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ENCYCLOPEDIA
OF SEXUALITY

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RAYMOND J. NOONAN, PH.D., CCIES WEBSITE EDITOR

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CONTINUUM *Complete*
International
ENCYCLOPEDIA
OF SEXUALITY

Updated, with More Countries

2004

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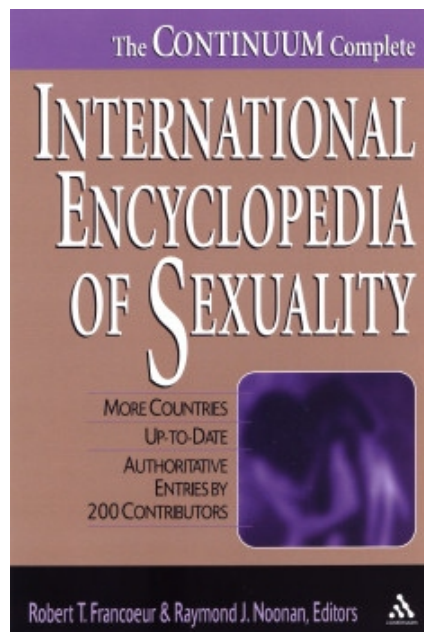
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Egypt

(*Jumhuriyah Misr al-Arabiyyah*)
(The Arab Republic of Egypt)

Bahira Sherif, Ph.D.*

Updates by B. Sherif and Hussein Ghanem, M.D.

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Demographics and a Brief Historical Perspective

ROBERT T. FRANCOEUR

A. Demographics

Egypt is located in the northeastern corner of Africa and the Sinai, a small Asian peninsula between the Middle East and northern Africa. Egypt's borders include a coastline of 1,523 miles (2,450 km) facing the Mediterranean Sea on the north and the Red Sea on the east. Israel is on the northeast border of Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, between the Mediterranean and Red Seas. On the south is Sudan and on the west Libya. Egypt's 386,660 square miles (1,001,450 km²) make it about one and a half times the size of the state of Texas. Almost all of Egypt is arid, desolate, and barren, with hills and mountains in the east and along the Nile River. The Nile River and its fertile valley, where most Egyptians live, stretches 550 miles from the eastern Mediterranean Sea south into the Sudan. Three percent of the land is arable and 2% is devoted to permanent crops; 2% of the land is irrigated.

In July 2002, Egypt had an estimated population of 70.71 million. (All data following are from *The World Factbook 2002* (CIA 2002) unless otherwise stated.)

Age Distribution and Sex Ratios: 0-14 years: 33.96% with 1.04 male(s) per female (sex ratio); 15-64 years: 62.18% with 1.02 male(s) per female; 65 years and over: 3.86% with 0.84 male(s) per female; *Total population sex ratio:* 1.02 male(s) to 1 female

Life Expectancy at Birth (1999): *Total Population:* 64.05 years; *male:* 61.96 years; *female:* 66.24 years

Urban/Rural Distribution: 45% to 55%; Cairo: 9.7 million; Alexandria (El-Iskandriyah): 3.6 million (1999)



(CIA 2002)

Ethnic Distribution: Eastern Hamitic stock (Egyptians, Bedouins, and Berbers): 99%; Greek, Nubian, Armenian, and European (Italian and French): 1%

Religious Distribution: Official government statistics cite Muslim (mostly Sunni): 94%; and Coptic Christian and other: 6%. However, several outside authorities claim the Coptic Christian population is actually 15% to 20%.

Birth Rate: 24.41 births per 1,000 population

Death Rate: 7.58 per 1,000 population

Infant Mortality Rate: 58.6 deaths per 1,000 live births

Net Migration Rate: -0.24 migrant(s) per 1,000 population

Total Fertility Rate: 2.99 children born per woman

Population Growth Rate: 1.66%

HIV/AIDS (1999 est.): *Adult prevalence:* 0.02%; *Persons living with HIV/AIDS:* NA; *Deaths:* NA (For additional details from www.UNAIDS.org, see end of Section 10B.)

Literacy Rate (defined as those age 15 and over who can read and write): 51.4% (male: 63.6%, female: 38.8%) (1995 est.); *attendance for nine years of compulsory school:* 95% (education is free and compulsory from age 6 to 13)

Per Capita Gross Domestic Product (purchasing power parity): \$3,700; *Inflation:* 2.3%; *Unemployment:* 12%; *Living below the poverty line:* 22.9% (2001 est.)

B. A Brief Historical Perspective

Civilization and urban life were born around 5000 B.C.E. in the fertile valleys of the Nile, Indus, and Tigris/Euphrates Rivers. About 3200 B.C.E., King Menes established the first of many dynasties of pharaohs who gradually unified the country from the Nile Delta to Upper Egypt. The pharaohs produced a distinctive ancient civilization of great wealth and cultural brilliance, built on an economic base of serfdom, fertile soil, and annual flooding of the Nile Valley. The decline of ancient imperial power facilitated the conquest of Egypt by Asian invaders, the Hyksos and Assyrians. The last pharaonic dynasty was overthrown by the Persians in 341 B.C.E. Alexandrian and Ptolemaic Greek dynasties then replaced the Persians, who were in turn replaced by the Roman Empire. Egypt was part of the Byzantine Empire from the 3rd to the 7th centuries of the Common Era, when it was conquered by Arab invaders who introduced the Muslim reli-

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gion and Arabic language. (The ancient Egyptian language is still used in the Christian Coptic liturgy.) Around 1250, the Mameluke dynasty, a military caste of Caucasian origin, replaced Arab control. In 1517, the Turks defeated the Mamelukes, and Egypt became part of the Ottoman Empire.

In 1798, Napoleon's armies invaded Egypt and occupied Cairo. His effort to block British trade routes to India and establish a francophone society was ultimately unsuccessful. Nevertheless, Napoleon's invasion had profound repercussions for the Arab and Muslim world, which continue to affect the region's political and social development. This was the first European conquest of a major Arab country in the history of Islam, and it signaled the rapid decline of Islam as a world political power. Some analysts even trace contemporary Muslim fundamentalism to this initial shattering defeat.

The French occupation, defeat, and withdrawal destabilized Egypt and left it vulnerable to an internal political struggle that was won by Mohammed Ali, an Albanian lieutenant in the Ottoman army, who set about modernizing the economic and educational structure of Egypt. However, the expansion ultimately put Egypt heavily into debt, and, at the end of the American Civil War with the resumption of American cotton production, initiated a major recession in Egypt's cotton industry. As a result of the economic crisis, the British began to assume greater control over the country.

The Suez Canal, built by a French corporation from 1859 to 1869, was taken over by the British in 1875. After the British Empire expanded into East Africa and the Sudan, the British established their *de facto* rule in 1882, although Egypt remained a nominal part of the Ottoman Empire until 1914. Egypt became a British protectorate in 1914 and a League of Nations Mandate in 1922. The autonomy of the Egyptian monarchy was strengthened in the Anglo-Egyptian treaty in 1936, although Great Britain continued its military presence in Egypt and its control of the Sudan.

After the heavy fighting of World War II, a growing nationalist movement led Egypt to abrogate the 1936 treaty in 1951. A military uprising the following year forced King Farouk to abdicate. Farouk was succeeded by Gamal Abdel Nassar when Egypt declared itself a republic. British troops were withdrawn from the Suez Canal Zone in June 1956, and the following month, Egypt nationalized the Canal. At the end of October, Israel invaded the Sinai Peninsula, and French and British forces came to Israel's aid. United Nations intervention maintained the peace between 1957 and 1967. Egyptian incursions into the Gaza Strip in June 1967 led to a full-scale war with Israel that continued through 1970, when Nassar died and was succeeded by Anwar Sadat. In October 1973, Egyptian forces crossed the Suez Canal and attacked Israeli positions. Eighteen days later, the Yom Kippur War ended in a ceasefire. Meanwhile, Soviet influence had risen with Russian contributions to the Aswan High Dam, and then waned. In 1974, Sadat's government became increasingly friendly to Western and American investment, and relationships between Egypt and Israel improved.

Sadat's economic "Open Door Policy" encouraged, in particular, the private sector to increase the productive capacity of the economy. However, as the government withdrew its commitment to guaranteed employment for all college graduates, unemployment increased. Women, in particular, were affected by this policy. While there had been an increasing expectation in the 1960s that women would increasingly enter the labor force, the Open Door Policy surprisingly worked against this expectation. The national dialogue about women's work started to shift, and the definition of women as primarily playing a role in the domestic arena gained ground. Justifying ideologies based on sexual divi-

sion of roles began to appear, supported by the newly emerging Islamic fundamentalist groups, which advocated that a woman's place was in the home (el-Baz 1997, 149). Further, a provision was added to Article Eleven of the 1971 Constitution, which declared the state's commitment to help reconciling women's family obligations and their equality to men in the public sphere, "provided that this did not infringe on the rules of the Islamic *shari'a* [the "Way" of Islam, including the law and governance]." The new Constitution represented an important divergence from the secular discourse of the 1960s and created opportunities for Islamic groups to oppose women's rights on the grounds that they were in opposition to Islamic principles (Hatem 1992, 241).

Throughout the 1980s, the Open Door Policy became increasingly institutionalized, eventually leading to the current economic Reform Policy. While this policy has been relatively successful on a macro level, it has had negative consequences for the more vulnerable sectors of society, namely the poor, and specifically, poor women and their children (el-Baz 1997, 149). As key resources, such as healthcare and education, have become scarcer, it has been lower-class women and children who have become least likely to have access to them. Also, affected by the economic restructuring have been individuals who would previously have been classified as middle class, namely civil servants and unemployed graduates.

While the pressures and tensions of a rapidly changing world in the last half of the 20th century have affected all the nations and peoples of the world, these tensions have been more obvious in the Islamic nations of the Middle East and southeast Asia. In particular, the growing Islamic fundamentalist movement symbolizes the tensions and conflicts between Western and indigenous traditions and beliefs. Further, in Egypt, this movement has centered much of its rhetoric around the "appropriate" roles for women in society. Gender issues thus constitute a principal mechanism for understanding issues of marriage and sexuality.

1. Basic Sexological Premises

According to Egyptian societal norms, sexuality and the ensuing children are part of marriage and creating a family, and do not, therefore, belong in any other sphere of life. With this ideology in mind, contemporary fundamentalists often point to the West and the "loose morality between the sexes" in order to legitimize their arguments about sexuality and gender roles. The essence of their arguments is that women should not work outside of the home and should instead take care of their husbands and children. The family structure emerges as all-important for maintaining a well-ordered society, practical morality, and channeling sexuality. As will be seen, gender roles, and in particular woman's role at the center of the family, thus acquire social importance and political relevance.

2. Religious, Ethnic, and Gender Factors Affecting Sexuality

A. The Issue of Gender

Egyptian society is organized on the principle that men and women simply have different natures, talents, and inherent tendencies. This becomes most apparent in the realm of the family, where each gender has a different role to play. Men are created for going out in the world and are responsible for providing financially for the family. Women are suited for remaining within family boundaries, caring for the home, the children, and the husband. Further, women's inherent sexuality is believed to be constantly endangering the social harmony of society (specifically, men) and is, there-

fore, best controlled through women's modesty and women remaining as much as possible within the private sphere of family. This belief is reinforced through cultural and religious norms that increasingly advocate that family roles of both women and men are fundamental in maintaining societal structure. The dominant gender constructions therefore support keeping women in the home and oppose women working and abandoning their primary roles (Macleod 1991, 85). Nonetheless, contemporary images of women as economic assets and providers are rapidly coming into conflict with what are perceived as divinely inspired roles.

Gender roles in Egypt derive much of their legitimacy from the Qur'an. In particular, women are often the focus of quotes that supposedly refer to the appropriate roles and behaviors of women. References to the role of women are widely scattered throughout the Qur'an. Some passages focus on women's unique nature, some on women's place in society, and some on women's role within the general congregation of believers. As Fernea and Bezirgan (1977, 13) emphasize, even though the Qur'an is the central source of Islamic belief, there is considerable controversy about the meaning of each of these passages and their implications for the status of women. Consider the verse:

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

This verse is used by some interpreters as evidence that women are considered equal within Islamic doctrine. Others, however, point to the following verse:

Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property [to support women]. So good women are the obedient. (Qur'an 4, 3, 4)

They cite this as evidence that women can never achieve equality within Islam (Fernea & Bezirgan 1977, 18). Selectively choosing Qur'anic verses can either undermine or support dialogues concerning the proper role of women.

Verses from the Qur'an, the *Hadith* (traditions about Mohammed, second only to the Qur'an in authority), and theological arguments about their relevance, are often used as empirical data for sociological explanations of a gender hierarchy in which women are subordinate to men (Mernissi 1987; Marcus 1992). Notwithstanding the powerful assertion that Muslim men and women utilize these sources as part of their hegemonic beliefs, contemporary scholarship has shown that, rather than determining attitudes about women, parts of the Qur'an are only used at certain times or occasions in order to legitimate particular acts or sets of conditions that concern women. The Qur'an is part of the way in which the gender hierarchy and sexuality are negotiated and enforced. It does not provide an explanation of gender roles; instead, it is part of a constant process of gender-role negotiation. While central to Islam, the Qur'an is neither the only nor the most important part of the beliefs and practices that influence the daily life of Muslim women and men. Differences between men and women are readily apparent in several aspects of Islamic law, which accords certain rights and capacities to both men and women. A Muslim's legal capacity (*ahliyyat*) begins at birth and ends with death. Legal responsibilities are assumed under one's legal capacity and are distinguished as a "capacity of execution" and a "capacity of obligations." A free Muslim man who is sane and considered an adult has the highest degree of legal capacity. A Muslim woman, even though she has certain rights, generally has

half the legal capacity of a man. This difference only becomes apparent when men and women reach adulthood.

According to the Islamic legal point of view, an adult is a:

legally and morally responsible person, one who has reached physical maturity, is of sound mind, may enter into contracts, dispose of property, and be subject to criminal law. Above all, he is responsible for the religious commands and obligations of Islam. (Lapidus 1976, 93)

When a Muslim man reaches maturity, his legal capacity becomes complete; neither his age nor marital status influences his legal rights, responsibilities, or capacity of execution.

A Muslim woman's legal identity also begins at birth, but in contrast to men, her legal capacity and status undergo various changes throughout her lifecycle. For a woman, her legal coming of age and her achievement of physical maturity do not necessarily coincide. She is a ward of her father or guardian as a child and, as an adult, is restricted in legal decision-making. Her legal persona and social status depend on the state of her sexuality, whether she is a virgin, married, divorced, or widowed. There is, of course, variation in different Islamic societies as to the perception of the different stages of femaleness. At different times in a woman's life she is treated differently both by the law and by the society. Societally and legally, the young woman (*shabba*) is the focus of a great deal of protection, and her freedom of movement is limited. In contrast, an old woman (*aguza*) is able to move with much greater ease, and may also move in places and participate in situations where the young woman is forbidden even to enter. It is, therefore, very important to emphasize the fundamental difference between the stability of mature men's status under the law versus the changing nature of women's status. This legal difference pervades and shapes the lives of women all over the Islamic world.

Existing side by side, and sometimes in contradiction to the reality of women's daily struggles in Egypt, is the cultural religious ideal of complementarity between the sexes. Within this concept, women are not devalued as persons, or somehow considered to be inherently lesser in value than men, or thought to be lacking in abilities. Instead, Egyptian women tend to emphasize that everyone—man, woman, or child—is thought to be part of an interrelated community, and that gender complementarity is part of the message of the Qur'an and *Hadith*. Even though men overwhelmingly act as the public spokespeople for Islam, as *ulama* (teachers and scholars of Islam), or as *sheikhs* (spiritual leaders), women tend to categorically emphasize that they are just as capable of spreading the word of Islam as men.

While women are clearly not always as much in the spotlight as men, they perform their duties in other ways. Women are valued as the first teachers of their children in the ways of Islam, both through their instruction and also by their example in daily life, which extends beyond the home. There are also many examples of women in Islamic history, beginning with the wives of the Prophet Muhammad and in folk Islam, who have become spiritual leaders in their communities (Ahmed 1992).

While both Muslim men and women are expected to be observant practitioners of religious rites, the actual practice of Islam among men and women in Egypt varies. According to the male view of Islam, all believers have the same responsibilities to God and the same duties to perform. This is supported by the Qur'an, which states: "And they [women] have rights similar to those [of men] over them in kindness, and men are a degree above them (2, 228)." In one sense, the Muslim community is made up of equals, and this is supported by the belief that all are equal before God. This doctrine is supported by reference to the Qur'an, and serves as

the foundation for the assertion that Islam is egalitarian. However, while it is stated that all are equal before God, at the same time men are in charge of women. Mernissi (1987, 41) considers the Islamic community, *umma*, to be the male Muslim world, while women's world is the other portion, a kind of sub-universe. However, this is only partially accurate. There is an important distinction between the concept of the *umma* as the imagined moral community to which all people naturally belong, and the society of believers on earth. The two spheres of the moral community and the world of daily life are connected, but in a manner that may not be directly apparent.

B. The Dangerous Sexuality of Women

A dominant gender ideology is an actively negotiated aspect of many Egyptians' daily lives. Contemporary constructions of what it is to be male or female are only partially shaped by Islamic beliefs. Western images, indigenous feminism, new Islamic views of women, and the requirements of the institutions of family and state all contribute to the creation of the ever-changing image of "proper" woman and man. Nonetheless, an Islamic framework is becoming ever more popular as the foundation for gender discourse in certain segments of Egyptian society. Fundamentalist discourse lends legitimacy and cultural authenticity to all positions in the argument. Much of this gender discourse is based on the "dangerous" nature of women and the evils of unbridled sexuality in society.

The contemporary sociologist Halim Barakat comments that, in the Arab world in general, "the prevailing religious ideology considers women to be a source of evil, anarchy [*fitna*] and trickery or deception [*kaid*]" (Barakat 1985, 32). Throughout Egyptian society, one finds the expression of a pervasive gender ideology that perceives women as posing extreme danger for men.

This same ideology prescribes modesty in the form of dress and behavior for women. Contemporary Egyptian beliefs regarding the modesty of women represent a convergence of ideology with customary practice and modern problems. In Egypt, as throughout the Arab world, descent is traced through the male line, and a woman remains a permanent member of her father's family. Even after marriage, a woman keeps her father's name and returns to him, or to another male relative on her father's side, if she is divorced or mistreated. She remains tied to the prestige structure of her father's family, even though she is incorporated into the household of her husband. The honor of the family is closely bound to the modest behavior of women, and honor is associated with the family group, not just with an individual. Thus, one finds that the actions of one family member affect the honor of everyone in that group. This leads to the complex situation that a woman's dishonorable actions before marriage threaten her father's whole family, but such actions after marriage threaten both her father's and her husband's family. As head of the family, a man must insure the integrity of family honor by watching over the behavior of the women of the group at all times.

One way in which these existing attitudes and practices are reinforced is by the recitation of passages from the Qur'an and *Hadith* that relate to women's modesty, and by interpreting them in a way that underscores the social values of keeping unrelated men and women separated from each other. For example, "And when ye ask of them [the wives of the Prophet] anything, ask it of them from behind a curtain [*higab*]" (Qur'an 33, 53). The word *higab* in some contexts is interpreted variously as a screen or a cloth used as a space divider in a tent, or in a metaphorical sense as modest dress or maintaining a decorous distance between

men and women. A key word relating to the modesty of women is *zina*, which is defined as adornment, ornament, or beauty. The Qur'an states:

And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest and to display of their adornment [*zina*] only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not to show their adornment [*zina*] save to their own husband or father or husband's father, or their sons or . . . And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment [*zina*]. (Qur'an 24, 31)

This verse has been alternately interpreted as defining *zina* as adornment, such as makeup or jewelry, or all of a woman, except for her face and hands or natural beauty (Hoffman-Ladd 1987, 29). It has become increasingly common in Egypt to hear that a woman must cover all of her *zina* in the name of honor and for the protection of public morals. In a constantly changing world, women have thus become the locus for many of the debates that actually deal with wider issues in the society.

Much of contemporary Islamic discourse on women deals with the underlying preoccupation with what it means to be a Muslim in a changing world. As technological developments in transportation, communication, and the media become accessible to a wider segment of the Egyptian population, some Muslims are turning to the fundamentalist scriptural versions of Islam, which are unfamiliar to much of the population. In an attempt to validate their positions, these Muslims cite the works of medieval jurists as the basis for their views on the appropriate roles of men and women. These works provide some insight into current developments with respect to gender roles.

First, one should note that the Qur'an specifically encourages sexual relations in the following verses addressed to husbands:

And when they [the women] have purified themselves, then go in unto them as Allah hath enjoined upon you. (Qur'an 2, 222)

Your women are a tilth for you to cultivate so go to your tilth as ye will, and send [good deeds] before you for your souls. (Qur'an 22, 23)

Having said this, medieval jurists regarded women as a major site of disruption, *fitna*. This was based, in part, on the specific notion of the potential danger of women's sexuality. In their arguments, the presence of women presented society, i.e., men, with the ever-present threat of *fitna*. Nonetheless, this presence was relational. Even though the danger of *fitna* was located in women, it was not their actual being that represented disorder, but the possibility of their unregulated relationships with men. A popular *Hadith*, frequently cited in contemporary fundamentalist literature, states: "I have not left any disorder [*fitna*] more damaging to men than women." Thus, women's disruptive sexuality presented a constant danger to a harmonious society.

In their socialization of men and women, the medieval societies of the Islamic world presumed that the sexes needed to coexist. Nevertheless, men and women needed to interact in prescribed ways. This was based on an ideology that assumed that women were seductresses and men were susceptible to seduction (Bouhdiba 1988, 20-29). Based on an assumption of their innate abilities, men were accorded the responsibility to set limits for women, who were considered to be below them. Jurists based this assumption on the Qur'anic verses that state: "men are a degree above women" (2, 228). While medieval jurists' emphasis on *fitna* must have affected attitudes toward other concepts relating to women's mod-

esty, these discussions were not by any means original or exclusive to the societies of that time.

The fear of *fitna*, which was posed by the visible presence of women, added an element of vested communal interest to the seclusion of women, an interest which was religiously sanctioned (al-Misri 1994, 512). Not only was women's modesty supposed to be guarded by men, who did so in order to guard the honor of their family, but women themselves were seen to bear a religious obligation to uphold their own modesty (*Ibid.*). Part of a woman's duty was to prevent *fitna*, to prevent men from feeling aroused, for if a man misbehaved as a result of arousal by a woman's physical presence, she, personally, was to blame. Furthermore, this was considered to be a woman's duty, not just toward her own family, but also toward society at large. Thus, Ibn al-Hajj, for example, writing in 14th century Cairo, suggests that in order for a woman not to cause havoc in society, she should leave the house three times in her lifetime: "at the time of her wedding; at the funeral of her parents; and at her own funeral" (1973, 1, 119). Any contact between men and women was deemed as potentially dangerous, as seen in another of his examples, where he warns the water-carrier to lower his gaze upon entering a house, because of the possibility of seeing an unveiled woman (1973, 3, 123). A spontaneous glance, in this case totally without forethought, was quite naturally assumed to lead towards seduction. These examples provide some insight into the underlying issues of gender ideology which are undergoing change in modern Egypt and reveal why women and sexuality remain a central focus of contention in contemporary debates about the centrality of marriage and family.

3. Knowledge and Education about Sexuality

A/B. Formal and Informal Sources

There is no form of sex education in Egypt. While Islamic culture has a certain fascination with all sexual matters as evidenced in the bawdy nature of *A Thousand and One Nights*, in contemporary Egypt, no sexual issues are discussed, either in schools or in the media. This is also in contrast to Qur'anic teachings, which encourage married couples to have sex both for reproductive as well as pleasurable purposes. This is evidenced by an Islamic law that says that if, on the wedding night, the woman discovers that her husband's penis is smaller than the thickness of three fingers, she may divorce him on the grounds of impotence.

While discussions of sexuality are a common component in Egyptian social life, and part of the role of older men and women is to help younger men and women deal with their sexuality, these informal discussions take place within highly regulated spheres of interaction characterized by gender segregation and, among women, the virgin/non-virgin category.

4. Autoerotic Behaviors and Patterns

ROBERT T. FRANCOEUR

For Muslim men, the loss of semen in masturbation and nocturnal emissions is bound up, as is the menstrual flow of women, with the impurity associated with the evacuation of organic wastes, unlawful (*haram*) relations, and specific taboos of the *ihram* (ritual purity and dedication of the pilgrim), violations of which constitute a capital sin against *zina*. The life of an observant Muslim is a succession of states of purity acquired then lost, and of impurity lost and then found again in carefully specified purification rituals. Man is never ultimately purified, nor is he condemned to permanent impurity. Major impurity (*janaba*) results from

any emission of semen, menstruation, or the 40-day lochia (*nafas*, the liquid discharged from the uterus following childbirth). Minor impurity is contracted as a result of any excretion by the urethra or anus.

Faithful execution of prescribed purification rituals, following emission of semen, urination, defecation, and the menstrual flow, enable a good Muslim to face God. Whatever the body eliminates is impure and sullies the body, and that pollution must be cleansed each time. This has nothing to do with sin, because man's very life involves the pollution of elimination and excretion, and nothing else. The serious nature and detailed prescriptions of the various purification rituals following an evacuation of organic wastes are often a surprise to non-Muslims (Bouhdiba 1985, 43-57).

The nature of the purificatory act is of a metaphysical order. It is the act of sublimating the body, of removing pollution and of placing it at the service of the soul and spirit. A material, physical, psychological or moral pollution is never final in Islam and the purpose of the purificatory techniques is to restore man to his original purity. (Bouhdiba 1985, 43)

Not surprisingly, in view of Egypt's Islamic culture and Islam's reticence in discussing sexual issues, female masturbation is not discussed, or even mentioned, in standard references on sexuality in Islam or Egypt. A single reference discovered by the editor in *Sexuality in Islam*, by Abdelwahab Bouhdiba (1985, 31), notes that, while both male and female homosexuality are equally condemned, female homosexuality (*musahaqa*) incurs the same reprimand as incurred by autoeroticism, bestiality, or necrophilia. Whether Bouhdiba would include female autoeroticism in this unspecified mention of masturbation is open to speculation.

5. Interpersonal Heterosexual Behaviors

A. Children and Adolescents

Gender Segregation of the Young

An Islamic marriage contract entwines men and women in a set of mutual rights and obligations. The first obligation of marriage is faithfulness and chastity. Any involvement in an extramarital relationship constitutes adultery and is grounds for divorce. This stems from two Qur'anic verses:

And who guard their modesty—save from their wives or the [slaves] that their right hands possess, for then they are not blameworthy. But who so craveth beyond that, such are transgressors. (23, 5-7)

And all married women [are forbidden unto you] save those [captives] whom your right hands possess. It is a decree of Allah for you. Lawful unto you are all beyond those mentioned, so that ye seek them with your wealth in honest wedlock not debauchery. (4, 42)

Traditional practices throughout the Islamic world limit interaction between the sexes, based on the idea that contact encourages adulterous relationships to develop. Contact is thus limited between young boys and girls, and complete separation of boys and girls becomes the ideal after the onset of puberty. These ideals have become extremely difficult to uphold with the advent of large numbers of women working outside of the house, and are presently in a state of negotiation between the sexes.

Faithfulness and chastity also account for the extreme emphasis that families and prospective bridegrooms place on the virginity of the bride. Both sexes believe that virginity guarantees the faithfulness of the woman to the man after marriage: "She will not desire others if she has not known men before," is a common phrase that is bantered about. While customarily, these rules are not applied as

stringently to men, men from “better” families will attempt (at least in mixed company) to portray themselves as very “moral” and as abstaining from women until marriage. It is commonly believed that one is able to predict future behavior based on the past.

Infractions of the moral code of faithfulness and fidelity are more common than is usually admitted by most middle-class Egyptians or than is cited in the literature on women and family. For example, Altorki writes, “In all the families studied, the fidelity of the wives was a principle that was strictly observed, and to my knowledge no infractions occurred” (1986, 63). While Egyptians also adhere to a similar belief system where the issue of faithfulness and fidelity is concerned, the reality may at times differ quite substantially.

B. Adults

Egyptian society is characterized by a general sense of patriarchy as well as sexual frustration. Men dominate over women in all matters of sexuality, and children are from their first day brought up with very strict sexual guidelines. Girls are expected to be virgins at marriage and are not allowed to ask about sex before their weddings. For many young women (especially the less-educated ones), the actual sex act comes as a complete surprise on their wedding nights and often results in lifelong frigidity because of the shock of the experience. Further, because of cultural constraints, even if a woman comes to enjoy sex, she is not allowed to show this to her husband, who will otherwise become suspicious of her desire and suspect her of having sex with other men. Also, women are not allowed to be the initiators when it comes to sex. Women are expected to initially be completely innocent and then later to “endure” sex in order to be “respectable” in their husband’s eyes.

Men have a different set of challenges. While they are expected to have some “experience” before marriage, men also are faced with maintaining their reputations so that they will be eligible to marry a “morally respectable” girl once they are financially set to do so. This entails secret sexual behaviors, since many men do not marry until their 30s. Further, it is difficult to find women to have sex with. Men, therefore, resort to encounters with prostitutes or with willing married women. However, most of this behavior occurs secretly and a man will never tell his bride about his experiences. Given the sexually repressive atmosphere of the society and the lack of sexual access to women, many men suffer from impotence and are extremely preoccupied with all sexual matters.

In addition, it must be pointed out that there are strong differences in degree between rural and urban areas, as well as class differences, in terms of interpersonal behaviors between men and women in the private sphere. Men from the south of Egypt (Saidi’is) are renowned for their jealous behaviors over their wives. Nonetheless, the rules depicted above apply in some degree to all individuals brought up in Egyptian society.

Concepts of Beauty

The traditional idea that in order to be attractive, women should be pleasantly plump (*mirabraba*) is still around, but it is changing in the upper strata of society. For example, it is now possible to find diet Coca Cola and other diet sodas in Egypt. Also, hospitals have started treating obesity. There are no reported cases of bulimia or anorexia. “*Hilwa mirabraba*” or “pretty and plump” is a standard phrase, as if the two words are automatically attached. To call a woman “skinny as a stick” or a “drumstick” (referring to drums, not a chicken’s legs) is an insult. Traditional lower-class women use a different insult, “you rusty needle” (*Iya ibra miSad-diyy*), as a standard insult.

As far as ideals of beauty are concerned, women spend a lot of money straightening kinky hair and trying to whiten their skin using various creams such as “Fair and Lovely” or “Fair Lady.” There are commercials for these products on television all the time. Also, the male ideal of a woman in traditional sectors is blonde, with white skin and blue eyes. Women tend to find men who are somewhat taller, have a full head of hair, and again fair skin, as attractive. However, women do not attach great importance to men’s looks if they have other favorable criteria, such as a job, good education, and respectable family background.

Intimacy and Nudity

ROBERT T. FRANCOEUR

While the Imams and mullahs of Islam are very clear in their interpretations of the Qur’an and what is permitted and not permitted by tradition, there is often, as Perper points out in the Preface to this volume, a real discrepancy between “proper sex” and “formal values,” what the authorities say should be done, and “smart sex” and “informal values,” what men and women actually do in their private sphere. The comments of Abdelwahab Bouhdiba in *Sexuality in Islam* are a good example of this distinction applied to the issue of nudity. Bouhdiba (1985, 37-38) writes about formal values and proper sex according to the Qur’an:

To be a Muslim is to control one’s gaze and to know how to protect one’s own intimacy from that of others.

However, the concept of intimacy is far-reaching, for we are confronted here with the concept of *’aura*, which tradition divides into four categories: what a man may see of a woman, what a woman may see of a man, what a man may see of a man, what a woman may see of a woman.

Between men and women, and also between men before their own wives, the part to be concealed from the eyes of others stretches from the navel to the knees exclusively, with a greater or lesser tolerance for the lower part of the thighs, especially in the case of youths. A woman must reveal only her face and hands. Between husband and wife sight is permitted of the whole body except for the partner’s sexual organs, which one is advised not to see for “the sight of them makes one blind.” However, this is allowed in cases where it is necessary, for juridical or medical purposes, to examine the sexual organs of the *zani* or woman in confinement.

Certain *fugaha* authorize the partners to look at one another’s sexual organs during intercourse. Zayla’i, armed with the opinion of Ibn ’Omar and Imam Abu Hanifa, even affirms that it increases one’s ability to reach the quintessence of ecstasy.

Total nudity is very strongly advised against, even when one is “alone.” This is because absolute solitude does not exist in a world in which we share existence with the *djinns* [*spirits lower than angels*] and angels. “Never go into water without clothing for water has eyes,” Daylami observes.

When the editor asked Bahira Sherif to comment on the above description of “proper sex” offered by Bouhdiba, she offered the following comment: “Public nudity in all forms is forbidden for both men and women. The most extreme case of this is that some ultraconservative men will cover their wife’s feet with a cloth when she climbs in and out of a bus. Men and women are allowed to be intimate and to see each other’s sexual organs.”

Islamic Law and Egyptian Marriage

In order to understand sexuality in Egypt, it is necessary to clarify the role of marriage in Islamic law (which remains in effect in all issues related to family in Egypt.) In all schools

of Islamic law, marriage is seen as a contract whose main function is to make sexual relations between a man and a woman licit. The term '*aqd al-nikah*' refers to the contract of coitus. A valid and effective marriage contract outlines certain respective legal rights and duties for wife and husband, together with other rights and duties common to both of them. Very superficially, these rights and duties can be summed up as dowry and maintenance for the wife and children, as well as the good treatment of the wife and children by the husband, the mutual right of inheritance between the conjugal couple, and the wife's obedience to her husband in lawful matters. At the time of marriage, other parties can stipulate certain conditions, provided that they are not contrary to the basis of marriage as defined by jurists.

The essential requirements for a valid Muslim marriage in Egypt are:

1. consent of the wife,
2. consent of the legal guardian or *al wali*,
3. two legal witnesses, and
4. payment of dowry or *mahr*.

While each of these elements must be present for a marriage to be considered valid, there are other features inferred from Islamic legal texts, which combine to make a legitimate, socially respectable marriage. Because marriage is a contract, both parties can stipulate certain conditions. For example, one condition may be the wife's right to divorce, but a condition that eliminates the husband's right to divorce would be void. Verma (1971, 97-104) has provided a list of valid and void conditions related to marriage.

Beyond its legal components, marriage is also regarded as a religious obligation and is invested with many ethical injunctions. This can be attributed primarily to the fact that any sexual contact outside marriage is considered fornication or a violation of *zina*, and is subject to severe punishment. Furthermore, Islam condemns and discourages celibacy. In this manner, marriage acquires a religious dimension; it becomes the way of preserving morals and chastity through the satisfaction of sexual desires within the limits set by God (Maudoodi 1983, 6-7). Muslim jurists have gone so far as to elevate marriage to the level of a religious duty. The Qur'an supports this notion in the verse that states, "And marry such of you as are solitary and the pious of your slaves and maid servants" (24, 32), which is commonly interpreted as advocating marriage in order to "complete the religion" (Bousquet 1948, 63). A common *Hadith*, still often quoted, particularly among men, states that "the prayer of a married man is equal to 70 prayers of a single man." Thus, all individuals are encouraged to marry, and societal provisions, such as the importance of family reputation, discourage being single.

Marriage remains at the center of contemporary Egyptian social life. It is the primary focal point in the lives of both men and women, followed only by the birth of a child. From a legal standpoint, the marriage contract establishes a series of rights and obligations between a couple which have a long-lasting effect on many aspects of their lives. An Islamic marriage contract naturally represents more than a mere exchange of money or material goods. It is a form of social exchange and is thus a legal, religious, economic, and symbolic transaction (Mauss 1967, 76). The contract is attended to with utmost seriousness and is preceded by a set of lengthy negotiations, almost all of which center around the material protection of the woman and her unborn children once she enters the state of matrimony. Nevertheless, the marriage contract may include conditions that are advantageous for either or both spouses. Conditions specified in the contract may range from the woman's right to dissolve the marriage,

to an agreement that neither party may leave the town they agree to live in, and even that the husband may not marry another woman. The contract, as a matter of course, also acts as a medium for bringing the various members of the two families together and provides them with the opportunity to discuss in detail the preliminary workings of the marriage. Most importantly, the marriage contract symbolizes the public acknowledgment of the formation of a lawful sexual partnership that will be sanctioned both religiously and socially, and which marks the beginning of a family and the care and upbringing of children.

Mut'a or Temporary Marriage

While *mut'a* or temporary marriage is not recognized as legitimate by any school of Sunni Islam, its acceptance and practice among the Shi'as highlight the contractual nature of Muslim marriages (Haeri 1989). However, Haeri's argument that all Islamic marriage contracts are basically an exchange of money for sexual intercourse, while thoroughly researched and argued, is incomplete. While that is one element of the exchange, Haeri ignores the other elements of protection of the woman and her children. Even temporary marriages require a contract based on the notion that should a child be fathered, even in a short-term union, the man must claim paternity. This can be observed by the fact that after the short-term-marriage contract expires, the woman is still required to observe the '*idda*', the period of waiting. A *mut'a* wife is not entitled to maintenance, but should children be conceived during a legitimate *mut'a* marriage, they are entitled to inherit from both parents.

For a *mut'a* marriage to be valid, the term of cohabitation must be fixed, and it may be a day, a month, a year, or a number of years; and a dower should be specified. However, it is still incorrect to draw conclusions about the nature of all Islamic marriage contracts based on *mut'a* marriage contracts. *Mut'a* marriages are outlawed among all other schools of law because they do not fulfill the purpose that the jurists argue is the fundamental reason behind marriage in the first place. While lawful sexual intercourse is one aspect of the contract, the legalities bound up with the relationship, I think, indicate the multidimensional nature of an Islamic marriage. The Sunni jurists emphasize that even under Shi'a doctrine, temporary marriage is not a proper marriage, since it establishes no maintenance or inheritance rights for the woman.

Modern Egyptian legislation dealing with marriage and its actual practice provides insight into the contemporary nature of the founding of an Islamic family through matrimony. Here we can only give a general summary of the issues dealing with marriage and divorce. A general examination of the legalistic intricacies of marriage is relevant to all schools of law in Islam and reveals the rights and obligations of both men and women that are established through the marital bond. It is not within the scope of this chapter to expound on the social and cultural customs that vary across the regions that are today primarily Islamic. While these variations are very important, they are not central to our discussion here, because of the prevailing uniformity of the legal issues. Few fundamental conceptual and legal differences exist among the various schools of Islamic law concerning the basic rights of women (e.g., dowry and financial maintenance), inheritance laws being the exception. Since the legal structure for marriage and divorce, which constitutes most of the laws dealing with women, is described in detail in the Qur'an (especially *suras*, chapters of the Qur'an, 2, 221-41; 4, 3-35; 65, 1-7), they are believed to be immutable. Historically, Islamic societies have avoided making changes to the structure of family law because of its derivation from religious text. Thus, it is of contemporary

relevance to examine some of the legalistic aspects of marriage with respect to their derivations from the Qur'an.

Sources such as the Qur'an and Islamic law represent norms; they do not describe what is or what was, but what should be. They constitute the mechanism of an ideally functioning Islamic society, the goal being to provide for humankind the path to happiness and paradise. However, this does not mean that these sources have no relation to reality. In fact, they do from two aspects. On the one hand, the solutions that they suggest to human questions and problems are often derived, in particular relation to issues about marriage and family, out of the existing circumstances, even in those instances when they seek to change existing conditions. On the other hand, these guidelines influence the given society, leading to changes in social practice, including marriage, family, and gender roles.

Sexuality Within Marriage

Islamic justification of sexual intercourse through the marriage contract can be seen in a variety of provisions (Bousquet 1948, 63-74). For example, a Muslim marriage only becomes completely valid when it has been consummated. If a man declares his wife divorced three times, he can only remarry her once she has contracted a marriage with another man and consummated the new marriage—a *Hadith* refers to this as "tasting a bit of honey."

[(*Comment 2001*) As Zeynep Gulcat, author of the chapter on Turkey in this volume, explained when asked about this by a graduate student in the Editor's class, this *Hadith* is meant to protect the wife from repeated, impulsive declarations of divorcing a wife for minor irritations and then remarrying her on reflection. (*End of comment by R. T. Francoeur*)]

Also, once husband and wife live together, the marriage is to be consummated within a certain period of time. The different schools of law vary on the specified time period, but one year seems to be the average (al-Misri 1994, 531). A woman may not refuse her husband's sexual advances at any time, even if she is menstruating, unless it will cause her discomfort. She, in turn, has the right, not just to sexual intercourse, but also to sexual satisfaction. It is said that if a woman pleases her husband sexually, she can be assured of paradise, and if she refuses him, she will be penalized both on earth and in heaven. If a man swears an oath that he will not touch his wife any more, then she has the right to divorce him after four months, unless he resumes sexual relations with her again (Qur'an 2, 226). All of these prescriptions indicate how important and potent Islam considers sexuality to be. Both men and women are to be satisfied sexually in order to prevent adultery and consequent chaos in the society.

The importance of sexuality in the married life of Egyptian women is very apparent in their conversations, which are often, by Western standards, very explicit. Married women will not speak of their sex lives in front of other men or unmarried young women. Nevertheless, once they find themselves alone with other married women, the conversations will become very detailed about the various strengths or weaknesses of their married lives. Women will advise one another on all aspects of sex and on how to best "deal with one's husband."

A major issue among married women is the issue of frequency of sex. Some women feel that their husbands place undue demands on them, given the fact that they work, have children, and are running a household. Interestingly, some other women have the opposite complaint. According to a couple of my informants, several of their husbands kept them on a strict schedule of sex. Thus, the men initiated sex

with their wives regularly but in a limited fashion on, for example, Tuesdays and Thursdays, Thursdays being the most common night for sex before the holy day on Friday. Any attempts on the wife's part to deviate from this schedule were met with great opposition. Thus, women are constantly advising one another on "seductive" techniques to force their husbands to vary the schedule. Men, however, feel that it is necessary to preserve a strict regular sexual schedule in order to keep their wives' sexuality under control. Men tend to fear that, as they age, women may want or expect too much from them, and that once they are not able to perform as well, this could initiate a marital crisis. Furthermore, many men fear that anything beyond basic sexual knowledge could potentially make their wives "promiscuous" and "uncontrollable." A major complaint on the part of women is their ignorance about sex when they married and their husband's lack of interest in educating them in this matter.

While Thursday night is considered "sex night," Friday is traditionally known as bath day. This is the day that ritually men get cleaned up to go to Friday prayer. Because of the traditional association of sex with full ablutions required after a major impurity, water is strongly associated with sex. This can even be seen in the term *Imayya suxna*, hot water, a phrase used by parents for something that the children should not be allowed to hear.

Among many Egyptians, part of the role of older men and women is to help younger men and women deal with some of the fundamental aspects of marriage. While sexuality, within the legitimate institution of marriage, is an active, much-discussed component of Egyptian social life, these discussions take place within highly regulated spheres of interaction characterized by gender segregation and, among women, the virgin/nonvirgin category.

To an individual brought up in the West, Egyptian women's discussions of sexuality are striking because of the many allusions to the Qur'an. While many women do not actually know what the Qur'an says, they do know that it urges all individuals to marry and that sexuality is encouraged and considered of primary importance for both men and women. "The Qur'an says it [sexuality] is part of our nature," or, conversely, "sex is part of their [men's] nature," are common comments and complaints among women. Especially among older women, jokes and anecdotes about sex and their husbands are afternoon entertainment. Younger women tend to be quite proud of the new power they have over their husbands and again validate these feelings with religious references, such as, "the Qur'an urges us to reproduce—and we are helping them [their husbands] to become good Muslims," or, "We are helping them to fulfill their religious obligation." Some of the less-happily married women in my study (in particular the older ones) repeatedly emphasized to me that, even though they were not satisfied with their husbands, "this was God's will," and that they were trying to please their husbands in all aspects, including sex, "because it is part of our religion and we will be rewarded in the afterlife." Religious references are used by both older and younger women to validate their positive and negative marital experiences. Nonetheless, none of the women seemed to have concrete knowledge of the actual *suras* or *Hadith*.

The complete social prohibition of young people's sexual activities outside of marriage naturally leads to the almost nonexistence of illegitimacy among this societal group. Illegitimacy is only spoken of in hushed tones and is associated with unusual occurrences, such as a maid getting pregnant through the advances of one of the men in the household. The Western phenomenon of older, educated, unmarried women

having children is unheard of and evoked expressions of extreme surprise among my acquaintances. "That is *haram* [forbidden]. Why would a woman do this to herself?" or "A woman bears children for her husband. Children need a father. How can this be?" A unanimously shared Egyptian belief is that reproduction belongs to the realm of the family and is thus, like sexuality, highly regulated by legal, as well as social rules and responsibilities.

Divorce

Until 2000, Egyptian and Islamic law provided the wife with a very limited right to initiate a divorce, one of these being the right of the wife to divorce her husband on the grounds of impotence if she discovered when the marriage was consummated that his penis did not exceed the thickness of three fingers.

A major development occurred in late January 2000 when the 454-member Egyptian Parliament voted to allow women to divorce their husbands without first having to prove to a judge that they had been mistreated. Under the new legislation, which was quickly approved by President Hosni Mubarak, divorce will still be more complicated for a woman than a male (Sachs 2000).

[Update 2002: With the new law, enacted after a 15-year campaign, an Egyptian woman now has two choices. A woman can still use the often-protracted procedure, which requires her to have witnesses to provide a family court judge with exacting proof that her husband has committed adultery or has mistreated and abused her badly enough to justify divorce. In the end, the court procedure usually results in a ruling against the wife. The old law gives men appeal rights that can take years to exhaust. Under the old law, as little as an hour with the local marriage registrar is all that it takes for a husband to get a divorce, sometimes without even informing the wife. Prior to passage of the new law of 2000, a Muslim man in Egypt could end his marriage by saying three times, "I divorce you," or by filing with a government registrar a document testifying to his action. Despite these disadvantages, 1.5 million such requests were filed each year under the old law, and 290,000 divorces were granted, according to government statistics. In Cairo, where one fifth of Egypt's 70 million people live, roughly 15,000 women filed for divorce annually under the old law.

[Even with the new law giving women the option of seeking a divorce, and the likelihood that the courts will tie up a case for years examining a woman's claim, it is still preferable for the wife to prove cause, if only to retain the *mahr* (bridewealth or marriage payment) her husband brought to the marriage. The option of the quick divorce demanded by the wife allows the husband to file his own divorce request and make a quick exit with the *mahr*.

[The new option allows a woman to demand a unilateral, no-questions-asked divorce on the basis of incompatibility. The only restrictions are a required court-supervised attempt at mediation and a six-month wait for a woman with children, and a three-month wait if no children are involved. If a judge fails to reconcile the couple in this period and the wife still wants a divorce, the judge has to grant it. However, the woman has to return all money, property, and gifts she received in the marriage from her husband—her *mahr*—and forego alimony.

[One compromise during the debate over the new law eliminated a provision that would have allowed Egyptian women to travel with a husband's or father's permission, because it was too daring. In late 1999, the government repealed a controversial part of the criminal code that allowed rapists to avoid imprisonment if they offered to marry their victims.

[During the 15-year effort to change the old family law, the conservative religious element objected vehemently that the proposed reform would cause major social upheaval and set women at war with men, while advocates of reform argued that reform would make the legal system more efficient and in tune with contemporary concern over women's rights. In the end, a diverse coalition made reform possible. President Mubarak, whose wife has been active on social reform issues, along with legal reform activists, civil libertarians, and supporters of women's rights, all supported the reform. Perhaps most crucial were the Muslim scholars who agreed that there was justification within Islam for the proposed changes. It was, in fact, the justification of the new law on religious grounds that won it approval in a nation where family law, in particular, is seen as deeply rooted in *shari'a* (Islamic code). The activists for reform successfully argued that the Prophet Mohammed meant divorce to be a gender-equal—or at least nearly equal—opportunity for men and women to dissolve an unhappy marriage. When scholars at Cairo's Al Azhar University, the Muslim world's oldest seat of religious learning, agreed, the reform became a reality (Geissinger 2000; Schneider 2000). (End of update by B. Sherif)]

The situation of the 6% of Christian Egyptians remains as burdensome as before, because religious courts, which administer family law, rarely grant Christian women a divorce unless she can prove adultery.

Many leading clerics supported the change, including the government-appointed *mufiti* (legal advisors on religious matters) and the sheik of Al Azhar University, the oldest Islamic teaching institution in the world. Supporters of the change point out that even the Prophet Muhammad allowed an unhappy woman to divorce her husband over his opposition, provided she first returned her dowry.

In the impassioned debate on the new law, opponents argued that Islam gives only men the right to initiate a divorce. Extending this right to women, whom they described both in Parliament and the media as emotionally capricious and vengeful, would lead to a massive breakdown of family life. "This will only lead to more and more splits within the society," Ayman Nour, a member of Parliament claimed; "This law will instigate women to be corrupt. A woman could just get together with another man and agree to divorce her husband."

Establishment of a woman's right to initiate a divorce is a major advancement for women in Egypt in light of the strong fundamentalist movement.

Polygyny

While polygyny is allowed by the Qur'an, it is virtually nonexistent in Egypt. In contrast to the stereotypical Western image of Muslim men with multiple wives, Egyptian men bemoan the difficulties of supporting one wife in today's economy, and strong social sanctions work against their even considering polygyny as a viable option.

Male and female reactions must be seen in light of a 1979 ruling, also known as "Jihan's law," so named after Sadat's unpopular modernist wife, who introduced a decree outlawing polygyny as an option for men. Considerable debate ensued in the media and among secular and religious elites concerning the Personal Status Laws and their relationship to the *shari'a* (Islamic law). This amendment was eventually partially abrogated on procedural grounds in 1985. However, in June of that year, a similar law (Law No. 100) amending the 1925 and 1929 laws was enacted and is now the law in place (Karam 1998, 145). The new law stipulates that in the case of a polygynous union, the first wife retains the right to seek divorce, but it is no longer an automat-

ic right. Instead, she now has to prove that her husband's second marriage is detrimental to her either materially and/or mentally. Further, the first wife now only has the right to sue for divorce in the first year of the new polygynous marriage. It is socially unacceptable among the middle and upper classes for men to engage in polygynous unions and, in fact, is not seen as an option. The revisions in the law are important on a symbolic level in terms of giving men certain legal rights over women in the context of the family.

6. Homoerotic, Homosexual, and Bisexual Behaviors

While there is no public acknowledgment of homosexuality in Egypt, there is a largely hidden but thriving bisexual and homosexual community (Murray 1997c). Nevertheless, families will never acknowledge that one of their members is potentially homosexual. Men will remain living in their natal family for most of their lives and there will never be any public discussion about their reasons for not marrying. Islam condemns male homosexuality and popular culture further reinforces this message. In reality, homosexuality is widely practiced but is divided into two categories: the active versus the passive partner. The active partner has little stigma attached to him, or at least much less than to the *khawal* or passive partner, who is heavily stigmatized. According to one *Hadith*, there are three kinds of male homosexual: "Those who look, those who touch, and those who commit the criminal act" (Bouhdiba 1985, 32).

There is also traditional pederasty between older men and younger boys. Long-term domestic relationships between men are unknown, given social norms that force all unmarried individuals to remain in their natal families until they marry. Since there are many situations in which males can interact with other males, opportunities for male homosexual encounters are available. Egyptian culture, for instance, encourages intimate interactions between men, and it is common to see men holding hands, embracing, or kissing each other on both cheeks without, again, any sexual overtones.

There are no similar venues for women, who are under the constant supervision of their families. Thus, there is no information available on the prevalence of lesbianism in Egyptian society. Also, it is considered quite appropriate for women to interact with other women in very intimate settings (such as helping each other bathe) without there being any sexual overtones to these encounters (Murray 1997b).

After pointing out that the Islamic world rests on the bipolarity of the sexes and their union in marriage, Bouhdiba (1985, 30-33) notes that "homosexuality is a challenge to the order of the world as laid down by God and based on the harmony and radical separation of the sexes."

"God has cursed those who alter the frontiers of the earth." In these terms the prophet condemns any violation of the separation of the sexes. Tradition has it that four categories of person incur the anger of God: "Men who dress themselves as women and women who dress themselves as men, those who sleep with animals and those who sleep with men." Homosexuality [*liwat*] incurs the strongest condemnation. It is identified with *zina* and it is advocated that the most horrible punishment should be applied to those who indulge in it.

In the final analysis, *liwat* even designates all forms of sexual and parasexual perversion. Nevertheless, in Islam, male homosexuality stands for all the perversions and constitutes in a sense the depravity of depravities. Female homosexuality [*musahaga*], while equally condemned, is treated with relative indulgence and those who indulge in

it incur the same reprimand as those condemned for autoeroticism, bestiality or necrophilia. (Bouhdiba 1985, 31)

[Update 2003: Although most Egyptians view homosexuality as heretical, it is not illegal. In the late 1990s, Cairo was gaining a reputation in Egypt's gay grapevine, and even in some nearby Middle Eastern countries, as having a rapidly expanding gay scene. Bars, discos, and plenty of public meeting places were opening up in the center of Cairo where it was relatively easy to socialize, exchange cellphone numbers, hold hands, and perhaps be more daring. The gay life flourished, either largely unnoticed amid more pressing issues, like terrorism and a government crackdown on radical Islamic activists, or tacitly tolerated.

[That changed dramatically in May 2001, when 52 men were arrested for "debauchery" in a police raid on the Queen Boat, a disco on the Nile known as a gay-friendly hangout. After the defendants were convicted in a November 2001 trial that caused international protests, President Hosni Mubarak ordered a second trial. In March 2003, a Cairo court convicted 21 of the 52 Queen Boat defendants of "debauchery" and sentenced each to three years in jail. Both highly publicized trials were widely criticized by human rights groups and Western governments. While homosexuality is not explicitly outlawed in Egypt, a section of the penal code dealing with "debauchery" that is rooted in Islamic law has recently been used to prosecute gay Egyptians. Activist lawyers and human rights activists estimate that 70 gay men have been arrested in recent months in addition to the 52 arrested two years ago.

[With the gay hangouts and clubs now closed down, gay men have turned to connecting on the Internet. But the police are now using sting operations on the Internet to track down gays. Government officials deny any harassment of gays. They also deny having targeted gays for arrest. However, several Western governments remain concerned about the treatment of gays and have been discussing the matter with Egyptian officials behind the scenes (Kershaw 2003). (End of update by R. T. Francoeur)]

7. Gender Diversity and Transgender Issues

There is no information available on transvestites or transsexuals because they cannot come out in public. This topic is not considered legitimate for discussion in Egypt.

8. Significant Unconventional Sexual Behaviors

A. Female Circumcision

In the West, the most controversial and publicized issue concerning women's health in the Islamic world and Africa is the practice of female circumcision. This practice is extremely widespread in Egypt, especially among the poorer classes and in rural areas. It is considered imperative for girls to be circumcised because of cultural norms that stigmatize uncircumcised girls and prevent them from marrying. Estimates range from 50 to 90% of all Egyptian women are circumcised, but precise figures are not known. A recent study conducted by researchers from Ayn Shams University found that 98% of all girls in the Egyptian countryside and poor girls in Cairo had been circumcised, both Muslims and Coptic Christians, while the estimate for upper-class girls in Cairo was approximately 30% (Botman 1999, 106). The 1995 Egypt Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS-95) indicates that female circumcision is still a common practice despite government portrayals to the contrary. Among women with one or more living daughters, 87% report that at

least one daughter has already been circumcised or that they intend to have the daughter circumcised in the future.

Most circumcisions take place before puberty; the median age at circumcision among both respondents and their daughters was 9.8 years. Traditional practitioners were responsible for more than eight to ten circumcisions among respondents, while trained medical personnel performed more than half of the circumcisions among the daughters of respondents.

The majority of women surveyed (82%) think female circumcision should be continued. Seventy-four percent believe that husbands prefer their wives to be circumcised and 72% believe that circumcision is an important aspect of religious tradition. Relatively few women recognize the negative consequences of circumcision, such as reduced sexual satisfaction (29%), the risk of death (24%), and the greater risk of problems in childbirth (5%).

This clinic-based study, one of the few of its kind, was carried out at five university hospitals, several rural hospitals, and two urban clinics. It included a total of 1,339 women for whom both questionnaires and physical examinations were completed. All clients coming to the sites for family planning or gynecological examinations were interviewed about their experience with female circumcision. In addition to the interview, pelvic examinations were conducted on all the women in the study. As part of the examinations, specially trained gynecologists determined whether there was physical evidence of circumcision and, in the case of circumcised women, the amount of tissue excised during the circumcision.

The results of the study permit a classification of circumcised women according to the type of circumcision performed. Because the interviews were conducted prior to the physical examinations, it was also possible to compare the woman's own report as to her circumcision status with the results of the physical examination. For 94% of the women in this clinic-based study, there was agreement between the reporting of circumcision and the findings of the subsequent physical examination.

While female circumcision is often presented as a requirement of Islam, this is in fact a fallacy. To the great embarrassment of the Egyptian government, the issue was raised at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. Subsequently, a decree was issued to limit the practice to hospitals. The government refrained from completely outlawing the practice because of pressure by Islamic groups who deem female circumcision as necessary based on a saying by the Prophet Muhammad. Critics, however, point out that the Prophet's own daughters were not circumcised and that circumcision is not practiced in Saudi Arabia, the most conservative Islamic country in the Middle East. In 1997, under pressure from Islamic fundamentalist groups, the government lifted the ban on female circumcision. Despite international efforts to publicize the physical and psychological dangers of circumcision, the practice is gaining legitimacy as Islamists revive the belief that it is religiously mandated. The controversy around female circumcision is indicative of the tension between ingrained cultural values with respect to gender, Islamists' quests for "authenticity," and Western perspectives that advocate universal women's rights with respect to control of their bodies.

B. Coercive Sexual Behavior

Incest

Although all cultures have some kind of incest taboo, the boundaries restricting who is an acceptable sexual and marital partner vary. In Egypt, for instance, sexual relations and marriage between first cousins is not considered incestuous

behavior and historically was very common. Even today, it is not uncommon for first cousins to marry. In fact, many families, particularly in the poorer and rural areas, consider this form of arranged marriage preferable to marrying outside of the family. The rationale for this includes the idea that one has an insider's knowledge about one's own family and, therefore, knows "what one is getting." Also, first-cousin marriages keep the land and wealth within the family.

Rape

Incidents of reported rape are infrequent in Egypt, because young girls, especially from middle-class and upper-class families are very protected. They tend to only move in the company of members of their families and they themselves take great care to protect their reputations in order to remain "marriageable." Girls from poor families who work as domestic servants are at a much greater risk of rape, because they have little power to protect themselves from the advances of male family members. These cases tend to go unreported and are not of interest to most members of the society. Also, the surge in an underground drug culture has led to a greater risk for women to be sexually exploited.

Unconventional Sexual Outlets

Although there are no recorded cases, some people claim that rural males occasionally use animals, such as sheep, as a sexual outlet. Especially in isolated villages, where sexual outlets for unmarried adolescents are lacking, sexual intercourse with animals is not uncommon.

C. Pornography and Erotica

Pornography, as well as prostitution, are forbidden by Egyptian law. That said, there are attempts to smuggle in pornography from the West, in particular now through the Internet. A crackdown on this behavior has been advocated by the government to the extent that at Internet cafes, users must sign a form saying that they will not attempt to access or download pornography.

D. Prostitution

Although information about prostitution in the religiously conservative nations of the Middle East is limited, prostitution is known to exist in most Arab countries, including the urban areas of Egypt (Inhotn & Buss 1993). Even though prostitution is outlawed in Egypt, Cairo is widely known as offering males access to many classes and types of prostitutes. With the increasing conservative climate in Egypt, the social phenomenon is increasingly hidden and not easily observed. Prostitution rings catering to traveling Western businessmen are known to operate out of private apartments, while other prostitutes frequent the large hotels with a high percentage of Western guests. It is difficult to regulate this form of prostitution because Egyptian prostitutes do not exhibit the same overt signals as their Western counterparts. There is no published data on prostitution in Egypt.

9. Contraception, Abortion, and Population Planning

Family planning is a problematic area even though Egypt has the longest history of contraceptive initiatives in the Middle East. In 1996, the former Ministry of Population and Family Planning was abolished and a new Ministry of Health and Population was created to underscore the renewed importance the government is giving to issues of population growth. Egypt's population problems are twofold: rapid rates of population growth related to high fertility and an unbalanced population distribution. The highest fertility level is found in rural Upper Egypt, 5.2 births per

woman, compared to a lower fertility level of 2.7 births per woman in urban Lower Egypt (Chelala 1996, 1651).

In order to help curb population growth, the government has consistently advocated the use of family-planning methods. However, the quality of family-planning services is often poor, contraceptives are not readily available, and, especially, poor and rural women are reluctant to use artificial birth control methods, which they have heard rumored are detrimental to women's health. Many unwanted pregnancies end in self-induced abortions because abortion is prohibited in Egypt, except in cases where pregnancy threatens the life of the mother. The 1995 Egypt Demographic and Health Survey, a nationally representative survey of 14,779 married women aged 14 to 49, shows a leveling off of the contraceptive prevalence rate at around 48% from 1991 to 1995. Although contraceptive use in Egypt doubled between 1980 and 1995, from 24% to 48%, most of the increase happened in the 1980s, with no significant change in the overall rate of contraceptive use between 1991 and 1995. The 1995 survey also revealed significant differences in the level of contraceptive use based on region, with women in Lower Egypt showing the lowest contraceptive use. This high discrepancy can be attributed, at least in part, to lower socioeconomic conditions and traditional practices and beliefs.

A primary issue discussed during the International Conference on Population and Development held in September 1994 in Cairo was the relationship between religion, family planning, and women's rights. Abortion turned out to be the most controversial topic. Muslims vehemently argue against abortion as a means of family planning but believe that abortion should be tied to the family unit. They believe that abortion may be practiced in exceptional cases where the health of either the mother or the fetus is in danger. The government's stance is that women must avoid abortion as a method of family planning, but the government does not provide treatment and counseling for women forced to resort to this measure.

Herbal and folk contraceptives are still popular, particularly in rural areas. Midwives are popular sources for information on preventing pregnancies and inducing abortions. Midwives are also often indirectly involved in the hymen-breaking ceremony of young virgins on their wedding night. Should a young woman not be a virgin or be worried about the intactness of her hymen, she may go to a midwife who will arrange for her to place a small sack with chicken blood into her vagina, so that when the marriage is consummated on her wedding night she will bleed.

Infertility, even though it is barely acknowledged or studied, is also an important problem that culturally afflicts primarily women in Egypt. In a society where it is imperative for women of all classes to bear children and, thus, attain social status through motherhood, the inability to bear children leads to serious social consequences. Alternatives to motherhood and domesticity are largely absent, and adoption is not allowed under Islamic law. Thus, for all women, biological parenthood is imperative, especially since under Islamic law a man has the right to replace an infertile wife through divorce or polygynous marriage. While polygyny is not an option that is exercised by upper- and middle-class men, the threat of divorce hovers over childless marriages. Among all classes and educational levels, women are typically blamed for reproductive failings, and they also bear the burden of overcoming this condition through a therapeutic quest that is often traumatic and unfruitful (Inhorn 1994, 5). Further, women face extremes of social judgment, for they are cast as being less than other women, as depriving their husbands and their husband's families of offspring, and as endangering other people's children through their supposedly uncontrollable envy.

10. Sexually Transmitted Diseases and HIV/AIDS

A. Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Information about sexually transmitted diseases in Egypt is scattered and often anecdotal. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that sexually transmitted diseases are widespread in the general population. The only study, which provides some indication of the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases, is research on reproductive morbidities, including reproductive tract infections, conducted among 502 women in two villages in rural Giza, 1989 to 1990. Sixty-four percent of the women sampled had a reproductive tract infection at the time of the survey, which may be in part because condoms are rarely used in Egypt. While solid data are lacking, the 1995 Demographic and Health Survey reported that only 14% of married women used condoms for family planning. It is, therefore, unlikely that condoms are commonly used in Egypt for disease prevention (Lenton 1997, 1005).

As in many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the migration-prostitution-STD triad is operative in Egypt. Studies indicate that, in particular, male labor migration, which is currently over 2 million, brings with it a variety of social ills, including STDs. Given strict cultural norms regarding women's premarital virginity and marital fidelity, Egyptian women find themselves on the receiving end of a variety of sexually transmitted infections. Their husbands, many of whom migrate for extended periods of time, contract gonorrhea, genital chlamydia, and other sterilizing infections, primarily from foreign prostitutes. Emerging studies from both rural and urban Egypt indicate that rates of various STDs are rising in similar proportions to the West. Often men contract STDs from either female or male prostitutes, and, given cultural norms that discourage this form of behavior, avoid seeing doctors. The infection, therefore, becomes chronic in men's prostates and they transmit the diseases directly on the first wedding night to their new brides. Women, thus, may start their marital lives with tubal infections that potentially lead to infertility. This has major societal implications, because infertile women face their greatest threat from their husbands, who have the right under Islamic law to replace an infertile wife through divorce or a polygynous remarriage. Such replacements are often encouraged by the husbands' families, who view an infertile wife as, at best, useless, and, at worst, a threat to the social reproduction of the patrilineage (Inhorn 1996, 4).

Another factor that may influence the spread of STDs is the fact that Egypt remains a popular tourist destination, both for visitors to the pyramids and pharaonic treasures and, more recently, for seekers of sand, sea, and sex who visit Red Sea resorts. Despite the growing conservative fundamentalist movement, Egypt is still more liberal than other Arab states.

B. HIV/AIDS

According to United Nations statistics, North Africa and the Middle East accounted for less than 1% of the total number of people infected worldwide with HIV. In this region, 27,000 people have died from HIV-related illnesses, compared to 170,000 in Europe and 46 million in sub-Saharan Africa (as of 1997). The National AIDS Program in Egypt recently published the number of units of blood that have tested positive for HIV in each of the seven years prior to 1997. The prevalence of infection is low and there is no real evidence of an upward trend. For example, in 1990, 136,422 blood units were tested and only 4 were positive for HIV; in 1996, a quarter of a million units were tested and only 3 were positive (Lenton 1997, 1005). The data from blood donations is par-

ticularly interesting, because all blood collected in Egypt's public-health facilities is voluntarily donated by family members of patients. There is no evidence of either voluntary or non-voluntary donor referral. Egypt's medical surveillance of blood units is, therefore, a good indicator of the prevalence of HIV in the adult population.

Despite worldwide increases in the AIDS epidemic, AIDS is so far not spreading in any perceptible numbers in Egypt. Nonetheless, factors that contribute to the spread of HIV definitely exist, and anecdotal evidence suggests that other sexually transmitted diseases are widespread in the general population. However, while reliable survey data is not available, Egyptian medical experts claim that the negligible spread of HIV infection and AIDS in the general population is possibly the result of the Islamic moral code, which forbids adultery, sex before marriage, and homosexual practices. This indicates that widespread adherence to this code could mean that, while HIV infection occurs in small groups practicing sexual behaviors that increase their chance of infection, only rarely do individuals in the general population come into contact with at-risk individuals. Nonetheless, research into patterns of sexuality is needed in order to explain the low prevalence of AIDS in Egypt. Also, the lack of reliable data makes it difficult to gauge the real situation from the picture presented by official sources.

[Update 2002: UNAIDS Epidemiological Assessment: Egypt appears to be at a low epidemic level. A small number of sex workers, men who have sex with men, and drug users have been tested yearly and the rate of HIV infection remains very low. In 1999, only one HIV-seropositive case was found out of 236 men who have sex with men who were tested. Likewise, there is still no evidence from reported data that HIV prevalence among injecting drug users is high. However, the problem of HIV and drug use in Egypt, as in many countries of the Eastern Mediterranean, should not be underestimated. In a recent study on the prevalence and patterns of drug use in Egypt, the rate of injecting drugs was around 13% of all practices of drug intake. HIV among sex workers is still below 1%. Clearly, with the current level of reported information about HIV in Egypt, and the obvious gaps in the surveillance system of high-risk groups, it is difficult to draw any conclusive remarks about the situation and the trends of HIV in the country.

[The estimated number of adults and children living with HIV/AIDS on January 1, 2002, were:

Adults ages 15-49:	8,000 (rate: < 0.1%)
Women ages 15-49:	780
Children ages 0-15:	NA

[No estimate is available for the number of adults and children who died of AIDS during 2001.

[No estimate is available for the number of Egyptian children who had lost one or both parents to AIDS and were under age 15 at the end of 2001. (End of update by the Editors)]

11. Sexual Dysfunctions, Counseling, and Therapies

While there are no official studies on sexual dysfunction in the Egyptian population, it is widely known that Egyptian men are obsessed with enhancing sexual performance. While the men define enhanced sexual performance as prolonging intercourse, all remedies used suggest underlying occurrences of impotence. In recent years, Viagra has become very well known and popular in Egypt. During Ramadan 1999, better varieties of dates, which are very popular as one of the favorite foods for breaking the fast, were being sold under the names "Viagra" and "Monica" dates. Even melatonin, when it initially became popular on

the world market, was seen by Egyptian men as some kind of aphrodisiac, as a means for bringing one's youth back. Other remedies that are thought to be good for men are hashish, tea (but not mint or *karkadeh* or hibiscus tea), and other things which are "relaxing," for example, pigeon, sheep's feet, and also nutmeg. There are other more medicinal remedies available at the traditional pharmacies. In addition, there is *dahaan*, "ointments" of various kinds, local anesthetics also supposed to prolong erection. Many Egyptian men at the time of their wedding will seek advice on sexual aids in order to ensure that everything will "function properly."

Women's medicinal and folk medicinal remedies tend to center around issues of conception, pregnancy, and nursing. While many people are aware that female circumcision may lead to frigidity, as was mentioned above, it is still extremely common. Also worthy of mention is the cosmetic practice of hymen repair. Because of the fact that female virginity plays an enormous role in terms of the honor of a family and the bride involved, some doctors have developed the practice of sewing up ruptured hymens before an upcoming wedding night. This practice is particularly common among upper-middle-class and upper-class families, where the girls have been permitted more freedom in terms of their interactions with men before marriage, but where female virginity on the wedding night remains just as important as among the lower classes.

12. Sex Research and Advanced Professional Education

Sexological research is only in the initial stages in Egypt. While issues of family planning, mother and infant mortality, and women's reproductive concerns have been at the forefront of the Egyptian research agenda for quite a long period, other topics concerning sexuality are not. The growing fundamentalist movement further impedes any research that deals with issues of sexuality not directly related to reproductive issues.

There are no sexological organizations or publications in Egypt. The Egyptian Family Planning Association has its offices at: 66 Gazirat El Arab Street, Al Mohandissen, El Giza, Cairo, Egypt. Phone: 20-2-360-7329; fax: +20-2-360-7329.

[Update 2003: The Egyptian Society of Andrology (ESA) and the Pan-Arab Society of Impotence Research and Sexual Sciences (PASIR) are well established and popular societies in Egypt and the Middle East, working in the areas of erectile dysfunction and sexology. Egyptian consultants have also initiated several erectile dysfunction centers in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf area. Since 1985, the Andrology, Sexology, and STD Department at the University of Cairo has offered a doctoral degree, possibly one of the few in the world, in Andrology, Sexology, and STDs. The faculty have numerous publications in both national and international journals, including the *International Journal of Impotence and Sexual Research*. Most sexological work and publications from Egypt over the past 20 years have been done by members of ESA and PASIR—many of whom are members of both societies. Both societies maintain good relations and are supportive of each other's activities (www.family-clinics.com).

[Many eminent members of both societies have been active in local media to promote sexuality education and to fend off fundamentalist critics. Many are also working and actively educating against the practice of female genital mutilation (female circumcision), which is sadly still very popular in Egypt and many parts of Africa despite the laws passed against it. Others are working on updating the study

curricula for undergraduate medical students and for postgraduate degrees in Andrology, Sexology, and STDs at Cairo University. ESA and PASIR members provide a variety of educational, scientific, and community services. They are also very popular and respected figures within our scientific community. (End of update by H. Ghanem)]

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