Christianity to provide outlets of acceptance.

Even though these same-sex desiring women do not consider themselves to be religious, they are inevitably surrounded by a society and culture that promotes Islamic religious ideals. Because most of their families follow fundamental principles of Islam and because family life is central to life in Jordan, informants are more likely to feel pressures from their family to act heterosexual and to abide by family wishes. These women utilize a couple strategies afforded to them via the networking space in Amman. They utilize these alternative spaces to be both a good Muslim/family member and a same-sex desiring person.

Because of the pressures placed on them, specifically by family, many same-sex desiring women claim to be good people as a mechanism for creating a space for their sexuality, desires, and the religious culture. This also allows them to live in a Muslim majority nation faced with religious pressures and faced with family pressures.

Limitations

Even though careful data collection and analysis were involved in this study, I believe that there are several limitations that have affected the results and conclusions of this study. These limitations include time, small sample size, language barrier, and lack of diversity of ages of informants. Though not concerning bias, my positionality (as the researcher) did generate some advantages and disadvantages.

One of the biggest limitations of this study was time. Data collection was originally planned for four weeks, but because of research approval delays and other

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circumstances, fieldwork was condensed to two and a half weeks. Two and a half weeks proved to be enough time to collect more interviews than anticipated, but more time would have been ideal. Because of the time constraint, I missed out on interviewing more same-sex desiring women who were available to speak to me. I also missed out on a lot of participant observation. Missing out on the opportunity to speak with more same-sex desiring women and engage in participant observation with their families and friends was somewhat of a hindrance to being able to get a better understanding of the navigation of identities. The small amount of time I was in Jordan did not allow me to build many solid relationships with informants that were needed to be welcomed into their family homes in order to do participant observation.

Similarly, the small sample size also proved to be a limitation. Because of the limited time, I was not able to reach out to more same-sex desiring women which left me with a small sample size. A small sample size means that I have had to base many conclusions about the lives of same-sex desiring women in Jordan on the lives of fifteen women. At times, it was difficult to make conclusions based on a very small number of women. Of course, the lives of these fifteen women is not the most comprehensive representation of all same-sex desiring women, but it does provide a small look into the lives of these women and what arguments and conclusions can be made that may be applicable to other same-sex desiring women in Jordan.

Closely related to small sample size and time is the limitation of age. If I had more time for fieldwork and had been able to talk to more women, I would have probably been able to get more women of diverse ages. The majority of the women I interviewed are in their 20s mostly because of the fact that they are not married, went to university

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and learned English, and are young during a time in Jordan where ideas of Western sexual liberation are spreading. It would have been possible to interview more women of different ages, but time and language barriers were restrictions. Finding more women who were older than thirty would have been beneficial in obtaining a more holistic image of same-sex desiring women's lives in Jordan.

This limitation closely resembles another limitation: the limitation that all my interviews were conducted in Amman, which is the cosmopolitan capital of Jordan. Therefore, my study is representative of some women in Amman and not necessarily the rest of the women in Jordan, which has large rural populations. It should be noted that global views regarding homosexual identities exist in Amman in part because the capital city is frequented by tourists and expats. Because of this, the views about same-sex desires and homosexuality among women in more rural parts of Jordan may differ from women in Amman. Interviewing same-sex desiring women in more rural parts of Jordan would have been more difficult because of the more conservative views on sexuality in the rural areas of Jordan. However, talking to women in these rural parts would have provided a more inclusive assessment of same-sex desiring women's lives in Jordan.

One other limitation of this study was the language barrier. Because I am not fluent in Arabic, I was not able to interview a number of women who were available to speak with me. I was also not able to hire a translator due to absence of funding, thus I missed the opportunity to learn about same-sex desiring women's lives from women who were not able to speak English or did not speak English well. These women, I am sure, have very important things to say about how they deal with their sexuality in a majority Muslim nation, and unfortunately, I was not able to communicate with them effectively

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enough to conduct interviews with them. My sample was limiting because my research results only represent those who are highly educated and fluent in English. Related to fluency in English is education. For the most part, the women I interviewed went to a four-year university. Because they went to a four-year university, their views on the topics asked could have been informed by their education and their academic environment.

An area that affected data collection was my positionality as not only a researcher, but a researcher from the West, and a person perceived to be same-sex desiring because of my research interest. My own perceived sexuality may have affected how informants acted around me or how they responded to interview questions. How would this study be different if my informants thought that I was "heterosexual?" As well, my national identity as an American could have affected how and the ways in which informants disclosed information to me. Would informants have felt more comfortable talking to a researcher who was from Jordan or from another part of the Arab world? While my national identity may have been disadvantageous because of potential precautions informants took in order to protect their identity and the identity of others who are same-sex desiring, I believe that my perceived sexuality, or sexuality, rather, was advantageous. Having similar sexual sentiments of my informants created a sense of unity where informants most likely felt comfortable talking to me about their desires and experiences.

Future Research

Future research could examine same-sex desires among rural women and same-sex desiring women of differing ages, particularly women above the age of 40. Future

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research could also explore same-sex desiring women's family interactions as well as how same-sex desiring men perceive their same-sex desires and their potential gender obligations regarding their sexuality.

One area of further study could include the investigation of same-sex desires among rural women in Jordan. To do this, one would need to either be fluent in Arabic or hire a translator, as English is hardly spoken in the more rural parts of Jordan. Engaging with rural women would allow a more holistic image of same-sex desiring women's lives. Rural women's views may differ from the views of women in Amman because of the many global views that surface via tourists and expats that visit the capital city. Rural women may have more reservations regarding talking about same-sex desires, and this process of discussing their potentially prohibited sexual desires with them may be difficult but would be very valuable.

Along with this, talking to women of different ages would contribute to providing a more comprehensive image of same-sex desiring women's lives in Jordan. Including women over 40 would possibly include insight into the world of marriage and their balance with their marriage and their same-sex desires. How do they navigate their familial expectations with their sexuality that may differ from those same-sex desiring women not married? As well, how many same-sex desiring women over the age of 40, for example, are not married, and what does this say about their beliefs about same-sex desires and family and religious pressures?

Another area that could be explored would be the family. Since ethnographic research was cut short and participant observation with same-sex desiring women's families was not possible, investigating encounters and behaviors among same-sex

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desiring women and their families would be advantageous to gaining a better understanding of how these women navigate their sexuality and desires around their family. These observations could be compared to the observations at events with friends to see potential differences in behavior, expression, and dialogue between family members and same-sex desiring women regarding things such as marriage.

Lastly, it would be beneficial to perhaps talk to same-sex desiring men to compare their lives to same-sex desiring women's lives. This would show potential differences in gender regarding expectations of marriage and sexuality performances. For example, are there more pressures for men to get married and act heterosexually than for women? Do men or women face more pressure from religion and society? Although there have been several studies of gay men in other Arab/Muslim-majority nations, there is a lack of literature on this topic in Jordan. Talking with same-sex desiring men would show if one gender has more freedom to express their same-sex desires in public than the other.

As an applied anthropological study, my research has potential benefit to those interested in the theorization of sexuality and those who are same-sex desiring women and men around the world. Those interested in the theorization of sexuality can benefit by reading this study and understanding the ways in which women in Jordan conceptualize their sexuality in order to make larger arguments about sexual diversity and social acceptance. This study can be beneficial to those who are part of the global LGBT population (and even those who are not) by educating them about the ways in which same-sex desiring women in a Muslim-majority nation live their lives so that there can be acknowledgement of similarly shared sexual desires cross-culturally. This would demonstrate that, to some extent, sexuality is a shared and relatable experience that may

help to better humanize people in Jordan and the Middle East. Likewise, political leaders in societies around the world may have a better understanding of how same-sex desiring people in other parts of world conceptualize their sexuality. This may aid in better understandings of human sexual variation which, in turn, has the potential to encourage policy and legislation that may benefit same-sex desiring people.

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APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) What is your age?
2) What word(s) would you use to describe your gender?
3) Why would you describe your gender in this way?
4) What word(s) would you use to describe your sexuality?
5) Why would you describe your sexuality in this way?
6) Are you sexually and/or romantically attracted to people of the same sex?
7) How did you know that you were sexually and/or romantically attracted to people of the same sex?
8) Do you only sexually desire people of the same sex?
9) What does it mean to you to sexually desire someone of the same sex?
10) Do you think you were born with a tendency to be sexually and/or romantically attracted to women?
11) When did you first hear about homosexuality? And how?
12) What do you think of the term 'homosexuality?'
13) 'Lesbian?' 'Gay?' How would you define these terms?
14) What is your religious affiliation?
15) Do you feel any pressure from your faith to sexually desire men or to marry a man?
16) Do you feel any pressure from your family to sexually desire men or to marry a man?
17) What is your current relationship status?
18) Can you balance/reconcile your sexuality with your religion? If so, how do you do this?
19) Can you balance/reconcile your sexuality with your family roles and expectations? If so, how do you do this?