Women's Trauma and Resilience through a Feminist Lens

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The psychological consequences of gendered traumatic events in the context of the Arab uprisings and their aftermath

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Dedication

"To my mother, to whom I owe every single thing I like about myself and every single accomplishment I made. Thank you.

To the ten inspiring women who trusted me enough to share their deepest pain, hope, fear and aspirations. What I learned from your moments of strength and weakness goes well beyond this thesis. As much as I appreciate the academic insights I gained from working with you, I realize how this experience has positively changed me as a researcher, a practitioner and a human being. I will remain forever grateful".

Résumé

Cette thèse est le résultat d'un projet doctoral traitant l'utilisation du genre comme un outil analytique afin d'aider à comprendre les traumas des femmes. En particulier, le projet s'est focalisé sur les traumas résultant des violences sexuelles et politiques et les traumatismes associés aux conflits politiques, guerres et déplacements en Egypte et en Syrie, dans le contexte des soulèvements de 2011 et leur après-coup. Basée sur un cadre théorique ayant comme fondement la psychologie féministe, la thèse postule que les traumatismes interpersonnels des femmes seraient des formes d'abus systématiques ancrées dans les normes de genre patriarcales et formées par les aspects socioculturels et politiques d'un contexte spécifique.

Cette recherche est présentée en cinq chapitres. La première étude a investigué la structure des prototypes féminins et masculins dans les deux contextes concernés/d'intérêt. Dans les deux cultures, nous avons pu identifier deux prototypes de féminité coexistants : *la bonne épouse* et *la femme compétente affirmée*, auxquels s'ajoutent quatre prototypes coexistants de masculinité : l'homme de famille, *l'homme macho*, *l'homme rebelle*, et *l'homme tendre et doux*.

Le second article a examiné comment les deux profils de féminité examinés sont corrélés avec l'exposition des femmes à la violence sexuelle, avec la rumination abstraite, la dépression et le TSPT (trouble de stress post-traumatique). Les résultats indiquent des différences significatives dans les liens entre chaque profil de féminité, d'une part, et la violence sexuelle et ses conséquences psychologiques, d'autre part. Ces patterns d'associations varient aussi selon le contexte (égyptien ou syrien).

La troisième et la quatrième étude consistent en une analyse quantitative des narrations de cinq femmes syriennes et cinq femmes égyptiennes, respectivement, avec l'objectif de comprendre les modes de victimisation et de résistance en réaction à l'exposition au traumatisme, ainsi que l'impact des changements possibles, dans les féminités et masculinités, à la suite des soulèvements arabes. Un point central à travers les deux études est la question de comment le contexte a contribué à la perception des participantes et à leur réaction au traumatisme.

La cinquième et dernière étude avait pour objectif d'évaluer la réception, par des femmes survivantes de traumatismes, d'une version adaptée de la thérapie narrative par exposition. L'intervention a été conduite à la lumière d'une lecture féministe des traumatismes des femmes et des thèmes qui furent identifiés à travers les narrations des participantes. Les résultats ont indiqué que l'intervention proposée avait une valeur potentielle, montrant que l'intégration d'une lecture genrée des contextes sociopolitiques des survivantes à l'intérieur des narrations post-traumatiques, pourrait contribuer à donner un sens et à aider les survivantes à établir une meilleure perception de soi.

La thèse se conclut par une discussion générale des résultats et des réflexions à propos du voyage doctoral/de l'aventure doctorale. Je traite de l'orientation du projet, de mon propre positionnement en tant que chercheure et practicienne, dans le monde du savoir en psychologie, en lien avec un certain nombre de points théoriques, épistémologiques, moraux. Et surtout, j'aborde le rôle potentiel de la psychologie pour favoriser le changement social, afin d'affaiblir les fondements de la violence genrée ainsi que la discrimination.

Abstract

This thesis is the outcome of a doctoral project on using gender as an analytical lens to help understand women's traumas and design context-specific psychological interventions. In particular, the project focused on traumas resulting from sexual and political violence and traumas associated with political conflicts, war and displacement in Egypt and Syria, in the context of the uprisings of 2011 and their aftermath. Based on a theoretical framework grounded in feminist psychology, the dissertation postulates that women's interpersonal traumas are forms of systematic abuse anchored in patriarchal gender norms and shaped by the socio-cultural and political features of a specific context. The research is presented in five papers. The first study investigated the structure of prototypical femininities and masculinities in the two contexts of interest. In both cultures, two co-existing prototypes of femininity were identified: the *Good Wife*, and the *Assertive Competent Woman*, in addition to four co-existing prototypes of masculinity: the *Family Man*, the *Macho Man*, the *Rebellious Man* and the *Soft and Tender Man*. The second paper examined how the two identified femininity profiles relate to women's exposure to sexual violence, abstract rumination, depression, and PTSD. The results point to marked differences in the way in which each femininity profile relates to sexual violence and the psychological consequences thereof, while showing different patterns of association among variables in each context. The third and fourth papers feature a quantitative analysis of the narratives of five Syrian and five Egyptian women, respectively, with a view to understanding modes of victimization and resistance in response to exposure to trauma, as well as the impact of possible changes in femininities and masculinities following the Arab uprisings. One key focus throughout both papers was how the context has contributed to the participants' exposure to, perception of, and response to trauma. The fifth and final paper aimed at evaluating the reception by women's trauma survivors of a tailored version of Narrative Exposure therapy. The intervention was directed in light of a feminist reading of women's trauma and the themes that were identified from participant narratives. The results pointed to the potential value of the proposed intervention, showing that integrating a gendered reading of the survivors' socio-political contexts into their post-trauma narratives may foster meaning-making and help survivors construct more positive self-perceptions. The dissertation concludes with a general discussion of the results and reflections on the overall doctoral journey. Most importantly, I discuss the position of the project, and my own position as a researcher and practitioner, within the psychology scholarship, engaging with some central theoretical, methodological, epistemological, and moral issues, and most notably, the possible role of psychology in pushing for social change to undermine the foundations of gender-based violence and discrimination.

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I embarked on my Ph.D. research project in October 2015. Almost six years after, this long, rough and rich journey is about to end. I have learned a lot and changed a lot. I am thankful for having landed where I am today, and grateful for the many people who made this possible.

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General Introduction

General Introduction

In 2011, massive waves of anti-government protests and uprisings broke out in the Arab region. A phase of regional turmoil ensued, marked by political instability and excessive State and societal violence. In some cases, this culminated in armed conflict and forced displacement. The resulting radical political, economic, and social changes affected Arab women as well as gender politics in general.

In Egypt and Syria, a significant increase in women's engagement in the public sphere was documented during and after the uprisings. This brought about changes in gender roles and gender relations in the two contexts. Challenging the restrictive social and cultural boundaries of conventional gender roles, women engaged extensively in political and social mobilization. Meanwhile, the aftermath of the Arab Spring gave more responsibilities to women. Many women were pushed, especially in the context of the Syrian war, to become the breadwinners of their families, as men were killed, arrested, and forcibly disappeared *en masse.* While women suffered the ramifications of war, displacement, and political violence, a huge rise in gender-based violence, particularly sexual violence, was also noted. This has given rise to several questions about the roots and consequences of violence against women in the context of the ongoing changes in the Arab World.

Being an Egyptian feminist, psychology researcher and practitioner, I had first-hand exposure to the Egyptian context, primarily through my personal engagement in the revolution and then through my involvement with Egyptian feminist initiatives to provide psycho-social support to women sexual violence survivors. In this capacity, I primarily worked with women who were assaulted in the contexts of protests. Later, I also became involved with a number of Syrian Women's rights organizations to develop simple interventions to help women activists manage the psychological consequences of working in the context of war and displacement.

Through my work within the Egyptian and Syrian contexts, I developed an interest to understand similarities and differences between the two contexts concerning women's exposure and responses to the *gendered traumas* that are associated with ongoing political and social changes. This made me occupied with a few initial general questions on how these political and social changes brought about changes in gender roles, and how women's perception of and responses to the traumatic context may vary in relation to their own femininity and their reading of changes in gender roles. These initial general questions have evolved through a process of engaging with the complex previous literature of psychology of gender and primary insights that emerged from first encounters with the empirical data.

In this short introduction, I will give a brief overview of the two contexts of interest, Egypt and Syria. In the chapter that follows, I will present the relevant literature and theoretical frameworks within which the dissertation research questions were formulated, followed by another short chapter that will describe the refined research questions and the methods that were used to answer them.

1. A Contextual Framework

This section sheds light on the two contexts examined in the dissertation, i.e., Egypt and Syria after 2011. Early in that year, both countries witnessed uprisings, followed by major political and social transformations which were reflected in women's situation, creating significant risks on the one hand, and substantial opportunities on the other.

1.1 Egypt

In February 2011, a popular revolution culminated in the ousting of a president who had ruled Egypt for 30 years. After 18 days of massive protests and sit-ins which flooded public places creating iconic "revolutionary squares", most prominently in Cairo's Tahrir Square, the president stepped down, abdicating power to the military (Kirkpatrick, 2011). The unprecedented and spectacular scenes inspired hope, not only in Egypt but throughout the world. However, following the downfall of the regime, Egypt entered a long phase of political instability and extreme polarization, which witnessed several waves of violence by the police and the military.

In July 2012, the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist political group that had been opposing the ruling regime for decades, ascended to power through presidential elections. One year later, a military coup supported by populist demonstrations removed the elected president. Following a bloody crackdown on massive sit-ins by Muslim Brotherhood supporters, during which at least 900 of them were killed, all opposition to the coup was gradually and brutally crushed (Amnesty International, 2019).

Since 2013, the country has been living in an extremely oppressive political and social environment, impacting most fundamental rights and freedoms. Arbitrary arrest, forced disappearance, maltreatment and torture in detention centers and prisons, and unjust trials continue to be extensively used against all opponents of the regime, not only those with an Islamist affiliation but also against civic human rights activists, journalists, academics, and members of the secular opposition (Amnesty International, 2019; Matthies-Boon, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2014; Scholars at Risk, 2019).

During and after the revolution of 2011, a remarkable increase in women's political and social engagement was documented. Younger women from social, economic, and geographical peripheries took to the public space calling for reform. Those women brought to the public discourse several social and political discourses on topics such as women's involvement in public affairs, personal rights, gender-based discrimination and violence, and sexual violence against women. Through their participation, Egyptian women negotiated the boundaries of conventional stereotypical femininity, and introduced new gender politics on both discourse and practice levels, challenging the forces of patriarchy, including the State and social authorities (Hafez, 2014; Hassan, 2015; Zaki & Abd Alhamid, 2014). It has been suggested that these emerging changes were mirrored in the social construction of gender roles, giving visibility to subordinated forms of femininities and possibly producing new ones as well, highlighting militant, agentic, and confrontational women as socially-recognized representations of Egyptian femininity (Amar, 2011b; Al-Ali, 2012; Hafez, 2014).

In parallel, between 2011 and 2013 a significant surge of State and social violence against women became a horrifyingly large-scale phenomenon, including several aggressive waves of gang rape and mob sexual assaults during protests and mass gatherings. A marked rise in other forms of sexual violence, such as street and online sexual harassment and sexual assault, was also noted (Al-Ali, 2012; Al-Ali, 2014; International Federation for Human Rights, Nazra for Feminist Studies, New Women Foundation, & Uprising of Women in the Arab World, 2014 & Zaki & Abd Alhamid, 2014).

In addition to the overall increase in political violence targeting women and men who are members of the opposition, such as arrest, detention, and forced disappearance; women activists were exposed to gendered forms of political violence. Several reports and studies have documented cases of sexual harassment and assault during detention, rape threats, and forced virginity and pregnancy tests, in addition to smearing campaigns against women activists using information or disinformation about their private or sexual lives (Amar, 2011b; Al-Ali, 2014; Hassan, 2015).

Nevertheless, it is important to stress that sexual violence in Egypt was not an exclusively post-2011 phenomenon. Several authors underlined the massive prevalence of sexual violence against women prior to the revolution, in both the private and the public domains (McRobie, 2014). According to the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR), in 2005, 83% of the Egyptian women reported exposure to sexual harassment, and 46.1% reported experiencing sexual harassment on daily basis (Shoukry, Hassan, & Abul Komsan, 2005). In 2007, more than 20,000 rape cases were reported to the security agencies (Aboul Komsan, 2009). A more recent study by UN Women reported that 99.3% of Egyptian women have been subjected to street sexual harassment, and 91.5 % experienced unwanted physical contact in the streets (UN Women, 2013). It has been repeatedly emphasized that sexual violence is an old and persistent epidemic that is deeply rooted in the Egyptian society, affecting almost all women on daily basis with a notable degree of social tolerance. It is supported and justified by cultural attitudes, social norms, and legal practices, mostly blaming women for failing to adhere to proper conduct and appearance (International Federation for Human Rights, Nazra for Feminist Studies, New Women Foundation, & Uprising of Women in the Arab World, 2014; Sadler, 2018).

1.2 Syria

In March 2011, massive protests erupted throughout Syria against the Ba'ath regime that has ruled the country since 1963, demanding political reform and democratization. The police and the military responded to the peaceful protests with excessive violence, including extensive waves of mass arrest, killing, and forced disappearance. As the brutal crackdown shattered the peaceful protest movement, it gradually turned into an armed rebellion, but the exact determination of when and how this happened is extremely difficult and beyond the scope of this thesis. Several reports considered June 2011 to be the point when opposition forces began to form their own militias, the most prominent of which was the Free Syrian Army made up of defectors from the Syrian Regime's army (aljazeera, 2018).

The involvement of armed rebel groups led to escalation of the violence, and by 2012 the battles had expanded to turn the conflict into "a large-scale civil war", according to several international observers including the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (Britannica, 2020). With the involvement of multiple regional and international forces, the armed conflict continues to this day, causing massive waves of forced displacement and enormous numbers of casualties. According to UNHCR, since 2011, more than 6.6 million Syrians were internally displaced, and 5.6 million fled Syria to neighboring countries, i.e., Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, as well as other destinations in Europe and over the globe (UNHCR, 2020).

The onset of the Syrian uprising witnessed significant participation by women in the civic movement, challenging the restrictive mainstream gender norms that had confined many Syrian women to the private sphere (Alsaba & Kapilashrami, 2013). According to Nasser, Mehchy, and Abu Ismail (2013), in 2010, more than 85% of women aged above 15 years were housewives, with very restricted access to the public sphere, leaving women largely dependent on their husbands and family. Further, another report in 2010 noted that among girls aged between 15 and 19 years, 38% were married and 29.8% were pregnant (Euromed Women, 2010).

War and displacement experiences dramatically influenced women's roles in Syrian society, giving many women, especially those from rural areas and from less privileged backgrounds, more spaces and more responsibilities. As men were facing arrest, forced disappearance, and death, a significant number of women, in Syria and among the displaced communities, became the main or sole breadwinners for their families. Many women entered the labor market for the first time, and many started to merge into social and communal activities, learning new skills and practicing new social roles (Alsaba & Kapilashrami, 2013; El-Masri, Harvey, & Garwood, 2013).

Compared to Egypt, sexual violence is an understudied phenomenon in Syria. Despite a slight improvement after 2011, several authors underlined how reporting and speaking-up on sexual violence remains a major taboo in Syria, triggering fear of social stigma and shaming by social authorities (International Federation for Human Rights, 2012; Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights, 2018). The vast majority of reports on sexual violence after 2011 were connected to the conflict, showing how sexual violence was employed as a weapon of war, targeting women in areas under the control of both the ruling regime and the Islamist opposition. Women prisoners and family members of fighters, and generally women in areas exposed to military attacks, were at significant risk of sexual violence in the form of rape, rape threats, sexual assault, sexual slavery, sexual trafficking, and forced marriage (Alsaba & Kapilashrami, 2013; Independent International Commission of Inquiry, 2018; The Lancet, 2013).

Reports also highlighted the social stigma that Syrian women survivors of detention face after their release, with a fear that they could have been exposed to sexual violence, which adds to the gendered social restrictions enforced on them by their families and local communities (Seif & Nassif, 2020). Further, several reports and studies underlined the

emergence of sexual violence against forcedly displaced women, including sexual exploitation during the journey from Syria, and sexual harassment and exploitation among refugee communities in destination countries (Amnesty International, 2019; International Federation for Human Rights, 2012). Hence, it is postulated that sexual violence in Syria remained to a large extent a conflict-related phenomenon, without much social tolerance or normalization, unlike Egypt where sexual violence is deeply rooted in, and culturally tolerated by, society.

In these two complex settings of changing gender norms and gender roles, as well as escalating violence against women, five empirical studies were implemented between 2016 and 2019 in the Egyptian and Syrian contexts. Following the elaboration of the theoretical and empirical frameworks in the next two chapters, each study will be presented in a dedicated chapter.

Chapter 1

A Conceptual Framework

A Conceptual Framework

This chapter aims at positioning this thesis within the diverse and complex literature of gender and women's trauma. The first section (a) presents an overview on how gender and associated terminology were conceptualized within psychology and adjoining disciplines, (b) highlights some of the major controversial conceptual and methodological issues that arise from this literature, and finally (c) establishes the conceptual and methodological standpoints which serve as a framework for the empirical work done. The second section presents feminist literature concerning women's experiences of trauma and adversity, to emphasize the fundamental need to read and treat these experiences through a gendered lens.

1. Conceptual Framework on Gender

Gender is a cross-disciplinary field of research that interests scholars from several domains of social sciences and humanities who seek to understand the "origins and the consequences of being a male of a female" (Wood & Eagly, 2010, p. 629). In psychology, gender encompasses a number of key concepts that dominated several waves of research about women, men and non-homonormative people for several decades now. These include sex, gender, gender roles, gender identity, gender stereotypes, as well as femininity and masculinity, which are core concepts of this research project. During many decades of ongoing research on gender, the conceptualization, epistemological foundations, usefulness, and social and political implications of each concept have been areas of disagreement, and sometimes tension, in the discipline of psychology, among and within its various subfields as well as its different theoretical, epistemological, and ideological approaches. Despite a long history of studying these concepts, no final consensus has been reached in the field of psychology on the exact meaning of each of concepts and their inter-relationships (Egan & Perry, 2001; Spence & Buckner, 1995). Hence, it is essential to start with clearly specifying the meaning of each of them in light of the previous literature, how they are going to be used in this dissertation, and how this usage relates to the ways in which they have been used historically.

Following the long tradition in psychology of starting a scholarly work on gender with discussing the relationship between two main constructs, sex and gender, I highlight a major shift in the conception of this relationship, from a dichotomy of two independent sides to a relationship of two interdependent constructs. Demonstrating an essentialist approach, sex was historically conceptualized within conventional literature as the inherent natural, immutable and fixed biological bases, e.g., reproductive organs and hormones, that distinguish females and males, while gender was used as the other opposite to refer to the psychological, social and cultural aspects of femaleness and maleness (Kessler & Mckenna, 1987).

Several feminist psychology scholars opposed this dichotomy through theoretical contributions and empirical research, as they conceptualized sex and gender as non-dichotomous, intertwined and reciprocal constructs. Further, they highlighted how this traditional conceptualization has reinforced the patriarchal structure of power within the mainstream political and social discourses in Western communities, and within the everyday life realties (Bem, 1993; Biernat & Deaux, 2012; Goldstein, 2001; Unger & Crawford, 1993). Alternatively, they highlighted how nurture/environment has an influence on the biological processes, on both function and structure levels, while these biological processes, in their turn, affect the constructs of gender on both individual and socio-cultural levels (Wood & Eagly, 2010). Along these lines, Fausto-Sterling (2019) stated that "it seems uncontroversial to posit that our desires, behaviors, and choices emanate from our bodies and that our bodies are, of course, expressions of biological processes; but perhaps it is more controversial to insist as well that nurture/culture directs, shapes and limits these processes" (p 4).

Further, other feminist scholars, within psychology and beyond it, emphasized how both sex and gender are socially constructed. In this sense, they accentuated how the biological determinants that are used to judge someone's sex and classify them in an agreed-upon category, such as external genitals, are also imbued with cultural meanings and interpretations (Butler, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987). As biological makeup and processes are not within the direct scope of this thesis, I will be focusing on gender in the sense of "[the] sociocultural systems that include norms and expectations for males and females, which vary as a function of intersections with other factors […] as well as psychological processes such as identity, femininity, masculinity, and gender-conformity and nonconformity" (Hyde, Bigler, Joel, Tate, & van Anders, 2018, p. 2).

Several feminist authors established a link between, on the one hand, the implicit or explicit adoption of a dichotomous view of sex and gender, and on the other, the long-standing and persistent popularity of research seeking to identify descriptive sex/gender differences between women and men in social behaviors, cognitive process, emotional characteristics and personality traits (Biernat & Deaux, 2012; Stewart & McDermott, 2004). This very old question of how women and men differ initiated, and sometimes served as a foundation for, several areas of research, including femininity and masculinity, gender stereotypes, gender roles, and gender identity research (Biernat & Deaux, 2012). Meanwhile, the complementary question of *why* women and men differ, witnessed disparities among scholars concerning the relative weight of varying factors contributing to such differences, creating several parallel research lines. These factors encompass: (a) the innate biological makeup of women and men, (b) personal gendered psychological characteristics (c) social norms and social stereotypes that shape gender roles (d) status and power differences between women and men, which are mirrored in structured privileges and disadvantages (Eagly, 1983; Eagly & Wood, 2011). Each of the ensuing research lines was associated, to some extent, with exaggerating or minimizing sex/gender differences, and represented different theoretical and epistemological positions that were sometimes shaped by ideological differences (Eagly & Riger, 2014).

Along with the adaptation of meta-analysis and effect size techniques in sex differences research, several scholars demonstrated smaller magnitudes of differences between women and men than what was traditionally identified (Wood & Eagly, 2010), leading to the emergence of the gender similarities hypothesis (Hyde, 2005). The gender similarities hypothesis, on the one hand, "holds that males and females are similar on most, but not all, psychological variables" (Hyde, 2005, p. 581), and on the other, postulates that gender differences are context-dependent, as summarized by Hyde, "the magnitude and even the direction of gender differences depends on the context" (p.589). Further, advocating for research that is context-oriented, Hyde and her colleagues discussed the high political, social and cultural costs associated with the focus on sex/gender differences in psychological research, which supports and substantiates the gender binary vision (Hyde, Bigler, Joel, Tate, & van Anders, 2018).

The central role of the context in which women and men exist was not highlighted only by Hyde, but by several other feminist psychology scholars, including Eagly and Wood (2011) in their prominent Social Roles theory. Eagly and Wood put together several core constructs of gender phenomena, including cultural stereotypes and personal gender identity, while integrating biological, psychological, sociocultural and contextual factors in explaining role acquisition and performance. They indicated how these factors shape the gender-role expectations of others and the self-internalized gendered standards which, together with biological factors, act as social- and self-regulatory mechanisms for gender role performance.

Further, the Social Role theory emphasized how women and men's positions in the social structure, i.e., the division of labor with women as homemakers and men as providers, shape gender role beliefs and stereotypes, e.g., holding that women are expressive/communal, and men are instrumental/agentic. In their turn, these beliefs and stereotypes influence gender identities when internalized by individuals, to various extents, in the form of gendered attributes through processes of socialization. Hence, such socialization processes, along with other social regulation mechanisms, work to facilitate the internalization of gender roles, "enabling men and women to develop appropriate personality traits and skills" (Eagly & Wood, 2011, p. 458). Accentuating the relative malleability of gender roles, Eagly and Wood stressed that as the division of labor and the associated stereotypes may differ overtime and across contexts, social role theory can serve as a useful model "to understand both stability and change in gender roles and associated behavioral sex differences" (Eagly & Wood, 2011, p. 471).

The concept of *Gender Stereotypes* plays a central part in Social Role theory, as well as in the scholarship of social psychology of gender in general. Ashmore and Del Boca (1979) defined *sex stereotypes* as "structured sets of beliefs about the personal attributes of women and men" (p. 222). The emergence of this line of research in the early 1970s marked a major shift from the question of how women and men differ to how people think they differ (Biernat & Deaux, 2012). In response to this latter question, several key themes emerged to describe stereotypes concerning women and men, which encompassed: communion and agency (Bakan, 1966), expressiveness and instrumentality (Parsons & Bales, 1955), and most

recently warmth (e.g., being trustworthy, warm, good-natured, sincere) and competence (e.g., being agentic, competent, confident, intelligent) (Fiske & Stevens, 1993).

Meanwhile, stereotypes do not just *describe* how women and men typically differ, but as norms of gendered behavior, they also *prescribe* how women and men should/should not behave (Burgress & Borgida, 1999). In this sense, women are educated to display typically feminine characteristics, such as warmth, and not to show what is stereotypically masculine, while men are educated to show typically masculine characteristics like dominance and control (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Accordingly, through socialization processes that teach women and men how to act in a feminine/masculine-typed manner, individuals internalize stereotypes as part of their self-construal. Moreover, through social regulation processes, individuals would receive social rewards or penalties according to the extent to which they adhere to respective stereotypes (Eagly & Wood, 2011).

The identified stereotypes for women and men resemble the personal attributes that were characterized in the femininity/masculinity line of research. Femininity and masculinity were among the early constructs that were examined by several psychology scholars, initially with the purpose of finding the "essence" of maleness and femaleness that differentiates women and men (Terman & Miles, 1936), and later as sets of characteristics that are typically associated with women and men (Bem, 1974, Spence and Helmreich, 1978). Throughout their history, femininity and masculinity witnessed radical transformations on both conceptual and methodological levels. Moreover, they faced harsh criticism concerning how they were historically theorized and measured, on the one hand, and the political representation and consequences of relying on them as central themes of research, on the other. Consequently, in recent years, they retreated from the center of research interest, while other gender-related sociocultural constructs and mechanisms gained more prominence.

1.1 Femininity and Masculinity: Conceptualization and Critique

Since femininity and masculinity are core concepts in the current thesis, it is important to go through the most significant milestones that shaped the currently most common conceptualization, while highlighting the main points of criticism, and the potential value of reclaiming the two concepts in the context of the current project.

Following the essentialist conceptualization of Terman and Miles (1936), presented in their first measure of femininity and masculinity, the two constructs were established as opposite ends on a single dimension. This remained the case until Constantinople challenged this conceptualization, questioning the validity of the theoretical and empirical foundations of this established dichotomy (Constantinople, 1973).

In 1974, Bem introduced the Sex-role Inventory (BSRI) in which she proposed femininity and masculinity as two independent dimensions, mostly representing agentic and communal traits as internalized sex-role standards. Bem further proposed the concept of *androgyny*, i.e., being "non-sex-typed" by adopting both feminine and masculine characteristics. Moreover, she suggested, with supporting empirical data, that androgyny is associated with better

mental health (Bem, 1974; 1975). Bem's theorization of androgyny received great attention for more than a decade, within both the academic scholarship and feminist political mobilization against sexism (Biernat & Deaux, 2012; Morawski, 1985). According to Bem (1993), androgyny offered a foundation for radically challenging the previously assumed polarization and essentialism of femininity/masculinity, while promoting mental health standards that are "genderless" (Bem, 1993, p. 121).

Later, Bem shifted her interest from *intrapersonal* experiences of gender, i.e., the individually internalized gender norms in the form of adopted gendered traits, to the *interpersonal* experiences of gender, focusing on socio-cultural *gender schema*, which resemble gender stereotypes. Through gender schema theory, Bem proposed a conceptualization of the process of sex-typing, based on a cognitive schematic model. She emphasized how social consensus concerning gender norms is assimilated through socialization processes, which mostly support the gender dichotomy, to blend into the self-concept of individual women and men (Bem, 1981). In this context, Bem not only argued that it is important for individuals to adopt flexible gender roles, but she also called for a more malleable socio-cultural gender system, or in her own words: "not that the individual be androgynous, but that the society be aschematic" (Bem, 1981, p. 363).

In the same decade, Spence and Helmreich (1978) presented a similar notion refusing the established dichotomy of femininity and masculinity as well as biological essentialism. They defined femininity and masculinity as "clusters of socially desirable attributes stereotypically considered to differentiate males and females and thus to define the psychological core of masculine and feminine personalities" (Spence & Helmreich, 1978, p. 3). Their well-recognized Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ) scale measured femininity with attributes representing expressivity and masculinity through attributes linked to instrumentality. Spence herself argued later against using PAQ as a measure for femininity/masculinity, arguing that femininity and masculinity are multidimensional constructs, and expressiveness and instrumentality factors are an underrepresentation of their more complex nature (Spence, 1993). Nevertheless, the scale continued to be widely used for years after, along with BSRI, to assess gender role, and expressivity and instrumentality remained the two most represented dimensions of trait-based femininity and masculinity, respectively, in subsequent psychological research (Smiler, 2004).

The line of research presenting femininity and masculinity as intrapersonal/adopted traits, including Bem's concept of androgyny, was harshly criticized by several feminist scholars. There are several tangled arguments that framed this criticism, which together contributed to a relative retreat of the two concepts from the modern scholarship of the psychology of gender. First, there is the main traditional criticism that femininity and masculinity concepts as personal attributes ignore the cultural and historical context that may mediate or transform such attributes. This is particularly salient when considering how femininity and masculinity were initially conceptualized as ahistorical universal constructs, that act independently from the context as well as other interrelated social categories like class, ethnicity and nationality (Morawski, 1985; Sherif, 1982).

Second, it was argued that femininity and masculinity research merely focuses on the personal level, thereby diverting attention away from the socio-cultural context. This renders such research devoid of any value on the social and political levels, especially when not providing an analysis of patriarchal structures and associated gender norms (Bem, 1993; Morawski, 1985).

Third, feminist psychologists argued that research focusing on *intrapersonal* gender constructs in general emphasized elements which blame women for their disadvantages, by explicitly or implicitly assuming that women inherently have certain qualities, i.e., biological makeup or personality attributes, that put them in a subordinate status or a lower position of power (Eagly, 2018; Sherif, 1998).

Fourth, several scholars argued that femininity/masculinity in their modern conceptualization along with the androgyny concept have simply reproduced the gender polarization (e.g., instrumental masculine personality versus expressive feminine personality) (Morawski, 1985). Bem herself highlighted this critique by other feminist scholars, writing that:

> [T]he concept of androgyny reproduces - and thereby reifies - the very gender polarization that it seeks to undercut. It does this by assuming masculinity and femininity to be conceptual givens, if not set personality structures, by emphasizing the complementarity of masculinity and femininity, which in turn, implies the naturalness of heterosexuality, and by focusing attention on the male-female distinction itself rather than on, say, the class or power distinction. (Bem, 1993, pp. 124-125).

These critiques explain the relative shift of interest within social psychology from *intrapersonal* gender concepts to *interpersonal/socio-cultural* concepts. With the rise of second wave of the feminist movement in the US in the 1970s, more and more psychology scholars rightfully rejected the reductionist emphases of conventional literature in psychology concerning sex and gender, e.g., research on sex/gender differences and on the biological causes of gendered behavior, which contributed to a gender-binary and essentialist rationalization of the behavior of women and men (Eagly, 2018). Hence, prominent feminist voices encouraged psychology scholars to shift their focus to the contextual factors and the social conditions that produce women and men's differences in behavior and status (Weisstein, 1968). Echoing this idea, Yoder and Kahn (2003) contended that "a social contextual approach, more so than biology- or socialization-based approaches, opens up promising possibilities for social interventions that may work to promote understandings of and equity for women and men" (p. 287).

Positioning myself within the feminist psychology scholarship, as an academic and political discourse, and believing in the social responsibility of feminist research to mobilize for material changes in the socio-cultural and political conditions that contribute to women's disadvantages, I agree with the main accounts that emerged from the above-described critiques, especially in relation to the fundamental importance of integrating the contextual and socio-political factors when explaining any gender-related phenomenon. The feminist emphasis on gender offered an understanding of the structured gender inequalities in the

environment, the consequences of these inequalities on women's status and mental health, and the possible interventions that may change these realities. Nevertheless, I do not support abandoning the investigation of the intrapersonal process that actively interacts with, and possibly changes, the social context in which women and men live, conceivably opening doors for changing the foundations of inequalities.

Concerning femininity and masculinity specifically, I align myself with Bem's response (1993) to the critique that argues against using these two constructs because they reproduce gender polarization and essentialism. Bem stressed that "modern" usage of these constructs conceptualizes them as "stereotyped definitions embedded with the cultural discourse rather than as personality structures embedded with the individual" (p.125), which reflects a dynamic relationship between the person and socio-cultural context. As mentioned earlier, theoretical models such as Social Role theory (Eagly & Wood, 2011), and Gender Schema theory (Bem, 1981) offer frameworks to understand how and why individuals may internalize, to varying extents, stereotyped cultural definitions, in the form of gendered attributes, and consequently how adopted feminine/masculine attributes may serve as personal standards that individuals use to regulate their gendered behavior in an interaction with the contextual factors (Eagly & Wood, 2011).

I argue that a merely context-oriented investigation of gendered behavior will dismiss fundamental aspects of the complex and multifaceted phenomenon of gender. In this regard, Eagly (2018) turns to Lewin's (1936) classic model of behavior as a product of interactions of the person and environment, arguing that focusing on only one aspect of the two will remain insufficient to understand human behavior (Eagly, 2018). The restricted focus of conventional psychology research on the person failed to offer a useful framework to understand and counterbalance women's disadvantages and men's dominance. Similarly, consideration of contextual factors alone will overlook the everyday practices and struggles individuals undertake to negotiate with gender patriarchal roles and norms, and to change the unfair social reality of gender relationships. In that sense, the context itself, which produces a binary gender system, patriarchal gender policies, and restrictive gender roles, is changeable. This is not the case only because of changes in contextual conditions and conscious efforts of feminist scholars and activists, but also because of the way in which individuals of subordinate gender groups, whether self-identified as feminists or not, embrace, practice, negotiate, resist and reproduce gender norms.

In this vein, femininity and masculinity, as personal attributes, are not static inherent traits, but rather dynamic constructs that interact with the context via a *gendered performance* by individuals. By adhering, fully or partially, or not adhering to the expectations of the context, as embedded in gender stereotypes, the person may influence, reinforce or modulate these expectations, consequently impacting the gender social structure underlying them. Meanwhile, through the complex system of social rewards and penalties, individuals may adjust their performance of gender, which might leave an impact on the intrapersonal constructs of gender, i.e., adopted femininity/masculinity. Bem demonstrated a similar approach in her more recent work (1993) defending constructs of femininity and masculinity by arguing that "[the] assumption here may seem to be that a gendered personality is a static

collection of masculine or feminine traits that has already been shaped by enculturation – that is a finished product, so to speak, rather than a psychological process. But gender personality is both a product and a process. It is both a particular collection of masculine and feminine traits and a way of constructing a reality that itself construct those traits" (P152). This viewpoint of gender as a process resembles to some extent West & Zimmerman's (1987) *Doing Gender*, which is a well-recognized theory within the sociology of gender.

West and Zimmerman (1987) posited gender as a "routine accomplishment embedded in every interaction" (p. 125). They emphasized that doing gender comprises sets of interactions and activities that are socially agreed-upon as expressions of what is feminine and masculine. These interactions and activities have social consequences, and they are always under an ongoing process of accountability by various individual, social and political actors and institutions, including the patriarchal system, concerning the degree to which they are gender appropriate. They stressed that this view of gender as "doing" moves it away from perceiving it as an accomplishment or achieved property of an active interactional process between individuals and social contexts. Most important, and most relevant to this thesis, unlike gender role theories which links gender performance mostly to role demands, West & Zimmerman underlined the importance of integrating a wider vision of gender expression, to include the expression of gender in everyday activities, along with the major activities associated with the normative division of labor. In this sense, a measurement of feminine/masculine characteristics should reflect a wider range of aspects such as physical appearance, interests, and modes of interaction and communication with others. Although West and Zimmerman clearly contested the gender conceptualization within traditional psychological research, their theory did not contradict how femininity and masculinity were later conceptualized in feminist psychology as social constructs that rely on cultural meanings and produce interpersonal interactions (Bem, 1993).

The importance of embracing a viewpoint that looks into gender both as a process and an intrapersonal construct is highlighted by Hyde et al. (2018), who argued that "being [referreing to gender as self-construal] and doing gender should be considered in an integrated way for all individuals, whether cisgender, transgender or nonbinary" (p. 10). I believe that such integrative perspective might enrich and improve the way in which gender is conceptualized and operationalized in terms of sets of in-person characteristics, which is one of the main goals of this thesis.

Moreover, West and Zimmerman underlined the important role other social categories, such as race and social class, play in interaction with gender to regulate the individual's processes of doing gender and their social consequences through the gender accountability process (West & Zimmerman, 2009). Intersectionality, i.e., the way in which people's experiences and behavior are shaped by the intersection of gender and various other social categories such as race, social class, and sexual orientation, is considered by several scholars as one of the most important contributions of feminist scholarships (Rutherford, 2018; McCall, 2005). The concept of intersectionality emerged in the realm of critical race theory (Crenshaw, 1989), in the context of investigating how the living experiences of women of color are significantly different from white women's experiences. E. Cole (2009) articulated

intersectionality as pursuing *"*analytic approaches that simultaneously consider the meaning and consequences of multiple categories of identity, difference and disadvantage" (p. 170). In this sense, intersectionality reveals how different relationships to power act together to determine the level of privilege of the dominant groups (e.g., man, white, heterosexual, upper/middle class), and the degree of disadvantage of and discrimination against the subordinate group (e.g., woman, black/people of color, sexual minorities, working class). Along this line, people's experiences should be understood in relation to their location within the social structure of power. This understanding meets the need for consideration of individuals' material reality, their access to power, and the impacts of the power dynamics on them (Stewart & McDermott, 2004).

1.2 Femininities and Masculinities: Intersectionality, Multiplicity and Contextualization

Several studies have examined from an intersectional perspective, how individuals' perception of, identification with, and expression of femininity/masculinity may vary in relation to their other identities, especially race. For example, studies articulated that, black and white women may have dissimilar notions concerning femininity and may identify differently with some aspects of "normative femininity" including beauty standards, physical appearance, feminine traits, and gender beliefs. These differences were attributed to the different social locations each group of women occupy, which are connected to structural privileges or disadvantages that shape their gendered ideologies and experiences in diverse ways (E. Cole & Zucker, 2007; Settles, 2006). Other studies focused in particular on immigrant women in the United States, and how immigration experiences are linked to the level of identification with traditional gender roles, or the gender roles of one's origin (Mahalingam & Leu, 2005; Pessar, 1999).

This notion that femininity and masculinity constructs may differ in interaction with other social categories corresponds to the idea of the possible co-existence of multiple femininities/masculinities, which was proposed in various forms within psychology and in other neighboring disciplines such as sociology.

Within psychology, there were several explicit and implicit representations of the multiplicity of femininity and masculinity constructs. Gender Roles theory for instance discussed the way in which individuals may differ in the specific aspects of gender roles they adopt. Wood and Eagly (2011) gave examples of women who self-identify as being feminine will invest more in the typical feminine traits and interests, while those who had been raised in an atypical environment were expected to internalize less of the conventional gender norms.

Moreover, Wade's Male Reference Group Identity Dependence theory (Wade, 1998) suggested that men's masculine identity can differ in relation to demographic factors such as race. He emphasized that men from a specific cultural/ethnic group can adopt distinctive masculine norms that represent the specific masculine ideology of their group. Male Reference Group Identity theory was supported empirically through research comparing the

masculine ideology of different racially-based sub-cultures in the United States as represented in adopted masculinity (Saez, Casado, & Wade, 2010; Smiler, 2004; Wade & Gelso, 1998).

The multiplicity of gender profiles was also present in the context of research on stereotypes. Several studies investigated the idea of "subtypes of women and men", i.e., the categorization of stereotypes under subtypes, in relation to the level of conformity to dominant stereotypes, or in interaction with age, race and different roles or identities (Carpenter & Trentham, 2001; Devine & Baker, 1991; Rudman & Glick, 2008; Vonk & Ashomore, 2003). Within this line of research, the most represented profiles for women were the *Career Woman*, with typical masculinity characteristics, the *Housewife*, with typical femininity characteristics, in addition to the *woman Athlete* and the *Sex Object*. The most identified types of men were: the *Macho Man* and the *Businessman* representing what is typically masculine, and the *Homosexual*, the *Wimp* and the *family man* representing what is typically feminine (see. Deaux, Winton, Crowley, & Lewis, 1985; Eckes, 1994). In Vonk & Ashomore's (2003) study which examined the content and dimensional structure of 229 women and men subtypes, three main dimensions explained the structure of these types: young-old, masculine-feminine, and traditional-modern. The authors concluded that through the visibility of these subtypes, gender role expectations are being violated, which raises several questions concerning the consequences of this violation, including the possible impact on the future formation of these expectations.

Within sociology, the main point of interest is to understand the way in which social structures produce several patterns of masculinities/femininities in interaction with a nexus of factors such as race, class and sexual identity. Most importantly, researchers aim to understand how these different patterns interact together creating a more complex gender hierarchy of power that functions within, and is supported by, the patriarchal structure. An example of this line is the well-recognized work of Connell on masculinities and the *hegemonic masculinity* (Connell, 1987 & 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Connell presented her masculinities theory as a framework to understand the complexity of the hierarchy of power that regulates gender relationships and produces gender inequalities. She criticized male-role theories and the trait-based approach as offered by traditional psychology scholarship and argued for the coexistence of multiple masculinities, among which there is a hegemonic form, i.e., the form supported by dominant gender norms and underlying political and economic forces, as well as other subordinate forms. In her viewpoint, these forms of masculinities are produced and organized in a hierarchy of power, while actively affecting each other through the gendered performance of individuals and groups of women and men. Notably, she stressed the mutability of gender politics, not only in response to changes in contextual conditions but also as a result of continued resistance and struggle of women and men against the dominant gender norms (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Carrigan, Connell, and Lee explained the way in which subordinated forms of masculinities can be produced and practiced, writing that "[in] some historical circumstances, a subordinated masculinity can be produced collectively as a well-defined

social group and a stable social identity, with some well-recognized traits at the personal level" (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985, p. 591).

Nevertheless, notions of multiple femininities and hegemonic femininity have received less attention in sociology. Moreover, Paechter (2018) criticized the fact that the conceptualization of femininity was restricted to the complementary, the opposite, and the subordinate to hegemonic masculinity, always positioned as "the Other" of masculinity. Paechter's criticism highlighted an *androcentric bias* which was identified, criticized and contested by several feminist psychology scholars. Through the androcentric approach which dominated psychology research for long, men's experiences have been established as the standard by which women's experiences are perceived, judged or explained (Bem, 1993; Hegarty & Buechel, 2006).

Paechter also disputed the argument advanced by Connell (1995) that there was no specific form of hegemonic femininity, contending that hegemonic femininity is locally produced in each cultural context and reflects the dominant feminine norms of this specific context with its own hierarchical position in relation to other forms of femininity, possibly independently from hegemonic masculinity. In her study on primary school girls in the United Kingdom, she identified the profile of the *Cool Girl*, with assertiveness and ambition as central features. Paechter's results indicated that the *Cool Girl* shared several common characteristics with the hegemonic masculinity profile '*the Cool Boy'*, therefore contesting the established binary between femininity and masculinity (Paechter, 2018).

Similarly, in sociological research as well, Budgeon (2013) highlighted how, in Western communities, social changes and associated gender politics, especially the transformation from a private to a public gender regime as a result of women's increased involvement in the public sphere, produced a new ideal feminine profile represented by an "empowered and autonomous yet reassuringly feminine woman" (p. 317), which can be seen as the "modern" hegemonic femininity in western countries corresponding to the profile of the *Career Woman* identified in the gender stereotypes line of research (van Anders & Dunn, 2009). In addition to women's negotiation with the patriarchy, Budgeon (2013) argued, women's socio-economic progress, as in being more financially independent, changed the features of traditional femininity and consequently changed its position in the hierarchy of gender.

Several psychology scholars criticized the normalization and universalization of "western" experiences of gender and identified this as yet another bias in mainstream research, establishing the experiences of white individuals as the norm, similar to how the androcentric bias established men's experiences as the norm (Brannon, 2005). Through this feminist critique, cultural and cross-cultural psychology scholars have highlighted how the privileges of white and western cultures, along with male, heterosexual, middle/upper-class privileges have dominated the production of knowledge in psychology while silencing or distorting the experiences of other groups (Hegarty & Buechel, 2006; Fine, Weis, Powell, & Wong, 1997). Moreover, Rutherford (2018) voicing a decolonial approach to intersectionality, has criticized how intersectionality research itself within American and European academia contributed to the misreading of "other" women's experiences. She

argued that such research "has tended, because of its own positioning and intellectual origins, to reproduce rather than challenge Euro-American domination, and contribute to the othering of majority-world women, portraying them as helpless, uninformed, passive victims of their oppressive cultural traditions" (Rutherford, 2018, p. 633).

Yet in more recent years, significant efforts were invested in identifying not only the differences and similiters in gender experiences cross-culturally (Kashima, et al., 1995; Valved, Kosakowska-Berezecka, Besta, & Martiny, 2021), but also unpacking the frameworks, concepts and tools that are used to judge these differences and similiters, and questioning the potential biases and ideologies underlying them (Adams, Kurtis, Salter, & Anderson, 2012; Morawski, 2005; Rutherford, 2018).

Upon reviewing the various lines of research that investigated the different possible ways femininity and masculinity constructs can be produced locally in relation to other identities, and possibly in diverse coexisting formations, several important insights can be drawn, as summarized in the following points:

- Femininity and masculinity cannot be conceptualized as fixed, deep-seated, enduring constructs. Instead, gender constructs should be viewed as they are under an ongoing process of making, which takes place as a function of, and in interaction with, various factors including changes in generational experiences, socio-economic conditions, power relationships, political discourses, etc.
- The conventional binary opposition of femininity/masculinity constructs is inadequate. As there are several coexisting possibilities for an individual to be feminine or masculine, two polar representations of gender profiles will fail to describe the complexity of the existing multiple options. Alternatively, a lens that investigates the modes of interaction and hierarchical relationships among these profiles, especially those which are hegemonic versus subordinate, will be useful to understand the reciprocal relationships between individuals who adopt these profiles and their local contexts.
- An intersectional perspective on experiences of gender can be informed by examining the factors that produce multiple femininities and masculinities in the same geographical/cultural context, as well as the possible reasons that make individuals internalize or adopt a specific gender profile rather than another.
- Gender constructs need to be contextualized and situated within their shaping environment. Having demonstrated the shortcomings of universal ahistorical concepts of gender, and the role of contextual factors in shaping gender constructs, a context-based approach that integrates the cultural and social representations of gender will serve as a useful framework to understand the complexity of gender.
- Due consideration should be given to the ability of individuals and groups to challenge and possibly change conventional gender norms and politics. Individuals are able to produce new forms of femininity and masculinity through their gender performance, everyday practices, interpersonal interactions, and the degree to which they adhere to or resist the hegemonic forms of femininity/masculinity. Consequently, it may be argued that they are possibly contributing to dismantling a main foundations of gender patriarchal norms, represented in the gender binary.

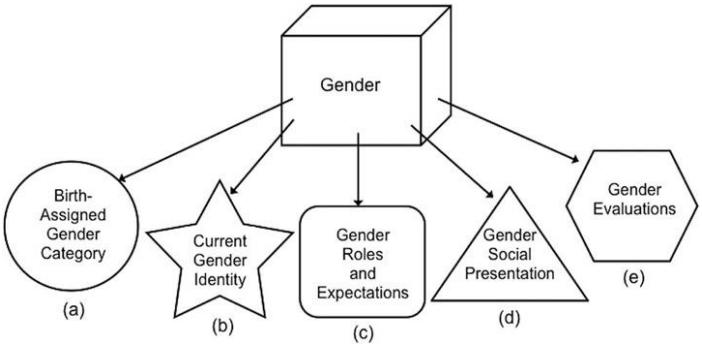
- An additional area of interest is the contextual reactions to and interactions with varying levels of conformity with, or rebellion against, hegemonic gender constructs and norms. How might social and cultural forces react to the production and adoption of atypical/non-conventional femininities and masculinities? What are the tools that such forces might be using in order to maintain or restore the dominance of the patriarchy? How might this impact individuals of atypical femininities and masculinities? The answers to these questions may enrich and deepen the understanding of gender phenomena within both person-oriented and context-oriented research.

These insights will inform the way in which femininity and masculinity will be conceptualized and treated in this thesis, which is articulated in the next section.

1.3 Thesis Perspective on Gender

In the literature of psychology of gender, two distinct but intertwined approaches can be identified: (a) a person-oriented approach which focuses on the intrapersonal/internal experiences of gender, i.e., the internalization of gender norms, gender ideology, gender identity, and adopted femininity/masculinity; and (b) a context-oriented approach which focuses on interpersonal/external experience of gender such as gender stereotypes and femininity and masculinity as socio-cultural structures of gender (Eagly, 2018; Smiler, 2004).

On the level of person-oriented research, Tate, Youssef & Bettergarica (2014) presented a *Bundle of constructs* with five major facets, each referring to one dimension of a complex construct of gender (see Figure 1). The bundle comprised: (a) the birth-assigned gender/sex category (e.g., female, male, intersex); (b) one's self-categorization into a gender group (e.g., women, man, trans, queer, nonbinary, etc.); (c) one's recognition of and level of adherence to gender stereotypes and expectations (e.g., gender roles, femininity, masculinity); (d) one's embodiment and expression of gender (e.g., gender performativity); (e) one's evaluation of her/his gender group, and other gender groups as well (e.g., gender bias). Tate, Youssef & Bettergarica (2014) emphasized that the first facet is usually the focus of medical sciences and anthropology, while the other four are studied in several other domains including psychology, sociology and gender studies. The focus of this thesis will be facets (c), (d), and, to a lesser extent, (e), investigating the participants' perception and evaluation of changes in gender roles.



Note. Each facet represents a construct that has been studied in psychology of gender scholarship. All facets together fit into the larger category of gender. Adapted from "Integrating the Study of Transgender Spectrum and Cisgender Experiences of Self-Categorization from a Personality Perspective", by. Tate, Youssef & Bettergarcia, 2014, *Review of General Psychology, 18,* p. 304. Copyrights 2014 by the American Psychological Association.

Figure 1. The Gender Bundle of Constructs according to Tate, Youssef, & Bettergarcia

Further, Tate, Youssef & Bettergarcia (2014) mentioned that the concept of gender identity is used by the majority of scholars to refer to facet (b), while some scholars used it to refer to facet (c) (see Eagly & Wood, 2011; Unger, 1979). To avoid this confusion, instead of *gender identity*, the term *adopted femininity/masculinity* will be used to refer to one's level of adherence to gender stereotypes and normative gender expectations or one's identification with other less dominant profiles, whereas the term *gender* will be used to refer simply to a participant's self-assigned gender category, as a woman or man, based on responses to the self-report measures used in this thesis.

In investigating gender, typically dominant gender identities, i.e., heteronormative identities, are the main interest of this thesis. Yet, it is my understanding that gender is a broad spectrum with multiple existing categories beyond the women/men binary. Further, it is understood that using only the two dominating categories may serve to assert the binary vision of gender. Nevertheless, the decision was made to restrict the scope of the self-report measures to these two categories for several reasons: (a) the use of non-heteronormative gender categories, such as nonbinary and queer identities, is still highly stigmatized within the mainstream population of the two contexts of the study; (b) due to this stigma, including other gender categories in the self-report measures would have negatively affected the research dynamics with the majority of study participants, who were expected to embrace heteronormative identities; and (c) finally and most importantly, within the two contexts of the research, including non-gender binary options would have involved major security risks to the researcher and possibly to the participants themselves.

Moreover, I am aware of the harsh criticism for using femininity and masculinity as units of analysis, as presented above. However, also as presented above, I argue that reclaiming femininity and masculinity in a manner that unloads the binary and essentialist meanings ascribed thereto in their initial conceptualization is possible and highly valuable. In the

coming few lines, I will articulate how femininity/masculinity will be used in this dissertation and how this corresponds to criticism of their earlier use.

- Conventional/dominant femininity and masculinity are socio-cultural constructs defined by sets of characteristics which are stereotypically expected or required from individuals according to their socially assigned or presumed gender as women or men. The extent to which these social expectations or requirements are rigid, flexible or negotiable varies across different times, cultures, social classes and sociopolitical and economic settings. This viewpoint, supported by several theoretical contributions and empirical studies, contests the traditional conceptualization of femininity/masculinity as inherent, enduring and immutable. In this thesis, *prototypical femininity/masculinity* refers to the socio-cultural constructs of gender stereotypes, as opposed to *adopted femininity/masculinity*, that is the internalized femininity/masculinity as a self-construal concept, i.e., the degree to which an individual adheres to gender stereotypes as represented in prototypical femininity/masculinity.
- Femininity and masculinity are context-dependent constructs, meaning that they are shaped, and can be reshaped in different formations, by a multitude of cultural, political, social and economic factors. Thus, they should always be considered in relation to a specific environment. This perspective is in line with how femininity and masculinity were conceptualized within feminist scholarship, addressing a major criticism of traditional femininity/masculinity as ahistorical universalized concepts. The extent to which femininity/masculinity may involve cross-cultural commonalities has for years been a subject of ongoing research within cross-cultural psychology, identifying several patterns of similarities and differences. In this research project, a cross-cultural comparison will be carried out between the Egyptian and Syrian settings.
- Due to the contextual nature of femininity and masculinity, pre-determined sets of characteristics formulated in a different context would fail to account for the socio-cultural relativity of gender norms. Alternatively, culture-specific scales need to be developed, using the main features of locally produced femininities and masculinities as perceived by members of the respective culture themselves. It is key to integrate a broad representation of feminine/masculine features so as to cover stereotypical gendered everyday practices, interests, and modes of interpersonal interactions.
- Femininity and masculinity are best understood as multidimensional constructs. It is therefore postulated that they are socially constructed in each socio-cultural context in multiple coexisting profiles/prototypes. Each profile contains sets of characteristics that are expected to distinguish a woman/man who adopts this profile from others who adopt other profiles. The relationship between these profiles and their degrees of desirability in the mainstream culture differ according to contextual factors. As this perspective is in conjunction with the viewpoint of the multiplicity of gender role constructs within the intersectional approach, recent literature of gender stereotypes, and Connell's sociological masculinities theory, it problematizes and challenges the traditional binary associated with femininity/masculinity heritage.
- Understanding the patterns of normative and stereotypical socio-cultural gender expectations, i.e., prototypical femininities/masculinities, while highlighting their complexity, relativity and possible multiplicity is a first step towards understanding how individuals selectively internalize, bargain and reshape gender norms, and further investigating the contextual reception of individual variations of gender conformity.

While this perspective highlights and acknowledges individual resistance and struggle against the patriarchal structure, it may serve as a bridge between the intra- and interpersonal experiences of gender, offering a foundation for further untangling their complex and dynamic relationship.

To summarize, this thesis argues that prototypical femininities/masculinities are socio-cultural constructs that are formed by different stereotypes that vary in their degrees of desirability for women and men in a specific context. Among these prototypes, there is a hegemonic/dominant form that acts as a socio-cultural reference to which people are expected and pressured to adhere. In turn, individuals differ in the degree to which they adhere to the dominant femininity/masculinity prototype, and may adopt another non-dominant form. As the dominant profile is supported by the social and political forces of patriarchy, there might be social consequences, in the form of social sanctions, for those who do not adhere, or who adopt undesirable profiles. Finally, as prototypical femininities and masculinities are products of the contexts and the gender preference of the individuals who adopt them, they are relatively malleable and changeable in response to contextual changes or due to the behaviors of nonconformist individuals who challenge them. This account will be the main theoretical framework for approaching gender in this dissertation.

2. Applying a Gendered Lens to Women's Traumas and their Consequences

Upon investigating the fundamental role of the environment in gender phenomena, i.e., the creation of gender expectations and regulation of behavior to ensure adherence thereto, two main questions emerge with regard to women's traumas: (a) how does the environment produce distinctive *gendered* forms of adversity, and possibly traumatic events, that are colored by patriarchal gender norms and politics? (b) how is women's exposure and responses to such forms of adversity and traumas colored by the gender norms they adopt? To establish a theoretical foundation for investigating women's traumas through a gendered lens, this section sheds light on these two questions by engaging with how they were tackled in the previous psychology literature.

In dealing with these two questions, feminist psychology scholarship criticized mainstream psychology literature for treating women's traumatic experiences as if they were detached from the underlying socio-cultural meanings of being a woman, and the hierarchical structure of power that makes women more exposed to specific types of adversity. The main emphasis was that women's traumas are not merely problems of individuals, but also a social issue that is shaped by the socio-cultural and political features of communities associated with femininities and masculinities (Webster & Dunn, 2005).

Several gender researchers have emphasized that socio-cultural and political forces act as regulatory mechanisms to maintain the order of the gender system (Biernat & Deaux, 2012), as behavior which deviates from the binary gender scripts is perceived as problematic (Bem, 1993) and consequently faced with negative reactions that may take various forms of social sanctions (Eagly & Wood, 2011). As the gender system in the majority of contemporary

societies is highly patriarchal, these social sanctions aim to maintain, or restore, male-dominance as represented in the division of labor, access to power and resources, the authority on decision making, and conventional gender stereotypes concerning the behaviors of women and men in both private and public spheres (Eagly & Wood, 2011; Morgenroth & Ryan, 2018).

Regarding women in particular, empirical research has shown that negative social consequences are associated with women's adoption of stereotypically masculine characteristics or behavior that is perceived as typically masculine. This includes for example: showing assertiveness and high competence at the workplace (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012), not adhering to family-oriented and nursing roles (Conner & Fiske, 2018), and showing overt self-sexualized behavior (Infanger, Rudman, & Sczesny, 2014). To preserve male dominance, a backlash effect in the form of social sanctions including aggression, was identified against women who show counter-stereotypic behavior that may be perceived as a threat to the gender status quo (Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012; Vandello, Bosson, Cohen, Burnaford, & Weaver, 2008).

Furthermore, based on the analysis of survivors' narratives about their traumas, feminist therapists and scholars underscored how violence against women relies to a large extent on the socio-cultural construction of femininity and masculinity (Webster & Dunn, 2005). Mary Harvey relied on her clinical experience with women who faced gender-based violence (GBV) to propose the ecological framework which outlines how environmental characteristics can directly contribute to women's victimization and recovery. Her work showed that patriarchal gender norms were ecological threats to women, as they produced gendered adversity and traumas, e.g., sexism and misogyny, and allowed men to use violence as a tool to maintain, or restore, control over women. Conversely, women's recovery could also be facilitated or hindered by environmental features, e.g., the level of support available, cultural norms and attitudes regarding women, and beliefs concerning GBV (Harvey, 1996).

Experiences of sexual violence, particularly of rape, were among the first gendered traumas that received attention from feminist researchers. Using empirical data that emerged mostly from clinical work with women who experienced sexual violence, scholars such as Koss (1985), Burgess & Holmstrom (1973, 1974), and Brownmiller (1993) dismantled the mainstream cultural and social misconceptions around rape, namely that it is an impulsive sexual act that affects a minority of women from specific socio-economic or racial backgrounds, women showing specific conduct in a particular situational setting, or women who dress or behave in a particular way in public. Instead, rape was re-conceptualized as an act of violence that is typically condoned and supported by socio-cultural beliefs about gender roles, patriarchal norms that favor male domination, and political and legal practices that fail to bring justice to victims or hold perpetrators accountable (Webster & Dunn, 2005).

Burgess and Holmstrom suggested that rape and its consequences, which they called *rape trauma syndrome,* and which resemble what we know today as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), are social problems that need special interventions, not only on the

individual level but also on the communal, social and political levels (Burgess & Holmstrom, 1973, 1974). Through collecting and refuting socio-cultural myths regarding rape, mostly centered around blaming women, Burgess and Holmstrom shed light on the underlying cultural beliefs which they considered the foundations of rape crimes.

Meanwhile, Brownmiller (1993) highlighted how cultural beliefs and norms associated with femininity, e.g., that women are educated to be passive, gentle and in need of men's protection, contribute to sexual violence victimization of women. Moreover, she emphasized that rape has historically been used, especially in the context of war and armed conflict, as a weapon against women to maintain or restore patriarchal gender norms. Subsequent scholars highlighted that rape can be a manifestation of men's desire to gain or maintain social control over women (Webster & Dunn, 2005).

Through her pioneering empirical research on the psychological and psychosocial factors associated with rape victimization of women, Koss underscored that women vary in the way they perceive and label rape experiences (Koss & Oros, 1982; Koss, 1985). She identified a number of situational and personal factors to explain this variation, including women's beliefs concerning rape as a gendered crime and their varied perceptions of themselves as victims. Moreover, she highlighted how these factors contribute to significant underreporting of rape crimes, especially when rape happens in an intimate relationship, leaving behind "*hidden victims"* who are neglected to a large extent in psychological research and practice (Koss & Harvey, 1991).

Through this line of research, sexual violence was explicitly conceptualized and established as a gendered trauma and a social and political issue that targets women based on their feminine roles as defined by the dominant cultural norms. Therefore, the integration of socio-cultural representations of gender roles and underlying contextual factors in psychological research would be essential for understanding and treating women's sexual violence traumas.

Additionally, several scholars focused on a variety of other types of women's traumas triggered in the private sphere, e.g., domestic violence, stressing how these traumas are also underpinned by gendered socio-cultural beliefs (see NiCarthy, 1987). Other efforts focused on forms of trauma that take place in the public sphere, such as political violence or State-perpetrated violence, including arrest, detention and violence by police or military forces. Within this line, studies underscored how political violence takes specific gendered forms when targeting women, and how it may have different consequences for women in comparison to men, such as limiting their involvement in the public sphere (Hadzic & Tavits, 2019).

In their analysis of existing literature on gender and politics, Bardall, Bjarnegård & Piscopo (2019) presented a theoretical framework on political violence by the State or the government against politically engaged women, comprising three interrelated elements: (a) gendered motives of political violence, when women, or individuals outside the hegemonic male group, are specifically targeted to ensure the preservation of patriarchal gender norms manifested in hegemonic masculinity's control over politics and the public sphere; (b)

gendered forms of political violence, where a hegemonic man would not be targeted in the same way in the same circumstances, e.g., sexual assault, shaming through sexual conduct, and sexualized online attacks; and (c) the gendered impact on women, as women may interpret, construct narratives and meanings for, and respond to political violence differently than a hegemonic man, in light of their understanding of the gender roles.

Within this growing line of research, several studies investigated the underlying dynamics of gendered political/State violence and women's responses thereto, including resistance and possible negative psychological consequences, within contexts such as conflict, post-conflict and large-scale political repression settings (Burdryte, 2010; Punamaki, 1990; Segalo, 2015).

Another area of interest for feminist scholars is how to employ the lens of intersectionality to examine gender in relation to other identity factors - such as race, ethnicity and poverty - which contribute to vulnerability to political violence, e.g., police brutality (Bryant-Davis, Adams, Alejandre, & Gray, 2017; Heberle, Obus, & Gray, 2020). Intersections of different types of violence were examined as well, revealing on the one hand how race, ethnicity and gender shape exposure to different kinds of violence - e.g., domestic violence, street violence, and State-initiated violence - and how, on the other hand, intersections of different identities shape responses to and consequences of each type of violence (Fine & Weis, 1998).

In addition to gendered forms of violence, a large body of research has underlined how women's feminine gender roles, and their position of power in the gender hierarchy, expose them to a great deal of adversity, hardships and strains on an everyday basis. For instance, several psychology scholars underscored that women's distress is exacerbated and their chances of self-fulfillment and personal achievement are reduced due to the traditional division of labor, which may position women to be mainly or solely responsible for undertaking household chores, nursing children, and caring for elderly and sick family members (Bird, 1999; Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001; Nolen-Hoeksema, Larson, & Grayson, 1999, Scattolon & Stoppard, 1999). Despite socio-economic developments that increased women's participation in the labor market and challenged the binary of men/breadwinners and women/homemakers especially in high-income western counties, recent empirical data from various welfare States highlight how the division of labor is still highly gendered, as women do more unpaid household and care work, while men do more paid work and are significantly less involved in household and care work (Cunha & Atalaia, 2019; Eagly & Wood, 2011).

Another example of gendered strains is sexism and gender-based discrimination, which were found to have significant impacts on women's wellbeing, in addition to limiting their opportunities in the public sphere, especially with respect to occupying leadership positions and reaching higher ranks (Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2002). Most relevant to this thesis, the Ambivalent Sexism Theory (Glick & Fiske, 1996) served as a useful framework to understand the effect of sexism on women. It proposes that sexism comprises two complementary aspects: hostile sexism representing misogynistic and competitive attitudes towards women, and benevolent sexism which holds subjectively favorable but patronizing attitudes towards women. In line with the previously discussed social sanctions against non-conformist women, Conner, Glink and Fiske postulated that ambivalent sexism, which is

deeply rooted in patriarchy, acts as a foundation for "policing women's bodies", i.e., justifying physical and sexual violence towards "bad" non-conformist women, while providing protection for "good" women who adhere to traditional gender norms. In such context, ambivalent sexism can predict sexual violence against women, while reinforcing underlying beliefs by which victims/survivors are blamed and crimes against them justified (Conner, Glick, & Fiske, 2017).

These different forms of gender injustice in both private and public spheres were found to be among the major factors contributing to depression in women, either directly or through other mediating factors such as women's sense of agency, self-esteem and self-concept (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001; Stoppard, 1999).

Gendered paths to depression are not only limited to sources of stress and adversity, but they also include the mediating processes through which individuals handle stressors. Through empirical psychological research, several authors have highlighted gender differences in coping strategies as another underlying aspect that contributes to depression in women. It was suggested that, in line with conventional feminine roles, women are typically educated to use emotion-oriented coping strategies when facing stress and adversity. Therefore, they may be at a greater risk of developing maladaptive emotional regulation strategies (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2012; Nolen-Hoeksema & Aldao, 2011).

One coping strategy that gained considerable attention is rumination. Nolen-Hoeksema defines rumination as "a mode of responding to distress that involves repetitively and passively focusing on symptoms of distress and the possible causes and consequences of these symptoms" (Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008, p. 400). Nolen-Hoeksema's seminal Response Style Theory established that, on the one hand, engagement in ruminative responses may impair an individual's problem-solving ability and reduce motivation to engage in constructive behaviors; and, on the other hand, women acquire a ruminative response style through early socialization processes and significantly ruminate more than men as adults. Relying on several empirical studies, she showed that rumination explains, at least partially, the higher prevalence of depression among women (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991; Nolen-Hoeksema, Larson, & Grayson, 1999).

A large body of subsequent empirical research postulated rumination as a core psychological mediating process that has an impact on the onset, severity and continuity of depression, specifically in interaction with stressful and traumatic events (Seligman & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987; Spasojevic & Alloy, 2001; Tamres, Janicki, & Helgeson, 2002). Although the magnitudes of reported gender differences in rumination were inconsistent across different studies, a significant difference was generally found, suggesting rumination as a contributing factor to differences between men and women in depression (Panayiotou & Papageorgiou, 2007; Tamres, Janicki, & Helgeson, 2002; Johnson & Whisman, 2013).

It was recently suggested that there are two distinctive types of rumination with different psychological outcomes: (a) a constructive concrete rumination style; and (b) an unconstructive abstract rumination style, which predicts depression, anxiety and persistence of PTSD symptoms (Douilliez, Heeren, Lefèvre, Watkins, Barnard, & Philippot, 2014;

Michael, Halligan, Clark, & Ehlers, 2007; Watkins, 2008). Although it is generally hypothesized that women are more likely to resort to abstract rumination, as it is more linked to depression, the degree to which there are significant gender differences in styles of rumination is still an area of ongoing research.

Accounting for all above-mentioned factors, i.e., the sources of adversity facing women, the gendered nature of women's traumas, and the coping styles more typically employed by women, is crucial not only for capturing the specificity of women's suffering but also for developing more relevant and grounded psychological interventions for individuals. More recently, several feminist scholars urged the adoption of political and social perspectives on women's suffering, calling for the de-medicalization of women's trauma and dealing with women's trauma-related psychological symptoms as normal manifestations in reaction to social injustice (Tseris, 2019).

The feminist literature thus seeks to politicize the study of women's traumas instead of examining gendered traumatic events as personal, arbitrary and heterogeneous events. Therapists and clinical psychology scholars are encouraged to study women's traumas in relation to their socio-cultural, political and economic contexts while acknowledging how the survivor's position of power in society, which is determined through her multiple identities, may have influenced the exposure to, perception of, and response to the traumatic event. It is further recommended that the voices of trauma survivors should be incorporated in psychological research and practice, through the integration of women's own narratives on their trauma and their resistance. In particular, therapists are called upon to take into account women's own understanding of their traumatic experiences, and their reading of their responses including their resistance, when structuring trauma interventions (Brown, 2008; B. Cole, 2009; Griffiths, 2018).

Several intervention models were accordingly proposed where a feminist reading of trauma and response thereto is integrated into psychological practice. In this vein, Harvey (1996) suggested seven principles as indicators of recovery for women's trauma survivors: (a) having authority over the remembering process, i.e., the ability to choose when to remember and when not to remember; (b) integration of memory and affect, i.e., the ability to experience the relevant feelings, and to recognize them, when remembering a specific part of traumatic memories; (c) effect tolerance, i.e., reaching a phase when traumatic events are no longer threatening or overwhelming; (d) symptoms of mastery, i.e., the ability to use a coping routine to reduce arousal and managing stress; (e) self-esteem and self-cohesion, i.e., getting rid of self-blame and guilt and restoration of self-worth and self-esteem; (f) safe attachment, i.e., the restoration of relation capacities and recovery or building of safe attachment bonds; (g) meaning-making, i.e., assigning "new meaning to the trauma, to the self as trauma survivor and to the world in which traumatic events occur and recur" (Harvey, 1996, p. 13). As these indicators were developed empirically through Harvey's psychological practice with sexually abused women, they became widely accepted among feminist therapists and were integrated implicitly or explicitly in a broad range of trauma interventions (Webster & Dunn, 2005).

Another example of a trauma intervention that has gained acceptance among therapists lately is Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET), which uses narration and exposure techniques to integrate traumatic experiences within an autobiographical context (Schauer, Neuner, & Elbert, 2011). NET allows survivors to reach an understanding of their own behavior and emotional response during the traumatic event while reflecting on their entire life from a coherent, holistic perspective, which contributes to a sense of personal identity, and consequently to meaning-making (Neuner, Schauer, & Elbert, 2014). NET was recommended to be used with survivors of political violence, torture, and sexual violence, as it helps place traumatic events in their shaping contexts and construct new meanings that possibly have political, social, human rights, or moral foundations (Bichescu, Neuner, Schauer, & Elbert, 2007; Halvorsen & Stenmark, 2010). Thus, a feminist adaptation of NET, integrating the feminist principles of trauma therapy with NET procedures, can be of great value in treating women who experience gendered traumas.

Against this backdrop, the final objective of this project was to test the feasibility of a feminist tailored version of NET trauma therapy with a small sample of women who experienced gendered types of traumas in the context of the aftermath of the Arab uprisings of 2011. The questions of this thesis were formulated and investigated based on three key positions, namely: adopting a feminist reading of women's traumatic experiences, believing in the fundamental need to contextualize women's experiences including their level of adherence to gender norms, and anticipating the great value women's voices can bring to our understanding of traumas and its consequences. In the coming chapter, an overview of the thesis questions and methods used to answer them will be presented.

Chapter 2

Overview of Research Questions and Methods

Overview of Research Questions and Methods

In line with the feminist literature on gender. as presented in the previous chapter, this research project uses gender as an analytical lens to help understand women's traumas and design relevant, context-based interventions for treating the possible negative psychological consequences of such traumas. Summarizing how gender was used in psychology as an analytical tool, Stewart & McDermott (2004) outlined three major approaches: (a) identification of sex/gender differences in terms of behavior and characteristics, following a classification of individuals into females/women and males/men (with underlying hypotheses regarding the causes of such differences, e.g., factors related to biology, socialization or social location); (b) investigation of within-sex variability, to understand how gender relates to individual differences among women or men; and (c) investigation of gender as a structure of power that shapes the social institutions and relationships within which women and men operate. Even though these three approaches were typically perceived as alternatives, there is growing recognition within the field of the value of their integration.

Moreover, the first and second approaches are person-oriented, whereas the third is context-oriented. While person-oriented approaches dominated the psychology of gender scholarship throughout its history, a context-oriented approach has been gaining more prominence, as an alternative, within feminist psychology scholarship in recent years. Stewart & McDermoot (2004) stressed the value of integrating both orientations when studying gender, arguing that an integrative framework can provide a powerful foundation for a better understanding of psychological phenomena.

Along these lines, this research project seeks to follow an integrative framework in investigating Egyptian and Syrian women's gendered traumas in the context of the aftermath of Arab uprisings on four different levels: (a) examination of the different ways femininities and masculinities, as contextual constructs that represent gender norms and stereotypes, are formulated; (b) exploration of the variability among women in adhering to such norms and stereotypes, and the different possible social and psychological consequences of the varied levels of adherence to a dominant femininity (i.e., whether women's adopted femininities may relate to exposure to and consequences of traumas); (c) examination of the way in which gendered power relations and structures may produce gendered forms of trauma and influence women's perception of and responses to such traumas; (d) investigation of whether a contextualized trauma intervention, formulated in light of the readings of trauma survivors themselves of their contexts, traumatic events and responses thereto, would be positively received and evaluated by the survivors. The project focuses on sexual and political violence traumas in the Egyptian context, and traumas associated with war and displacement experiences in the Syrian context, as forms of gendered traumas that are strongly connected to the aftermath of Arab uprisings.

The doctoral dissertation comprises five interrelated studies, each presented in a separate chapter (chapters three to seven), followed by a concluding chapter that offers an overall discussion of the empirical work and some general reflections on the whole research journey. The current chapter presents the research questions of the thesis and the methods that were employed to answer them. Finally, an overview of the structure of the dissertation will be outlined.

1. The Research Questions

Employing a gendered-lens, the final goal of this dissertation is to design and evaluate a tailored context-based feminist psychological intervention that targets the psychological consequences of women's gendered traumas. To reach this goal, the following four questions are investigated, consecutively.

(1) What is the current structure of prototypical femininities and masculinities in Egypt and Syria? This question will be investigated in chapter 3.
(2) How do the different forms of adopted femininities relate to women's exposure to traumas, and predict the psychological consequences of traumas, in the context of the emerging changes in Egypt and Syria following the Arab uprisings? This question will be investigated in chapter 4.
(3) How do Egyptian and Syrian women's narratives concerning their traumas reveal the way in which socio-political contexts shaped their exposure to traumas and influenced their perception of these traumas while contributing to their responses including suffering and resistance? This question will be covered in chapters 5 and 6.
(4) How do women trauma survivors receive and evaluate the usefulness of a trauma intervention that is tailored in light of the feminist reading of women's traumas and the socio-cultural context in which the traumatic events occurred? This question will be covered in chapter 7.

2. Methods

Emphasizing the significance of choosing research methods that are in line with the researcher's theoretical and epistemological frameworks concerning the phenomena of interest, Crawford & Marecek, (1989) wrote that: "A method is a theory. The methods of a discipline reflect certain values and assumptions about the phenomena under study. […] If one holds truth to be historically and culturally situated, then methods should focus on dynamic processes and regard historical and cultural influences not as "nuisance variance" but as legitimate objects of study" (p. 159).

In this respect, a mixed-method approach was considered to be most suitable for this research project. In the context of social science research, a mixed-method approach refers to collecting, analyzing and combining quantitative and qualitative data to maximize the ability to understand the phenomena of interest, by capturing trends while having an in-depth look into details through close examination of individual experiences (Crawford & Kimmel, 1999; Ivankova, John, & Stick, 2006).

As presented in the previous chapter, this thesis employs feminist theoretical and epistemological frameworks anchored in the belief that, to reach a better understanding of the gendered phenomena, there is a fundamental need to contextualize women's experiences, and a great value in relying on women's own readings of their experiences. Feminist theorists and researchers have highlighted the value of integrating the voices of women who are more vulnerable to discrimination and violence, to counteract a long history of discounting the experiences of marginalized individuals under the classic post-positivist epistemological approach in mainstream psychology (Eagly & Riger, 2014; Harding, 1992).

In line with this perspective, qualitative methods offer a unique ability to reflect individual personalized understandings of gendered experiences in a specific context, allowing women's voices to be at the heart of the research project (Campbell & Wasco, 2000; Eagly & Riger, 2014). Furthermore, relying on women's narratives particularly allows participants to express their perceptions of their experiences and their understanding of their contexts in their own words, which possibly minimizes power gaps between the researcher and participants, and challenges potentially preexisting assumptions such as the androcentric bias (Eagly & Riger, 2014; Gergen & Gergen, 2010).

The qualitative method of choice in this these was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which has been employed recently in various psychology studies. Aiming at an in-depth examination of human experiences, IPA analyzes how people make sense of their major life experiences and their social contexts, especially when everyday life is interrupted by a significant experience or major transition. IPA allows the experiences of participants to be expressed in their own terms, rather than according to predefined category systems. The analysis starts with initial comments on the transcripts, through initial clustering and thematic development, into the final structure of themes which should represent trends across investigated cases (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Moreover, IPA allows the researcher to take an active role in both the interview and the analysis through their interpretation of the narratives of participants (Gilkinson, 2009), incorporating the researcher's understanding of the context of investigated phenomena, and the in-depth interaction with the research participants, to facilitate the interpretation of those narratives. In addition to being in line with the theoretical and epistemological frameworks of the study, IPA was chosen for its suitability for the purposes of the thesis studies, to help understand how participants make sense of the multiple traumas they experienced, interpret their responses to those traumas, and read the context in which their traumas took place.

For the quantitative aspect, the researcher relied on self-report Likert scales, a commonly used data collection method in psychology that is able to capture trends in participants' self-perceptions and reveal the patterns of associations between several psychological and psychosocial variables. Multiple statistical techniques were used to analyze the data, including factor analysis, correlation analysis, t-test, linear regression analysis, and structural equation modeling.

3. The Structure of the Dissertation

In addition to the theoretical framework in chapter 1, the questions and methods presented in this chapter, and the final chapter dedicated to general discussion and concluding remarks; the dissertation consists of five papers, each presented in a separate chapter:

1. *"The Structure of Prototypical Femininities and Masculinities among Egyptian and Syrian Women and Men: A Factor Analysis Study*": Identifying prototypical femininity profiles in each of the two cultures of interest is the first step towards investigating how adopting different forms of these profiles can be associated with women's exposure to gendered traumas and with the psychological consequences of such traumas. Hence, this first paper aims to answer the first research question by exploring the current structure of prototypical femininities and masculinities in Egypt and Syria.

A sample of 456 Egyptians and 185 Syrian women and men were asked to identify the extent to which each of 97 characteristics is stereotypically required/ desirable in their societies, for women and men separately, according to the dominant cultural norms. These 97 characteristics were collected via open-ended questions asking a sample of 25 Egyptian and Syrian women and men to identify the characteristics that are normatively associated with prototypical femininity and masculinity in their cultures including emotional and cognitive attributes, interests, physical appearance, social gender roles, and typical modes of communication. A detailed account of the methods used in this paper and of the results is presented in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

2. "*Does Adopted Femininity Modulate the Psychological Consequences of Sexual Violence: A Study on Syrian and Egyptian Women?"* : Employing two coexisting femininity profiles (i.e., *Assertive Competent Woman* and *Good Wife*), which were extracted from the first study, this paper investigates how adopting each profile relates to abstract rumination, as a mediating process, and depression and PTSD, as two possible negative consequences of trauma, among Egyptian and Syrian women in the context of sexual violence post-2011 Arab uprisings.

In light of the previous literature presented in chapter 1, which posits sexual violence as a possible social sanction for challenging traditional gender norms, the paper hypothesizes that adopting the *Good Wife* profile predicts less exposure to sexual violence while adopting the *Assertive Competent Woman* profile predicts more exposure to sexual violence. In a sample of 307 Egyptian and 185 Syrian women, a model was used with adopted femininity profile as an independent variable, exposure to sexual violence and abstract rumination respectively as two mediators, and depression and PTSD as outcomes. Meanwhile, the study also aims at investigating how patterns of associations between the study variables may differ across the Egyptian and Syrian samples in relation to different underlying socio-cultural conditions. The details of the study and its results are presented in the Chapter 4.

3. *"Beyond Trauma, What Kept them Going? An Analysis of the Lives and Narratives of Five Syrian Women in Lebanon"*: Using the narratives of five Syrian women who fled Syria to Lebanon as a result of the Syrian war, this study addresses how are Syrian women in

Lebanon resist and go on with their lives despite the psychological consequences of the traumas they experienced. The meanings ascribed by the participants to their traumas are investigated while identifying the means they used to keep going after their several losses. Moreover, in line with the prototypical femininity and masculinity profiles identified by the factor analysis conducted under the first paper, this study investigates how recent political, economic, and social changes were reflected on constructed gender roles while impacting women's self-perceived femininity. The five women's narratives were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and were subsequently examined using IPA. The identified themes explaining how and why the five Syrian women were able to resist the traumatic environment of war and displacement and keep going despite extreme adversity are presented in Chapter 5.

4. *"The Lives of Egyptian Women between Continuous Trauma and Resistance: A Feminist Analysis of Narratives of Five Survivors after the 2011-Revolution":* This qualitative study aims at understanding how the socio-political context shapes women's exposure to traumas, influences their perception thereof, and contributes to their responses thereto. Narratives of five Egyptian trauma survivors were collected via in-depth semi-structured interviews and analyzed using IPA to identify themes that explain these women's modes of victimization and resistance in the context of Egypt post-2011. The paper focuses specifically on sexual violence traumas and gendered political traumas, as two forms of gendered traumas that are tightly connected to the political and social changes in Egypt after 2011. The extracted themes and the participant's readings of the context in which their traumas occurred are presented in Chapter 6.

5. *"How Egyptian Women with Trauma Benefit from a Tailored Feminist Version of Narrative Exposure Therapy? A Proof-of-Concept Study":* The study aims at testing the feasibility of a tailored feminist version of Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET), with the same five Egyptian women survivors of political and sexual trauma who were interviewed for the fourth study. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, the study examined the survivors' reception and evaluation of the intervention, while considering the indications of effectiveness and any possible signs of harm. In addition to using the exposure and narration techniques of NET, the intervention directed the cognitive restructuring process based on the literature on the feminist psychology reading of women's traumas as well as the themes explaining the modes of victimization and resistance identified in Chapter 6. The results of the intervention's evaluation are presented in Chapter 7.

In the chapters that follow, each study will be presented in detail, including the study questions, the method used, results, and discussion of the results in relation to previous literature and the two contexts of interest.

Chapter 3

The Structure of Prototypical Femininities and Masculinities among Egyptian and Syrian Women and Men

A Factor Analysis Study

Abstract

Using a cultural lens, this study aims at identifying the structure of prototypical femininities and masculinities in the Syrian and Egyptian cultures as reflected in the construction of stereotypical profiles for women and men. On five-point scales, 456 Egyptians and 185 Syrians were asked to identify the extent to which 97 characteristics were stereotypically desirable/required for women and men separately, according to the dominant norms of their culture. A factor analysis was conducted on each of the two samples separately. In both cultures, two factors emerged underlining two co-existing prototypes of femininity: Good Wife, and Assertive Competent Woman; whereas four factors emerged highlighting four different co-existing prototypes of masculinity: Family Man, Macho Man, Rebellious Man, and Soft and Tender Man. The results frame prototypical femininity and masculinity as complex, multidimensional constructs that reflect multiple co-existing profiles. The level of social desirability of each profile was also tested. The results are discussed in light of previous literature and in relation to emerging social, political, and cultural changes in Egypt and Syria after the Arab uprisings of 2011.

Keywords

Prototypical femininities, prototypical masculinities, gender roles, factor analysis, Egyptian men, Syrian women

The Structure of Prototypical Femininities and Masculinities among Egyptian and Syrian Women and Men

A Factor Analysis Study

1. Introduction

Femininity and masculinity are among the key concepts in the psychology of gender that have gained attention through several waves of research since the 1930s (Biernat & Deaux, 2012). Throughout these waves of research, their conceptualization and operationalization witnessed major reconsiderations, shifts, and critiques highlighting disparities among scholars in their adopted theoretical frameworks and ideological commitments (Eagly, 2018; Morawski, 1985). More recently, several scholars have criticized the long and persistent reliance on femininity and masculinity as sets of personality traits in studying gender phenomena in psychology, highlighting how these two concepts are imbued with several flawed historical, theoretical, and ideological foundations (Morawski, 1985; Lott, 1981). Instead, several feminist scholars called for a shift towards studying gender as a social structure that defines power relationships and influences interpersonal interactions in various contextual settings (see Bem, 1993; Stewart & McDermott, 2004; Yoder & Kahn, 2003).

Eagly (2018) highlighted this discord among psychology scholars regarding the studying of gender, either in terms of interpersonal context-oriented processes or intrapersonal qualities, calling for the integration of both perspectives under one approach which would allow for an inclusive understanding of the complex and multilayered phenomena of gender. Along the same lines, we argue that femininity and masculinity are useful tools of analysis that can bridge interpersonal processes, i.e., femininity and masculinity as external socio-cultural constructs that represent sets of gender stereotypes, and intrapersonal qualities of gender, i.e., internalized gendered attributes that correspond to various extents with gender stereotypes. Nevertheless, taking the feminist critique of femininity and masculinity into consideration, there is a crucial need to invest persistent efforts to reclaim the two concepts in new traditions that do not infer their historical shortcomings. Accordingly, before elaborating on how femininity and masculinity are used in this research, we will present an overview of their historical conceptualizations, while highlighting, and engaging with, the main critiques of these conceptualizations.

Introducing the first femininity/masculinity test, “The Attitude-Interest Analysis Test”, Termen and Miles (1936) posited the two concepts as inherent, fixed sets of traits in which “the sexes differ fundamentally in their instinctive and emotional equipment and in the sentiments, interest, attitudes, and modes of behavior which are the derivatives of such equipment” (p.2). Embracing an essentialist approach to sex/gender differences, they

collected items that they believed can "naturally" distinguish women from men. Their test positioned each of the two concepts as the opposite polar of the other, proposing one single dimension in which individuals are classified either to be feminine or masculine. Further, they posited that femininity and masculinity are related to psychopathology, meaning that women who obtain low femininity scores are expected to suffer from mental health issues, and the same applied for men (Bem, 1993; Morawski, 1985).

Termen and Miles's conceptualization dominated the field for at least twenty-five years, influencing subsequent measures of femininity and masculinity (Biernat & Deaux, 2012). This conceptualization relied on several flawed assumptions that directed psychological research for decades: (a) associating identified and presumed differences in personality between women and men with biological sex; (b) positing femaleness and maleness as deep, inherent, and stable features in an individual's personality, and linking any deviation from these constructs to mental illness; (c) positioning femininity and masculinity as the polar opposites of a dichotomy, and classifying individuals under either one or the other exclusively; (d) assuming that femininity and masculinity are ahistorical and universal constructs that are produced, and can be studied, independently of any contextual factors.

Several feminist psychology scholars rightfully criticized this approach for giving scientific legitimacy to the polarization and essentialism of gender roles within the cultural, social, and political spheres, which have contributed to a moral discourse that supports the patriarchal structure of gender relationships (Bem, 1993; Morawski, 1985; Smiler, 2004).

Accompanying the rise of feminist voices within and beyond academia in the 1970s, major transformations have happened in the theorization of gender phenomena, leading to the re-conceptualization of femininity and masculinity (Smiler, 2004). In 1973, Constantinople challenged the validity of empirical and theoretical foundations of the major tests of femininity and masculinity, including Termen and Miles test. She also highlighted that the items' content implied "sex roles stereotypes" rather than standing sex differences between men and women. She concluded that all existing tests of this era were inadequate for measuring femininity and masculinity, as data suggested that the two concepts should be represented on separate dimensions rather than as polar opposites on one dimension (Constantinople, 1973).

In the same decade, and through her Sex-role Inventory (BSRI), Bem contested the bipolarity of femininity and masculinity. She introduced them as independent constructs that represent cultural stereotypes to which women and men are expected to adhere, rather than reflecting inherent deep-seated features of human personality. Voicing this core transformation, she defined them as "the extent to which the culture's definitions of desirable female and male attributes are reflected in an individual's self-description" (Bem, 1979, p.1048). Further, she introduced the concept of *androgyny*, i.e., non-sex-typed people who embrace both feminine and masculine traits. She postulated androgyny to be associated with better mental health in women and men, as it represents individuals' ability to be flexible in social situations and change their gendered behavior in relation to contextual requirements (Bem, 1974, 1975).

Moreover, in her *gender schema theory*, Bem (1981) further emphasized how women and men internalized the dominant socio-cultural gender norms through a sex-typing process, which happens through socialization across the developmental path. She offered a theoretical foundation that explained how individuals may embrace the established socio-cultural gender dichotomy of femininity and masculinity and adopt gendered traits that are typically culturally associated with either women or men. Challenging polarization and essentialism through her two main contributions, androgyny and gender scheme theory, Bem stressed the importance of having flexible gender roles on both, the personal and social levels, urging the need for "aschematic" societies as a gateway to achieve gender equality (Bem, 1981).

Along the same lines, Spence and Helmreich (1978) formulated the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ) as a measurement of femininity and masculinity. They operationalized femininity and masculinity as non-dichotomous concepts that represent gender stereotypes to which women and men are expected to adhere, defining them as "clusters of socially desirable attributes stereotypically considered to differentiate males and females and thus to define the psychological core of masculine and feminine personalities" (p.3). PAQ measured femininity, through attributes signifying communion, and masculinity, through attributes demonstrating agency, as two sets of identified stereotypes that are linked to women and men (Bakan, 1966). Although Spence herself later argued against using PAQ as a measure of femininity/masculinity, due to its underrepresentation of these multidimensional constructs (Spence, 1993), PAQ continued to be frequently used in subsequent psychological research as a scale for femininity and masculinity. Further, similar to gender stereotypes, communal and agentic traits —which were reformulated as expressiveness and instrumentality (Parsons & Bales, 1995), and later as warmth and competence (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002)— remained the two most represented dimensions of trait-based femininity and masculinity in subsequent research (Biernat & Deaux, 2012; Smiler, 2004).

Bem (1974, 1979) and Spence & Helmreich (1978) proposed femininity and masculinity as the individual's adherence to cultural norms concerning women and men, disputing their prior conceptualization as deep-seated and enduring features of personality. By doing so, they introduced a contextual framework to femininity and masculinity constructs.

Within this perspective, it is postulated that gender stereotypes act as social mechanisms for the regulation of individual behavior. As societies produce the gender norms that construct social scripts to which individuals are prescribed and pressured to adhere, individuals may internalize these scrips in the form of ascribed gender attributes, which act as self-regulatory standards with respect to social role and behavior (Eagly & Wood, 2011).

Nevertheless, the conception of femininity and masculinity as adopted characteristics that are stereotypically associated with womanhood and manhood was criticized by several feminist scholars for merely representing conventional gender norms, while producing a new gender polarization that neglects how individuals may reject, negotiate, and possibly influence normative roles (Hoffman, 2001; Morawski, 1985). Alternatively, several scholars advocated for relying on gender identity constructs, i.e., the "basic phenomenological sense of one's maleness and femaleness" (Spence, 1984, p 91), instead of stereotypical

femininity/masculinity. As each person may have their own personal definition of what it means to be a woman/man, they argued for the value of studying the personal sense of being feminine or masculine, which is internally developed regardless of whether an individual adopts and adheres to the conventional standards of femininity and masculinity or not (Betz, 1995; Hoffman, 2001; Spence, 1999).

Further, several other conceptions and measurements of femininity and masculinity that differ from those based on the internalization of traditional gender norms have been introduced. These included, for example, Feminist Identity Development (Bargad & Hyde, 1991); Male Reference Group Identity Dependence (Wade & Gelso, 1998); Gender Role Journey Measure (O'Neil, Egan, Owen, & Murray, 1993); and Gender Role Conflict Scales (O'Neil, Helms, Gable, David, & Wrightsman, 1986). These efforts shifted emphasis from how individuals endorse and internalize traditional stereotypes, to how individuals may adopt different formations of femininity and masculinity based on several elements, such as race, sexual identity, socio-economic background, gender ideology, and personal evaluation and judgment regarding the content of traditional norms (Hoffman, 2001; Smiler, 2004).

This more recent conceptualization of femininity/masculinity as incorporating different possibilities for an individual to be a woman/man resembles a core account of this paper, which is the possible multiplicity of *femininities/masculinities*. The co-existence of multiple forms of femininities and masculinities was highlighted, explicitly and implicitly, within psychology and beyond it (Levant, Richmond, Cook, House and Aupont, 2007; Pleck, 1981; Smiler, 2004). While some of these research efforts, as accentuated above, focused on femininity/masculinity as self-construal concepts, others proposed them as socio-cultural constructs that are produced in multiple forms within a social context (Connell, 1995). In this latter line of research, the hierarchy of these multiple forms, and the way in which they interact with each other and with contextual factors producing hegemonic/dominant and subordinate forms, has been a core interest within sociology research (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Paechter, 2018).

Similarly, in the gender stereotypes research, several authors have underscored the multiplicity of gender profiles, i.e., "subtypes of women and men," which are locally produced in interaction with the gendered behavior of individuals, and ongoing changes in socio-economic, cultural, and political factors (Carpenter & Trentham, 2001; Devine & Baker, 1991; Rudman & Glick, 2008; Vonk & Ashomore, 2003). The degree to which adopting and performing these profiles is desirable, accepted, rejected, or punished by forces of the patriarchy is an ongoing research question that is examined locally in diverse cultural contexts (Conner, Glick, & Fiske, 2017; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012).

Against this backdrop, we argue that using femininity and masculinity as a tool of analysis in psychological research is still of value if (a) the feminist critiques of prior conceptualizations and measurements of the two concepts are taken into consideration (b) the more recent accounts are integrated (e.g., non-polarity, multidimensionality, multiplicity, contextuality, relative malleability, and changeability over time and as a result of individual

behavior). Studying femininity and masculinity under such approach would not only challenge their prior conceptualizations and their underlying theoretical and ideological foundations, but would also lay the groundwork for understanding the interaction between individuals and their gendered contexts. Through investigating how people negotiate and resist traditional gender norms and how they adopt and perform different formations of femininities and masculinities, and by examining how different contexts respond to non-conventional gender behavior, these areas of research that lie at the core of feminist psychology can be explored.

In conclusion, the theoretical and methodological viewpoints of this paper concerning femininity and masculinity can be summarized as follows:

- Conventional femininity and masculinity are socio-cultural constructs that represent stereotypical characteristics concerning how women and men are expected/required to be. The extent to which these social expectations or requirements are rigid, flexible, or negotiable varies across times, different cultures, social classes, and socio-political and economic settings. "Prototypical femininity/masculinity" will be used in this paper to refer to femininity/masculinity as socio-cultural constructs implying gender stereotypes, in contrast with internalized femininity/masculinity, which will be referred to as 'adopted femininity/masculinity,' i.e., the degree to which an individual adheres to gender stereotypes as represented in prototypical femininity/masculinity.
- Femininity and masculinity are context-dependent constructs, meaning that they are shaped, and can be reshaped in different formations, by a multitude of cultural, political, social, and economic factors. Thus, they should be considered in relation to a specific environment.
- Consequently, developing culturally specific scales, using the main features of locally produced femininities and masculinities as perceived by members of the respective culture themselves, is a foundational step towards understanding the formation and function of these constructs. As we perceive femininities and masculinities as broader than the sole representation of warmth versus competence personality traits, we will integrate a wider representation of stereotypical feminine/masculine features that cover stereotypical gendered everyday practices, interests, and modes of interpersonal interactions.
- We recognize that people's understanding of what it means to be a woman/man, even from a conventional viewpoint, may vary significantly. Thus, in order to capture this diversity, there is a need to start with open-questions that ask individuals to determine the socially agreed-upon characteristics, rather than readymade lists of characteristics.
- We adopt a perspective in which femininity and masculinity are possibly produced in each socio-cultural context in multiple coexisting profiles/prototypes. Each profile contains sets of distinctive characteristics that distinguish it from another profile. The relationship between these profiles and their degrees of desirability in the mainstream culture differ according to contextual factors.

Based on these foundations, the current paper aims at investigating the current structure of prototypical femininities/masculinities in the two cultural contexts of Egypt and Syria, following the Arab uprisings. Hence, prior to presenting the method that was followed in this regard, an overview of the two contexts of interest is needed.

2. The Socio-cultural and political context of the Study

The dynamic role of culture is usually reflected in social consensus regarding normative behavior, perception, and evaluation of ingroup and outgroup members, the hierarchy of power among social groups, and the structure of social institutions and systems (Valved, Kosakowska-Berezecka, Besta, & Martiny, 2021). A main line of research in the domain of stereotypes investigates this dynamic role of culture and its underlying political, economic, geographical, and historical features in shaping the content of stereotypes (Schneider, 1996). For instance, Cuddy, et al., (2009), captured the relationship between the social structure of societies and the content of stereotypes. Emphasizing the interpersonal and intergroup perception, they highlighted how the competence and warmth stereotypes in each society are "shaped by perceived and actual economic, geographic, normative, and power relationships" (p.5).

With evolving recognition of the role of the socio-cultural context in shaping femininities and masculinities, cultural analysis and cross-cultural comparisons of gender phenomena have received considerable attention from psychology scholars in the more recent years (Glick, et al., 2000; Lee, Hu, & Li, 2020; Valved, Kosakowska-Berezecka, Besta, & Martiny, 2021).

A main focus within the cross-cultural line of research is to compare more patriarchal contexts (i.e., countries that have a lesser level gender equality) against less patriarchal contexts (i.e., counties that achieved a better level of gender equality), in terms of the extent to which gender stereotypes and norms in these contexts are rigid or flexible, the degree of tolerance toward deviation from traditional femininity/masculinity, and the forms of social sanctions imposed on individuals who do not adhere to traditional gender roles (Bosson, et al., 2021; DiMuccio, Yost, & Helweg-Larsen, 2017; Valved, Kosakowska-Berezecka, Besta, & Martiny, 2021). These research efforts generally concluded that the more patriarchal a culture is, the more rigid the gender roles are, possibly leading to more strict forms of social sanctions against those who threaten the gender status quo (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012; Valved, Kosakowska-Berezecka, Besta, & Martiny, 2021)

With regard to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in particular, more recent research efforts have drawn attention to the complexity of gender norms and gender relations in Arab countries with a Muslim majority, beyond the dichotomy of Western versus Eastern cultures (Benstead, Jamal, & Lust, 2015; Charrad, 2001; Rizzo, Abdel-Latif, & Meyer, 2007). While these efforts challenged the traditional broad generalization about the Arab-Muslim world's gender values and practices (Alexander & Welzel, 2011; Inglehart & Norris, 2003), they highlighted the diversity and complexity across different Arab counties, and in relation to a nexus of variables including age, education, socio-economic level, religiosity, and political and gender ideologies (Al-Ali, 2000; Amar, 2011a; Jones, Mitchell, & Martin, 2021). Further, although they highlighted how the mainstream dominant culture in the region supports a patriarchal structure and conventional gender norms, they emphasized the way in which these structures and norms are being challenged, and possibly

restructured, through changes in economic, social, and political conditions, and through everyday practices of resistance by Arab women and men (Amar, 2011a; Kandiyoti, 1988; Rubenberg, 2001; Mustafa, 2014; El Feki, Heilman & Barker, 2017).

Moreover, following the Arab uprisings of 2011, increasing efforts have investigated the impact of emerging changes on gender politics in the region. In the context of Egypt, scholars have been analyzing how political, social, and economic changes during and after the 2011 revolution and the 2013 military coup have affected gender politics (Al-Ali, 2012, 2014; Amar, 2011b; Biagini, 2019; Hassan, 2015). In the Syrian context, a lot of attention has been given to the implications of the Syrian war and the massive waves of forced displacement for the gender roles of Syrian women and men (Alsaba & Kapilashrami, 2018; Buecher & Aniyamuzaala, 2016; Nasser, Mehchy & Abu Ismail, 2013; Suerbaum, 2018).

In line with the idea of "Precarious Manhood"—i.e., masculinity being in a "precarious state requiring continual social proof and validation" (Vandello, Bosson, & Cohen, Burnaford & Weaver, 2008, p. 1325)—which links masculinity being threatened to men's aggression, many scholars have advanced the controversial notion of "Masculinity in Crisis"—i.e., men failing to fulfill their stereotypical gender roles—which they either considered to have contributed to the outbreak of the protests or employed to explain the massive increase in gender"—based violence during and following the Arab revolutions (Amar, 2011a; El Feki, 2017/18).

Other scholars argued that after 2011, men have been embracing new forms of masculinities in pursuit of undermining women's gains, earning back male privileges, and restoring male dominance over women (Mustafa, 2014). In this context, several studies and reports emphasized how Egyptian women's increased engagement in political and social activism during the revolution of 2011, especially younger women from geographical and socio-economic peripheries, has led to new gender politics. It was particularly emphasized that women were able to occupy wider spaces in the public sphere, through which they gained more agency, challenged patriarchal gender norms, breached silence concerning the established gender-based violence, and pushed the boundaries of conventional femininity (Hassan, 2015; Hafez, 2014). Meanwhile, gender-based violence against women, particularly sexual violence, markedly increased after 2011, which was described by several scholars as a counterattack against women's ability to occupy new spaces and threaten patriarchal gender roles (Kandiyoti, 2013; Zaki & Abd Alhamid, 2014). This is similar to the hypothesis of the backlash effect which takes the form of social sanctions, including aggression, against women who challenge gender stereotypes or threaten the gender status quo (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012).

Similarly, in the context of Syria, experiences of war and displacement rendered men incapable of fulfilling their traditional masculine roles as family protectors and income providers, pushing many women to take up new responsibilities, e.g., becoming the main or sole breadwinners for their families. This has led many women to question, challenge, and reshape the established gender norms (El-Masri, Harvey & Garwood, 2013; Barakat & Philippot, 2018; Gren, 2018; Suerbaum, 2018). This echoed earlier findings of a large body

of research that highlighted the impact of wars and major political and economic changes on reshaping gender roles, such as the emergence of new femininities and masculinities in Europe after the Second World War, and in the United State after the Civil War or during the Great Depression (Armengol, 2014; Goldstein, 2001; Smiler, 2004).

Against this backdrop, the current paper aims to highlight a moment of possible transformation of gender roles in two contexts that have recently witnessed dramatic socio-political changes. Using factor analysis, the study seeks to identify the current prototypical construction of femininities and masculinities and provide an analysis of that construction, in light of current socio-cultural political changes and previous literature concerning femininities and masculinities in general. This will not only contribute to the understanding of femininities and masculinities in Egypt and Syria, but may also contribute to the broader understanding of femininities and masculinities in relation to changing socio-political conditions.

3. Method

3.1 Procedures

For the purpose of compiling a list of stereotypically feminine and masculine characteristics that represent a diverse local understanding of gender roles, a pre-study was carried out using an open-ended questionnaire to identify the Arabic vocabulary used to describe prototypical femininities and masculinities in the Egyptian and Syrian cultures. Participants were asked to identify the characteristics that a woman/man should or should not have according to the gender norms in their respective cultures.

A recruitment post was published on social media, and an electronic version of the questionnaire was sent to those who expressed their willingness to participate. A small sample of 25 Egyptian and Syrian Arabic speakers (15 women and 10 men, with a mean age of 29.32 years and *SD*.: 9.05 years) responded to the questionnaire. Twenty of the participants were university graduates and 5 were university students. To overcome the limitations of this small and potentially biased sample, the participants were asked to reply to each question twice, once based on their perception of dominant stereotypical gender norms in their society and once according to their own beliefs regarding gender roles.

In total, 179 characteristics were identified, including 59 desirable/required characteristics for women, 53 desirable/required characteristics for men, 34 unacceptable characteristics for women, and 33 unacceptable characteristics for men. These collected characteristics covered four different areas: physical characteristics, emotional and social traits, cognitive characteristics, and social roles and main interests. A minimum of three mentions was set as an inclusion criterion. After excluding synonyms, 97 characteristics were chosen, covering all four areas.

3.2 Instrument

The 97 characteristics collected through the open-ended questionnaire were used to create the "Prototypical Gendered Characteristics Questionnaire" (PGCQ). The PGCQ aimed at profiling prototypical femininities and masculinities as reflected in stereotypical characteristics of women and men according to the gender norms of the Syrian and Egyptian cultures. Items were rated on five-point scales comprising the following options: "necessary, desirable, neutral, undesirable and unacceptable for a man/woman". Respondents were instructed to indicate the extent to which each trait is required/desirable for an individual to be a prototypical woman/man. They were also instructed to indicate the desirability level in light of the dominant gender norms in their society, despite their own beliefs.

3.3 Samples and Procedures

An electronic version of PGCQ was offered to various groups of Egyptian and Syrian prospective participants via the online survey software "Qualtrics". Distribution was carried out through email and social media, and the PGCQ was widely circulated via Facebook among various individuals and groups, including university student groups, researcher groups, Syrian expat groups, and civil society platforms.

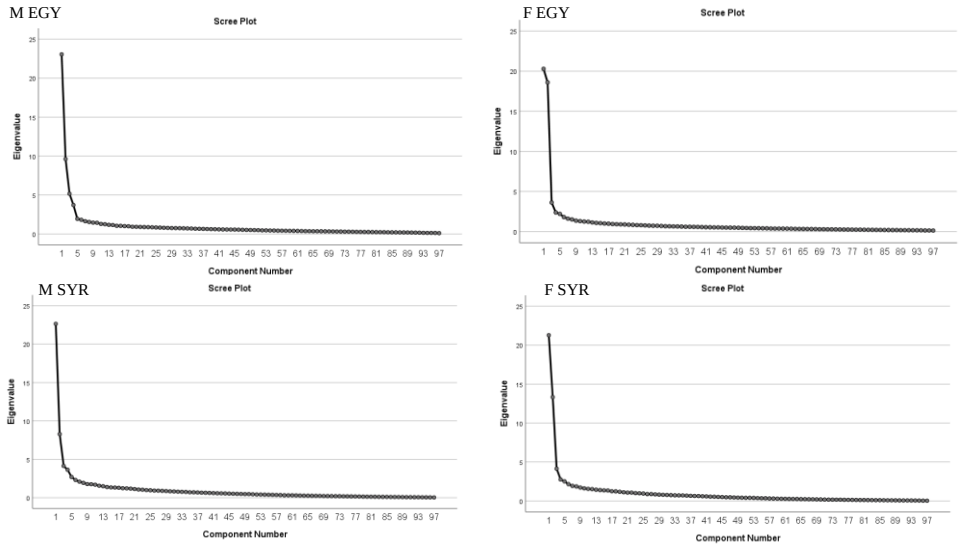
Two separate samples were constructed, an Egyptian sample comprising 456 (236 women and 220 men,) with an age mean of 31.07 years (*SD*: 8.88); and a Syrian sample comprising 185 participants (101 women, and 84 men) with an age mean of 29.09 years (*SD*: 7.17). The educational level was similarly high for participants in the two samples. Among participants in the Egyptian sample, 12.28% were university students, 67.32% were holders of a BA level degree and 16.32% were holders of MA or higher-level degrees, whereas in the Syrian sample the percentages were 13.44%, 65.5%, and 17.74%, respectively. With regard to marital status, 46.27% of participants in the Egyptian sample were single, 32.98% were married, 13.38% were in a romantic relationship other than marriage, and 1.1% were divorced, whereas in the Syrian sample the percentages were 53.76%, 27.69%, 15.05%, and 3.23% respectively. Socio-economic status was determined via self-reported estimation (respondents were instructed to use monthly income, household amenities, and assets as identifying criteria). Accordingly, the percentages of participants who were identified as having an above-average, average, and below-average socioeconomic level were, respectively, 33.19%, 63.08% and 3.74% for the Egyptian sample and 17.74 % and 68.2,8% and 13.98% for the Syrian sample.

3.4 Data analysis

For the purpose of identifying the factors that contribute to prototypical femininities and masculinities in each sample, factor analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-26). Based on the hypothesis that the factors are not orthogonal, Principal Component Analysis with Oblimin rotation was applied on the Egyptian and Syrian samples separately, once for characteristics that are typical for men and once for characteristics that are typical for women. Principal Component Analysis was also carried out with Varimax rotation, and no significant differences were noted.

4. Results

For each sample, factor solutions were chosen based on the Scree Plot (see Figure 2) and the consistency and homogeneity of each factor and therefore eligibility for meaningful interpretation in light of the previous literature and the specific cultural context.



Note. EGY, Egyptian sample; SYR, Syrian sample; F, femininity; M, masculinity.

Figure 2. Scree Plot of Femininity and Masculinity Factors

In the Egyptian and Syrian samples, respectively, 2 factors explained 40.09% and 39.95% of the total variance in the case of femininity, and 4 factors explained 42.84% and 39.91% of the total variance in the case of masculinity (see Table 1).

Table 1. Variance Explained by Femininity and Masculinity Factors

	% Explained Variance		% Explained Variance	
	F EGY	F SYR	M EGY	M SYR
First factor	20.91	21.93	23.76	23.34
Second factor	19.18	13.37	9.92	8.54
Third factor			5.33	4.27
Fourth factor			3.82	3.76
Total Variance Explained	40.09	39.95	42.84	39.91

Note. F, femininity factor; M, masculinity factor; EGY, the Egyptian sample, SYR the Syrian sample.

The criteria to place a characteristic on a specific factor was item loading on the factor being above 0.40. Reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha for each factor and all the factors showed an acceptable *alpha* value (see Table 2).

Table 2. Number of Items and Cronbach's Alpha Value

	F				M			
	Number of items		Cronbach's alpha		Number of items		Cronbach's alpha	
	EGY	SYR	EGY	SYR	EGY	SYR	EGY	SYR
First factor	43	48	.96	.96	42	43	.94	.96
Second factor	46	36	.95	.88	16	14	.87	.79
Third factor					11	8	.60	.75
Fourth factor					21	21	.91	.89

Note. F, femininity factor; M, masculinity factor; EGY, the Egyptian sample, SYR the Syrian sample.

The identified factors showed a high level of consistency between the two samples with regard to the representation of femininity and masculinity characteristics on each factor (see appendix A).

For femininity, the two factors that emerged were labeled (a) "*Assertive Competent Woman*" characterized by physical strength, openness, dominance, competence, and non-conformity to social traditions; and (b) "*Good Wife*" characterized by altruism, nurturance, mothering, conformity to social norms, meeting typical beauty standards, and being concerned with fashion and appearance (see appendix A).

For masculinity, the four factors that emerged were labeled (a) "*Family Man*", characterized by decency, relationality, competence and being family-oriented (b) "*Macho Man*", characterized by physical strength, power, dominance and conformity to social norms; (c) "*Rebellious Man*", characterized by rebelliousness, impulsivity, and expressiveness of sexual desires; and (d) "*Soft and Tender Man*" characterized by emotionality, tenderness, obedience, efficiency with household chores, and being concerned with fashion and appearance (see appendix A).

To ensure that our interpretation of the factors has an acceptable level of inter-rater consistency, six Egyptian and Syrian judges from psychology, sociology, and gender studies disciplines were asked to name each factor in light of the characteristics loaded thereon. The selected six judges were familiar with both the factor analysis method and the cultural context in Egypt and Syria. The suggested labels showed an acceptable level of consistency both among the six judges and with our proposed labels. Five of the six judges used synonyms of the chosen labels, or labels that are close in meaning (e.g., *Boss* or *Autonomous* for the first factor of femininity; *Altruistic Mother* for the second factor of femininity; *Husband* for the first factor of masculinity; and the *Outlaw* for the third factor of masculinity). One judge chose labels of famous Arabic film characters or Arab celebrities that signify the main characteristics of each factor.

To identify the degree to which each femininity and masculinity profile is stereotypically desirable, we compared the desirability means of femininity and masculinity factors. The differences in desirability were examined separately for women and men respondents. It appears that the desirability ranking among the profiles was similar for women and men respondents. Thus, we present the results for women and men respondents pooled together (see Table 3). Significant differences were found between the two femininity profiles and

between each of the four masculinity profiles. In both the Egyptian and Syrian samples, the *Good Wife* was a more desirable femininity prototype compared to the *Assertive Competent Woman*. Also in the two samples, the *Family Man* was the most desirable masculine prototype, followed by the *Macho Man*, the *Soft and Tender Man*, and finally the *Rebellious Man*. For all prototypes, differences in desirability means were significant.

Table 3. Desirability Means Differences of Masculinity and Femininity profiles

		M *(SD)*		95% Confidence Interval Lower Bond, Upper Bond		F statistics		Effect size	
		EGY	SYR	EGY	SYR	EGY	SYR	EGY	SYR
Femininity	F1	3.67 *(.62)*	3.54 *(.56)*	3.61, 3.72	3.48, 3.65	F(1.454) =153.46	F(1.183) =145.60	.25	.44
	F2	4.13 *(.47)*	4.20 *(.41)*	4.08, 4.17	4.14, 4.26				
Masculinity	M1	4.26 *(.46)*	4.22 *(.47)*	4.22, 4.30	4.15, 4.29	F(3.452) =1206.28	F(3.181) =446.53	.89	.88
	M2	3.55 *(.58)*	3.81 *(.50)*	3.49, 3.60	3.74, 3.88				
	M3	2.79 *(.46)*	2.81 *(.57)*	2.74, 2.83	2.73, 2.90				
	M4	3.40 *(.55)*	3.49 *(.53)*	3.36, 3.45	3.41, 3.57				

Post-hoc revealed that all means differences were significant at $p < .0001$.
Note. EGY, Egyptian sample; SYR, Syrian sample; F1, *Assertive Competence Woman* factor; F2, *Good Wife* factor; M1, Family Man factor; M2, *Macho Man* factor; M3, *Rebellious Man* factor; M4, *Soft and Tender* factor. Effect size as measured by Partial Eta Square. All $p < .001$.

5. Discussion

In both investigated cultures, the results show more complexity, specificity, and diversity in the structures of prototypical masculine gender roles compared to feminine ones. This is in line with the results of several earlier studies that indicated a more factorial complexity of masculinity in comparison to femininity (Choi & Fuqua, 2003; Choi, Fuqua & Newman, 2009; Feather, 2007; Waters, Waters, & Pincus, 1977). This difference in relative complexity was consistently found, regardless of whether femininity and masculinity were conceptualized as internalized traits (e.g., Bem, 1975, 1981), or as socio-cultural constructs identified in gender stereotypes or ideologies (e.g., Brannon, 1976; Smiler, 2004). A possible explanation advanced by some studies suggested that masculinity constructs might be more differentiated and complex in nature than femininity constructs (Thompson, 1989). This hypothesis was supported by several theoretical models (e.g., Connell, 1995; Wetherell & Edley, 1999) and further empirical studies (see. Choi & Fuqua, 2003).

Further, in their examination of pancultural gender stereotypes, Williams, Satterwhite, and Best (1999) emphasized that stereotypes concerning men are cross-culturally more articulated than stereotypes concerning women. This is also consistent with the social developmental model of masculine role acquiring, considered by many researchers to be a process that is more salient at an earlier age and more persistent over the life course in comparison to feminine role acquiring (Brannon, 1976, Constantinople, 1973).

In our study, two factors of femininity and four factors of masculinity emerged analogously from each of the two samples. The identified factors showed high consistency across the two cultures, which is an indication of the reliability of the employed models. Each factor comprised a group of physical characteristics, emotional and social traits, cognitive characteristics, social roles, and main interests, which together suggest one coherent profile of personality. As these profiles reflected various possible prototypes that women and men may embrace in each of the two cultures, we interpreted them as multiple co-existing femininities and masculinities. We labeled the femininity profiles *Good Wife* and *Assertive Competent Woman* and the masculinity profiles *Family Man, Macho Man, Rebellious Man,* and *Soft and Tender Man.* The labels were confirmed separately by six independent judges.

This multiplicity runs contrary to how femininity and masculinity were traditionally conceptualized and operationalized under the trait approach (Bem 1974; Spence & Helmreich, 1978) as one single homogeneous profile for each construct, signifying the dominant gender norms concerning women and men (mostly representing expressiveness traits for femininity and instrumentality traits for masculinity). Nevertheless, it is consistent with several more recent theoretical accounts and empirical findings within the field of gender stereotypes and the feminist scholarship, which underlined possible several co-existing forms of masculinities and femininities that are socially produced and possibly adopted by individual women and men.

Through an intersectionality lens, several empirical studies identified several formations of femininities/masculinities in interaction with various demographic and identity variables, such as race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, (E. Cole & Zucker, 2007; Saez, Casado, & Wade, 2010; Settles, 2006; Wade & Gelso, 1998). Experiences such as immigration and displacement were also examined in terms of how they influence people's identification and expression of traditional versus non-traditional gender roles, producing more complex gender systems (Mahalingam & Leu, 2005; Pessar, 1999). A similar account was proposed by Connell (1987; 1995) in her theory on masculinities. Connell presented a framework that emphasized the complexity of the gender hierarchy of power in a contextual setting, which is not merely regulated by the relationship between dominating masculinity and subordinate femininity, but also by several forms of masculinities that enjoy different degrees of support from patriarchy.

Research on gender stereotypes also highlighted the existence of subtypes of women and men, which are locally produced as a result of changes in contextual factors and varied gender performance of women and men (Carpenter & Trentham, 2001; Devine & Baker, 1991; Rudman & Glick, 2008; Vonk & Ashomore, 2003). The most represented gender profiles in this line of research are (a) for women: *Career Woman* and *Housewife*, resembling the two femininity profiles identified in this study, in addition *to Woman Athlete*, and *Sex object*; (b) for men: *Macho man*, *Wimp*, and *Family Man*, resembling three of the four masculinity profiles identified in this study, in addition to other profiles such as *Homosexual* and *Businessman* (Deaux, Winton, Crowley, & Lewis, 1985; Eckes, 1994).

In line with these latter approaches, we can emphasize two possible explanations for why the current study produced multiple coherent profiles rather than one profile with several components; the first relates to how the PGCQ was formulated, and the second to how femininities and masculinities are represented in the examined cultures.

Traditional femininity/masculinity scales— e.g., Bem's Sex-role Inventory (BSRI) and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ)—were based on personality traits mostly signifying agentic and communal stereotypes. In contrast, we started with a large pool of characteristics that were collected through open-ended questions, asking participants to identify both desirable/required (positive) and undesirable/rejected (negative) characteristics for a typical woman/man in their cultural context. This approach possibly left room for (a) capturing varied assumptions about prototypical gender roles to emerge; (b) widening the scope of collected characteristics beyond the dimensions of agency and communion to also cover physical and cognitive characteristics, emotional and social traits, as well as social roles and main interests; and (c) underlining stereotypically undesirable or rejected characteristics for women and men, leading to formulating less desirable femininity/masculinity profiles. Though clearly not preferred, as shown by the desirability mean scores to be discussed in a following section, these profiles were recognized as distinct existing patterns of expressing gender roles. This was especially evident in the cases of the profiles of the *Tender and Soft Man* and the *Rebellious Man*.

On the other hand, a major emphasis within more recent work on femininity and masculinity is the fundamental need to contextualize gender roles, acknowledging and highlighting the core role of socio-economic, cultural, and political factors in shaping masculinities and femininities (Bem, 1993; Budgeon, 2013; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Eagly & Wood, 2011; Yoder & Kahn, 2003). In the two investigated contexts of the study, even though the dominant, most desirable gender profiles (*Good Wife* and *Family Man*) reflect conventional gender stereotypes, the other identified profiles show a degree of relative malleability in gender scripts. We interpret this multiplicity and relative malleability as (a) a reflection of the heterogeneity and diversity of the socio-cultural factors that shape gender roles and ideologies, which corresponds to more recent research efforts that highlight the complexity of Arab gender politics beyond the generalized assumption of rigid homogeneous traditional gender norms (Amar, 2011a; Al-Ali, 2000; Benstead, Jamal, & Lust, 2015; Charrad, 2001; Rizzo, Abdel-Latif, & Meyer, 2007; Jones, Mitchell, & Martin, 2021); and (b) a possible effect of the identified recent socio-political and economic changes taking place during and after the Arab uprisings of 2011 (Alsaba & Kapilashrami, 2018; Buecher & Aniyamuzaala, 2016; Biagini, 2019; Nasser, Mehchy & Abu Ismail, 2013; Suerbaum, 2018), which corresponds to the emphasis placed by Cuddy et al. (2009) on the impact of perceived and actual economic and social conditions on the content of stereotypes (e.g. competence/warmth dimension).

Further, despite differences in contextual factors between Egypt and Syria, the results showed high consistency in prototypes of femininity and masculinity across the two cultures, suggesting relatively analogous underlying gendering processes across the two countries. This may be ascribed to shared elements of history, language, cultural heritage, and social

structures (Cuddy, et al., 2009), and it also likely reflects a similar recent or ongoing processes of reconstruction of gender norms and roles, corresponding to the recent socio-political and economic changes that challenged and problematized the dominance of conventional feminine and masculine roles (Al-Ali, 2012; Amar, 2011a, 2011b; El-Masri, Harvey & Garwood, 2013; El Feki, Heilman, & Barker, 2017).

Several authors have investigated the emerging changes in gender roles and gender relations in Egypt, Syria, and among displaced Syrian communities in relation to political, socio-economic, cultural changes after the Arab uprisings.

In the Syrian context, war, intensive waves of forced displacement, and asylum in new cultural contexts contributed to the emergence of new gender politics (Barakat & Philippot, 2018; Gren, 2018). Forced displacement, in particular, has been linked to major changes in gender relations as well as in gender constructs, due to, inter alia, losing the foundations of the established gender roles when being forced to leave the homeland and confront the new contextual conditions of the hosting culture (Gren, 2018; Suerbaum, 2018). Moreover, the social and economic changes have forced men to abandon practices and roles associated with traditional masculinity, e.g., being the breadwinner and the protector of the family, and to accept new gender politics concerning feminine gender roles, e.g., more freedom of movement for women, and more presence of women in the job market and in the public sphere in general (Buecher & Aniyamuzaala 2016; El-Masri, Harvey & Garwood, 2013).

In a recent study on displaced Syrian men in Egypt, Suerbaum (2008) emphasized how displacement experience has led to the construction of new multiple masculinities. She pointed out how Syrian men in Egypt created a new hierarchy of masculinities, in relation to other Syrian men in other countries, Egyptian men, and Syrian women. She also emphasized how emerging changes in femininities were challenging the core of traditional femininities and masculinities and threatening Syrian men's masculinities. This was reflected, for example, in iterations that women no longer have the "privilege" of staying at home. She concluded that Syrian men in Egypt were forced to create several new prototypes of masculinities, through which they were still positioning themselves as superior over women and other groups of men.

In the context of Egypt, in line with the notion of "Precarious Manhood" (Vandello, Bosson, & Cohen, Burnford & Weaver, 2008) and "Masculinity in Crisis" (see El Feki, 2017/18), several studies have proposed that the forms of masculinities that emerged after 2011 were influenced by the challenges facing Egyptian men in fulfilling traditional masculinities before the 2011-revolution, such as economic hardships rendering men unable to satisfy their traditional gender roles by starting a family or supporting a household (Amar, 2011a; Mustafa, 2014). These challenges possibly problematized conventional masculinity and the norms associated with it, while opening up spaces for new forms of masculinity to emerge, or for existing subordinate forms to gain more visibility.

Concerning femininities, Syrian women were pushed to take over more responsibilities, accept new roles, and acquire new skills and knowledge to be able to join the job market, which was reflected in a higher sense of agency and self-efficacy. This opened up new spaces

for them to develop and practice new femininities that confront conventional cultural notions, most noticeably, the norms confining Syrian women to the private sphere (Gren, 2018). Meanwhile, several studies highlighted changes in Egyptian femininities, emphasizing how the notable engagement of Egyptian women in the revolution of 2011 and its spawn of social and political movements has given rise to new gender politics and gender roles for Egyptian women, giving prominence, and more visibility, to profiles of the assertive, engaged, tough, outspoken, autonomous, or militant women (Amar, 2011b; Biagini, 2019; Hafez, 2014; El Feki, Heilman & Barker, 2017). Moreover, the tough economic and political challenges following the coup in 2013, such as loss of income, mass killings, and mass arrests of members of the opposition, has pushed many women, especially from traditional and conservative backgrounds, to become the breadwinners of their families and to go beyond their traditional feminine roles (Biagini, 2019).

In this regard, we argue that this emergence of new roles for women is possibly reflected in this study in the profile of the *Assertive Competent Women*, which is opposed to conventional femininity as represented in the *Good Wife* profile. This dichotomy corresponds to what Budgeon (2013) highlighted in her review of the dynamics of gender hegemony as the *New Girl* who is assertive, dynamic, and free—as opposed to the image of the passive vulnerable voiceless traditional girl. Budgeon emphasized how the emergence of this new "modern" femininity was a production of a series of social changes in Western societies, most importantly the shift from a private to a public gender regime, which happened as a result of women's growing participation in the public arena. Moreover, it also resembles a polarity that was captured by several social psychology studies between warmth, as the main feature of the traditional feminine role, and competence, as a distinctive characteristic of a modern female leader (Conner & Fiske, 2018; Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012). Adopting this latter form of femininity was found to be linked to experiencing sexism in various cultural contexts including Arab counties (Conner, Glick, & Fiske, 2017; Valved, Kosakowska-Berezecka, Besta, & Martiny, 2021).

In line with Connell's conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity, i.e., the conventional dominant gender norms concerning men which work to contain subordinate forms and to maintain the gender status quo (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), we examined the different degrees of desirability of the identified femininity and masculinity profiles. The results indicated significant differences in mean desirability among these profiles. In both Syrian and Egyptian samples, *Family Man* was the most desirable as a masculine prototype, followed by *Macho M*an, *Soft and Tender Man*, and finally *Rebellious Man.* The *Good Wife* came as a more desirable prototype of femininity than *Assertive Competent Women*. Hence, despite the co-existence of multiple masculinity and femininity profiles, these profiles vary in the extent to which they are stereotypically accepted or desired for men and women. The fact that *Family Man* and *Good Wife* were the most stereotypically desirable for men and women underlines the centrality of family as a main value for the construction of prototypical gender roles in the two investigated cultures, which corresponds to previous literature that identified family as a core foundation in the formulation of masculine and feminine roles in the Arab region (Ali, 2002; Khadr & El-Zeini, 2001).

Moreover, the contents of the masculine prototype of *Family Man* and the feminine prototype of *Good Wife* differ significantly. Both prototypes featured characteristics such as caring for others, being a good partner and a good father/mother, yet characteristics related to competence, e.g., being able to protect others, hard-working, wise, independent, decisive, self-assured, and capable in facing challenges, were central and more evident in the profile of *Family Man*. Contrastingly, the *Good Wife* featured characteristics that are associated with conformity to social norms and compliance, e.g., being shy, polite, obedient, conservative, and not rebellious. This highlights the differences in stereotypical notions regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the Arab family. Additionally, among all the prototypes, *Family Man* appeared as the most idealized profile with the largest number of positive characteristics that cover two domains together: agency/competence and relatedness, while *Good Wife* was represented mostly by emotionality, nurturance, purity, and submissiveness, resembling the features commonly described by previous literature as traditional femininity (Costa, Terracciano, & McCrae, 2001; Levant et al. 2007), which was generally identified as the favorable profile in patriarchal societies (Conner & Fiske, 2018; Conner, Glick, & Fiske, 2017).

The *Assertive Competent Woman* profile included traits associated with agency/competence, e.g., assertiveness, confidence, dominance, ability to protect others, along with several traits that represent relatedness, e.g., being sociable, understanding, funny, and reassuring. Yet, unlike the *Family Man*, this profile contained some traits associated with non-conformity to the traditional feminine role, e.g., being rebellious, expressing sexual desire, and laughing loudly, which intersects with the features of a "self-sexualized" woman (Infanger, Rudman, & Sczesny, 2014), and generally resembles the "career women" commonly found as a subtype of women in research on stereotypes (Vonk & Ashomore, 2003). This rendered the *Assertive Women* as the polar opposite of the *Good Wife*, challenging the usually assumed absolute hegemony of the norms associated with the latter in more patriarchal contexts.

Macho Man was profiled as strong, dominating, conservative, jealous, bad-tempered, career-oriented, well-off, and well-built. It corresponds to the stereotypical *Macho Man* which was identified as a subtype of men by several studies in western contexts (Deaux, Winton, Crowley, & Lewis, 1985; Vonk & Ashomore, 2003). Meanwhile, it resembles the generalized stereotype of Arab men as dominant, controlling and macho (Amar, 2011a). Further, it generally manifests what was described as a main representation of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), which is the imaginary embodiment of the top position in the patriarchal hierarchy of power.

Contrariwise, the third desired profile for masculinity, the *Tender and Soft Man*, presents as the polar opposite of traditional masculinity as described in previous masculinity scales, e.g., restrictive emotional expression, toughness, dominance, and self-reliance, in addition to an anti-feminine factor, i.e., rejection and avoidance of what is believed to be stereotypically feminine (Mahalik, et al., 2003; Smiler, 2004; Levant, McDermott, Hewitt, Alto, & Harris, 2016). It is manifested in emotionality, tenderness, obedience, efficiency with household chores, and being concerned with fashion and appearance, corresponding to what is labeled

in the literature as "effeminate masculinity," which was historically presented as the stigmatized opposite to hegemonic masculinity (Wetherell & Edley, 1999). It also resembles the profile of "wimp" and "homosexual" as two types of men identified by the literature on stereotypes (Vonk & Ashomore, 2003).

Finally, there is *Rebellious Man*, who is impulsive, violent, stubborn, an adventurer, expresses his sexual desires, has a bad reputation, and is not religious. This profile resembles the rebellious man described by Wetherell and Edley, which they considered as a form of superficial resistance of hegemonic masculinity, through which men try to achieve autonomy form social conventions and flouting of social expectations (Wetherell & Edley, 1999).

In conclusion, the way in which each of the two femininities and the four masculinities profiles was presented through its distinctive characteristics, along with the fact that these profiles coexist in the same cultural context, even if with different degrees of desirability, underlines once again the complexity and diversity of gender roles, and the fundamental need to contextualize them. How these different femininities and masculinities are represented, adopted, practiced, and negotiated on the ground by individual women and men is a possible direction for future research.

6. Conclusion and Limitations

The results of this study dispute older notions of femininity and masculinity as unified single profiles, in line with the more recent conceptualization of femininities/masculinities in feminist scholarship as contextual multidimensional constructs that are represented in multiple co-existing forms. At the same time, and in line with the emphasis placed by modern cultural and cross-cultural psychology on the complexity and contextuality of gender roles, the results contest the stereotypical image of gender roles in the Arab region.

In light of previous literature, we stressed that gender roles in Syria, as in Egypt, have been significantly challenged and fractured due to dramatic political, economic, and social changes. As the old gender roles were falling into crisis, a phase of fluidity was brought about, and new gender politics emerged. Gender roles were likely rearticulated in multiple prototypes of femininities and masculinities, as reflected in the results of the current study. In this regard, the study stresses echoes of feminist psychology accounts that emphasize the need for femininities and masculinities to be contextualized and analyzed in relation to their shaping socio-economic, political, and cultural factors.

Further analysis, via an intersectionality lens, is needed to investigate how these identified femininities and masculinities prototypes are connected to other social factors like gender, political and gender ideologies, educational level, and class. Finally, as understanding the patterns of prototypical femininities/masculinities is a first step towards understanding how individuals selectively internalize, negotiate, and reshape gender norms, further research is needed to investigate how the indicated prototypes are adopted, embodied, performed, or negotiated by women and men in reality, and how this corelates to different psychological processes such as stress and coping.

Chapter 4

Do Adopted Feminine Gender Roles Modulate the Psychological Consequences of Sexual Violence?

A Study on Syrian and Egyptian Women

Abstract

This paper investigates how feminine gender roles relate to depression and PTSD in the context of sexual violence in two samples of Egyptian and Syrian women. Two femininity profiles, identified as co-existing femininities in the two cultures (Assertive Competent Woman and Good Wife), were used as predictors of depression and PTSD symptoms, with exposure to sexual violence and rumination as mediators. In both samples, the results suggest that adopting an Assertive Competent Woman profile negatively predicts abstract rumination and depression while the Good Wife profile negatively predicts exposure to sexual violence. Structural Equation Modeling indicated that the Good Wife femininity profile predicts less exposure to sexual violence, yet when women who adopt that profile experience sexual violence, they would ruminate, which would predict depression and PTSD symptoms. Differences were found between the Egyptian and Syrian samples with regard to the role each femininity profile plays in predicting exposure to sexual violence and the consequences thereof. These differences were discussed in light of a conceptualization of gender roles as multifaceted constructs that are formulated, practiced, and negotiated differently depending on the socio-economic and cultural context.

Keywords

Femininities, Sexual Violence, Syrian Women, Egyptian Women, Abstract Rumination, PTSD

Do Adopted Feminine Gender Roles Modulate the Psychological Consequences of Sexual Violence?

A Study on Syrian and Egyptian Women

1. Introduction

Gender differences in depression is a topic that has obtained great attention within psychology research for decades (Eagly, Eaton, Rose, Riger & McHugh, 2012). Although it is cross-culturally established that depression is nearly twice as prevalent among women as it is among men (Kessler, McGonagle, Swartz & Blazer, 1993; Weissman, et al., 1996), the principal factors underlying this discrepancy are still an area of ongoing scientific debate, reflecting different underlying theoretical models. Contesting the explanation offered by biological models for these differences, e.g., hormonal or genetic factors (e.g., Cyanowski, Frank, Young & Shear, 2000), feminist scholars underlined the role of several psycho-social factors and mechanisms that contribute to depression in women. This included two major lines of research that are relevant to the current project.

The first line emphasized how women's positions of power in society, and the underlying norms associated with gender roles, make them more exposed to strains, hardships, and traumatic experiences. A fundamental argument is that under the traditional division of labor, women are mainly, or solely, responsible for undertaking household chores, nursing children, and caring for elderly and sick family members. This contributes to women's distress and depression, while depriving them of equal opportunities for personal achievement (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001). This feminist perspective also highlighted how sexism and discrimination, as products of patriarchal values, restrain women's opportunities in the public sphere and determine their position of power in the private sphere, thereby contributing to depression and other related psychopathologies (Swim, Hyers, Cohen & Ferguson, 2002). Moreover, several feminist scholars stressed the importance of recognizing the extent to which the patriarchal structure of most societies produces patterns of gender-based violence (GBV), most notably in the form of sexual violence (SV). This was identified as a major source of women's affective psychopathologies including depression and PTSD (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001; Stoppard, 1999; Webster & Dunn, 2005).

Leading the second line of research, Nolen-Hoeksema highlighted how the mechanisms through which women are socialized to react to stress, including mediating processes such as rumination, make women more prone to develop depression (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987). In her Response Style theory, she explained the greater prevalence of depression among women through their higher engagement in ruminative responses (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991; Nolen-Hoeksema, Larson & Grayson, 1999), which she defined as "a mode of responding to distress that involves repetitively and passively focusing on symptoms of distress and the possible

causes and consequences of these symptoms" (Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco & Lyubomirsky, 2008, p. 400).

Furthermore, a large body of research has positioned rumination as a core psychological mediating process with major influence on the onset, severity, and continuity of depression and other related psychopathologies, specifically in interaction with stressful and traumatic events (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991; Seligman & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987; Spasojevic & Alloy, 2001; Tamres, Janicki & Helgeson, 2002). In line with Nolen-Hoeksema's work, several studies highlighted that in response to stress, women ruminate significantly more than men, which is a main factor contributing to gender differences in depression (Panayiotou & Papageorgiou, 2007; Johnson & Whisman, 2013; Tamres, Janicki & Helgeson, 2002). More recently, two distinctive types of rumination have been identified: (a) constructive concrete rumination; and (b) unconstructive abstract rumination, which predicts depression and persistence of PTSD symptoms (Michael, Halligan, Clark & Ehlers, 2007; Watkins, 2008).

Within both lines of research, women's depression is explicitly or implicitly attributed to constructed conventional gender roles and associated dominant feminine and masculine norms. On the one hand, it is shown that feminine gender roles confine women to a specific position of power in the gender hierarchy, which is typically associated with specific gendered strains and gendered traumas. On the other hand, it is underlined that through gendered socialization processes that aim for role acquiring, women develop specific styles of responses to strains and stress such as rumination.

Within the more recent lines of research in psychology, femininity and masculinity have been conceptualized as "stereotyped definitions embedded within the cultural discourse" (Bem, 1993, P125), describing the dominant social beliefs and norms concerning women and men, and reflecting the cultural and socio-political forces that determine gender scenarios to which women and men are required to adhere. In this sense, they may be operationalized as "clusters of socially desirable attributes stereotypically considered to differentiate males and females" (Spence & Helmreich, 1978, p. 3).

Several theoretical models emphasized how, through socialization processes, these socio-cultural constructs of gender roles are internalized, to various extents, as a part of an individual's self-construal, in the form of gendered characteristics. While social constructs of gender, e.g., gender stereotypes, act as social regulatory mechanisms for the socially required/accepted behavior, internalized characteristics serve as self-regulatory mechanisms for gender role performance by individuals (Bem, 1981; Eagly & Wood, 2011).

Femininity/masculinity is traditionally conceptualized, within the traits-based approach, as a single homogeneous profile that represents the conventional gender norms and stereotypical gender role expectations (Bem, 1974; Spence and Helmreich, 1978). As such, femininity was mostly marked by emotionality, expressiveness, nurturance, and submissiveness; and masculinity by instrumentality and autonomy (Smiller & Epstein, 2010; Costa Jr, Terracciano & McCrae, 2001; Choi & Fuqua, 2003).

This unitary conceptualization has been criticized by feminist scholars for reproducing gender polarization by only representing the dominant and conventional masculine versus

feminine stereotypes, neglecting the relative malleability and changeability of gender norms, and underestimating the ability of individuals to challenge, resist or negotiate normative stereotypes while possibly producing other forms of femininities and masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Hoffman, 2001; Morawski, 1985).

Nevertheless, several empirical studies pointed out the multiplicity of gender prototypes in interaction with demographic factors, group identities, and the changeability of the contextual factors that shape, and change, gender norms (Biagini, 2019; E. Cole & Zucker, 2007; Mahalingam & Leu, 2005; Pessar, 1999; Saez, Casado & Wade, 2010; Settles, 2006; Wade & Gelso, 1998).

Along similar lines, research on gender stereotypes also underlined the existence of multiple profiles of women and men, i.e., subtypes of women and men that exist in a specific context and are produced by changes in socio-cultural and economic factors or different gender performance of the individual women and men (Carpenter & Trentham, 2001; Devine & Baker, 1991; Vonk & Ashmore, 2003; Rudman & Glick, 2008).

Meanwhile, Connell presented a contextual framework that accentuates the complexity of the gender hierarchy, emphasizing how this hierarchy is not merely a representation of the power relationship between femininity and masculinity, but it is also constructed as a result of the more complex, multilayered power relationships between a hegemonic, dominant form of masculinity, which is most supported by the patriarchy and several other subordinate forms of masculinities (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

The degree to which adopting a particular femininity or masculinity profile is encouraged, accepted, rejected, or punished through social and political forces, differs across cultural and historical contexts (Bosson, et al., 2021; DiMuccio, Yost & Helweg-Larsen, 2017; Valved, Kosakowska-Berezecka, Besta & Martiny, 2021). It is generally concluded by cultural and cross-cultural studies that, although being possibly produced in diverse forms, dominant gender norms, which are supported by the patriarchal structure, are more definite and rigid in more patriarchal cultures, i.e., cultures with a lower degree of gender equality, possibly leading to stricter forms of negative social sanctions against those who behave in a counter-stereotypic manner (Jones, Mitchell & Martin, 2021; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan & Nauts, 2012; Valved, Kosakowska-Berezecka, Besta & Martiny, 2021). Within this perspective, sexism, GBV, and SV are postulated to be possible forms of social sanctions against women who threaten the gender status-quo and its supported patriarchal forces (Conner, Glick & Fiske, 2017; Glick, et al., 2000; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan & Nauts, 2012; Vandello, Bosson, Cohen, Burnaford, & Weaver, 2008).

The psychological consequences of adopting one socio-culturally shaped form of femininity as part of women's self-construal are the focus of the current study. This notion is referred to below as *adopted femininity profile*, while femininities as social constructs that represent sets of gender stereotypes concerning women is referred to as 'prototypical femininities/prototypical feminine profiles.'

2. Context of the Study

This paper is concerned with two cultural contexts of Arab countries with a Muslim majority, Egyptian and Syrian. Though established as highly dominated by patriarchal gender norms (Alexander & Welzel, 2011; Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Said-Foqahaa & Mazaid, 2011), increasing research efforts are highlighting the complexity and multiplicity of gender politics and roles within the Arab world (Benstead, Jamal & Lust, 2015; Glas, Spierings, Lubbers & Scheepers, 2019; Jones, Mitchell & Martin, 2021; Rizzo, Abdel-Latif & Meyer, 2007). In addition to capturing changes in Arab gender roles due to political, cultural, and economic changes in the region (Charrad, 2001; El Feki, Heilman & Barker, 2017; Mustafa, 2014), these efforts illuminate how gender norms are being challenged and negotiated by the everyday behavior of Arab women and men, possibly leading to new forms of gender roles that contest the hemogenic conventional forms (Al-Ali, 2000; Amar, 2011b; Kandiyoti, 1988; Fargues, 2005; Rubenberg, 2001). Within this contextual framework, it was postulated that 2011-Arab uprisings represented a major point of change in femininities and masculinities within the Egyptian and Syrian cultures (Amar, 2011b, Al-Ali, 2012; El-Masri, Harvey & Garwood, 2013; Gren, 2018).

In January 2011, Egypt witnessed a revolution leading to the ousting of a regime that had stayed in power for 30 years. In 2013, a brutal military coup brought about excessive waves of State violence. During and after the revolution, a remarkable increase in Egyptian women's social and political engagement has been documented, especially among younger women from socio-economic and geographical peripheries, who used to have much less access to the public sphere. Egyptian women have generally gained more space, not only to become part of political and social movements, but also to speak up against discrimination, sexism, and GBV, especially SV, in both the public and the private spheres (Al-Ali, 2012; Hassan, 2015).

In Syria, the 2011 popular uprising was marked by notable participation by women, but it quickly turned into an ongoing militarized conflict among multiple regional and international forces, causing massive waves of forced displacement. War and displacement experiences dramatically influenced women's roles in the Syrian society, granting them more space but also putting more responsibilities on their shoulders; for example, through having them become the main or sole breadwinners for their families. Conversely, men were forced to negotiate or give up their dominance in the public sphere, in the household, and over decision-making (Alsaba & Kapilashrami, 2013; Barakat & Philippot, 2018; El-Masri, Harvey & Garwood, 2013; Gren, 2018).

As discussed in a large body of research, it is well established that major political and economic changes directly influence gender roles, through producing new femininities and masculinities that reflect these changes or satisfy the emerging socio-economic needs associated therewith (Armengol, 2014; Budgeon, 2013; Biagini, 2019; Goldstein, 2001). Along the same lines, recent studies concerned with the Arab region have highlighted changes in Arab femininities and masculinities (see Al-Ali, 2012; Amar, 2011b). Some addressed the failing of hegemonic masculinity when men could no longer satisfy their

traditional roles as breadwinners and family protectors, especially in the Syrian context, where women's presence in the public sphere before 2011 (e.g., education and labor market) had been restricted and dramatically lower than men's (Alsaba & Kapilashrami, 2013; Barakat & Philippot, 2018; Gren, 2018). Other studies highlighted how the Arab spring generated cracks in traditional gender roles, leading to a phase of relative fluidity, during which new gender roles have been constructed (El-Masri, Harvey & Garwood, 2013; Suerbaum, 2018; Gren, 2018). Other scholars underlined how Egyptian and Syrian women were able to push the boundaries of traditional femininity, despite serious challenges and at heavy prices, producing new femininity profiles with more agency, assertiveness, rebelliousness, and militancy in direct opposition to the construction of traditional femininity (Al-Ali, 2014; Barakat & Philippot, 2021c; El-Feki, Heilman & Barker, 2017).

During this period of social and political upheaval, a considerable increase in GBV, and particularly SV, was observed in both Egypt and Syria.

In Egypt, this included several aggressive waves of gang rape and mob sexual assaults against women during protests and mass gatherings, manifested in a horrifying large-scale phenomenon between 2011 and 2013. In parallel, a marked rise in other forms of sexual violence, such as street sexual harassment and assault and online sexual harassment, was also noted (Al-Ali, 2012; Al-Ali, 2014; Zaki & Abd Alhamid, 2014; Hassan, 2015). This was interpreted by several scholars as a backlash against women's defiance of traditional feminine roles through increased participation in social and political movements during and after the Egyptian revolution (Kandiyoti, 2013; International Federation for Human Rights; Nazra for Feminist Studies; New Women Foundation & Uprising of Women in the Arab World, 2014; Zakarriya, 2019; Zaki & Abd Alhamid, 2014). This echoes Kandiyoti's notion of *masculinist restoration* which "comes into play at the point when patriarchy-as-usual is no longer fully secure and requires higher levels of coercion and the deployment of more varied ideological state apparatuses to ensure its reproduction" (Kandiyoti, 2013).This also resembles a line of research that investigated and underlined the social sanctions, including sexual violence, against women who threaten the gender status quo (Conner, Glick & Fiske, 2017; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan & Nauts, 2012).

Nevertheless, it is important to stress that SV in Egypt is not an exclusively post-2011 phenomenon. Several authors underlined the massive prevalence of SV against women prior to the revolution in both, private and public domains (McRobie, 2014). It has been repeatedly emphasized that SV is an old and persistent epidemic deeply rooted in the Egyptian society, affecting almost all women on a daily basis, with a notable degree of societal tolerance. It is supported and justified by cultural attitudes and social norms, mostly blaming women for not adhering to "proper" conduct and appearance (International Federation for Human Rights; Nazra for Feminist Studies; New Women Foundation & Uprising of Women in the Arab World, 2014; Sadler, 2018). According to the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR), in 2005, 83% of Egyptian women reported exposure to sexual harassment, and 46.1% reported experiencing sexual harassment on a daily basis (Shoukry, Hassan & Abul Komsan, 2005). A more recent study by UN Women reported that 99.3% of Egyptian women have

been subjected to street sexual harassment, and 91.5% experienced unwanted physical contact in the streets (El Feki, 2017/18).

Compared to Egypt, SV is an understudied phenomenon in Syria. Despite a slight improvement after 2011, several authors underlined how reporting and speaking up against SV remains a major taboo in Syria, triggering fear of social stigma and shaming by social authorities (Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights, 2018; International Federation for Human Rights, 2012).

The vast majority of reports on SV after 2011 have been connected to the conflict, showing how SV has been employed as a weapon of war targeting women in areas under the control of both, the ruling regime and the Islamist opposition. Women prisoners and family members of fighters, and generally, women in areas exposed to military attacks, were at significant risk of SV in the form of rape, sexual assault, sexual slavery, sexual trafficking, and forced marriage (Alsaba & Kapilashrami, 2013; Independent International Commission of Inquiry, 2018; The Lancet, 2013). Further, several reports and studies underlined the emergence of SV against forcibly displaced women, including sexual exploitation during the journey from Syria, and sexual harassment and exploitation among refugee communities in the destination countries (Amnesty International, 2016; International Federation for Human Rights, 2012).

Against this backdrop, a number of crucial and timely questions emerge, pertaining to the dynamic relationship between gender roles, gendered traumas like SV, and the psychological consequences of such traumas. Understanding this relationship can serve as a foundation to deepen our understanding of how women adopt different femininities depending on the context in which they live, how adopting a specific femininity profile might lead to specifically gendered traumas, and how women's responses to trauma can be affected by their adopted feminine profile.

In another recent study by the authors of this paper, factor analysis was conducted with the aim of identifying the construction of femininities and masculinities in Egypt and Syria after 2011, using a large sample of 456 Egyptian and 185 Syrian women and men. Two factors of femininity and four factors of masculinity emerged in each sample. These factors reflected multiple co-existing prototypical femininities and masculinities in each of the two cultures and reflected a high level of consistency between the two samples.

The two femininity prototypes were named the *Good Wife* and the *Assertive Competent Woman*. The *Good Wife* profile comprised characteristics which are associated with conformity to social norms and compliance (e.g., shy, obedient, polite), while satisfying the role of a mother and a wife (e.g., loves children, emotional, efficient with household). The *Assertive Competent Woman* profile emphasized a sense of agency and competence traits such as being independent, decisive, self-assured, strong, and ambitious. A post-analysis comparing the desirability means of the two profiles showed significant differences, with the *Good Wife* profile emerging as the more desirable prototype of femininity in both samples (Barakat & Philippot, 2021a).

In this context, the present paper aims at investigating the relationships between exposure to SV, femininity profiles as adopted by women (i.e., women's self-assessment of the degree to which they adopt each of the characteristics forming each femininity profile), abstract unconstructive rumination (AR), depression, and PTSD symptoms, in a sample of Syrian and Egyptian women. In line with the theorization of SV as a form of social sanction against women who adopt non-conventional feminine roles (Conner, Glick & Fiske, 2017; Kandiyoti, 2013), we hypothesize that adopting the *Good Wife* profile will predict less exposure to SV, while adopting the *Assertive Competent Woman* profile will predict more exposure to SV.

Furthermore, we hypothesize that exposure to SV will mediate the relationship between each of the two femininity profiles and AR, while AR will mediate the relationship between exposure to SV and both, depression and PTSD, as possible trauma outcomes.

We also hypothesize that the patterns of associations among the study variables may differ between the Egyptian and Syrian samples in relation to their different underlying socio-cultural conditions.

To test our hypotheses, we will: (a) identify correlations between study variables; (b) identify whether each of the two femininity profiles would predict SV, AR, depression, and PTSD when adopted by Syrian and Egyptian women; and finally, (c) examine models which explain the relationship between the adopted femininity profile as an independent variable, SV, and AR as two mediating variables and depression and PTSD as outcomes.

3. Method

3.1 Instruments

A set of questionnaires was used to assess the following variables: (a) adopted femininity profile, (b) exposure to SV, (c) exposure to war trauma, (d) AR, (e) depressive symptoms, and (f) PTSD symptoms, as detailed below.

(1) The Adopted Femininity Prototypes Scale (AFPS) is a self-construal questionnaire designed by the authors in Arabic, comprising a list of 53 desirable or undesirable characteristics (i.e., physical characteristics, emotional and social traits, cognitive characteristics, and social roles and main interests) for prototypical femininities in the Egyptian and Syrian cultures (See appendix B). These 53 items were extracted from a larger list of 97 gendered characteristics, that was employed with a sample of 456 Egyptian and 185 Syrian men and women to identify the factorial structure of prototypical femininity and masculinity in Egypt and Syria. The list of 97 traits was created using an open-ended questionnaire asking participants to list the desirable and undesirable characteristics of prototypical femininity and masculinity, as defined by the dominant gender norms of their culture (Barakat & Philippot, 2021a). The 53-trait AFPS used in the current study consists of two subscales, assessing women's adopting of two femininity profiles: The *Assertive Competent Woman* Scale (comprising 22 traits loaded on the first femininity factor in the two samples and representing the *Assertive Competent Woman* profile), and the *Good Wife* scale

(comprising 23 traits loaded on the second femininity factor in the two samples and representing the *Good Wife* profile) (see appendix C). For each trait, the participants indicated the extent to which the respective trait describes them on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 to 5. The internal consistency of the two scales was calculated for the Egyptian and Syrian samples using Cronbach's *alpha*, showing a satisfactory level (see Table 4).

(2) The Sexual Violence Questionnaire (SVQ) was designed by the authors in Arabic to screen different possible SV incidents women can experience, varying from verbal sexual harassment to rape. SVQ contained twelve possible incidents, asking women respondents to indicate whether they ever experienced each type of violence before. If yes, they were asked to indicate the frequency of the incident (happened once or twice or happened several times), for each of six different possible perpetrators (a stranger, someone in a power position, a colleague or a friend, a family member, a group of people, and a current or previous partner) (see appendix D). A mean score of each type of violence, then an overall mean score of all types of violence, were calculated to indicate exposure to SV for each participant.

(3) The PTSD-event List (LEC5) is a list of 17 possible traumatic events which was designed to screen potentially traumatic events in a respondent's lifetime (National Center for PTSD, 2015a). The list was translated into Arabic and back-translated, and both the original and back-translated versions showed high consistency. For the current study, only the item assessing exposure to a war trauma was included to control for its effect in the Syrian sample.

(4) The Abstract rumination (AR) scale is an eight-item subscale of the Cambridge-Exeter Repetitive Thought Scale (Mini-CERTS) (Douilliez, et al., 2014), assessing the unconstructive form of repetitive thinking. Mini-CERTS was translated into Arabic, then back-translated, and the original and back-translated versions showed high consistency. The Arabic version used in this study showed an acceptable level of internal consistency among the two samples of the study (see Table 4).

(5) Zung Self-rating Depression Scale (ZSD-Ar) is an Arabic translation of the short-self-administered survey ZSD (Zung, 1965) that measures depression as a state. It consists of 20 items assessing affective, psychological, and somatic symptoms of depression an individual is experiencing during the past several days. The Arabic version of ZSD showed a satisfactory level of internal consistency in the current study (see Table 4).

(6) The PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL5) is a 20-item self-report measure that assesses the presence and severity of PTSD symptoms according to the DSM-5 criteria (National Center for PTSD, 2015b). PCL-5 was translated into Arabic and back-translated. The original and back-translated versions showed high consistency, and the Arabic version showed a high Cronbach's *alpha* value (see Table 4).

Table 4. Scales Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha)

	Egyptian sample	Syrian sample
Zung Depression Scale	.86	.80
PCL-5 (PTSD)	.94	.93
Abstract Rumination	.72	.61
Assertive Competent Woman femininity profile	.87	.83
Good Wife femininity profile	.87	.87

3.2 Procedures and sample

The questionnaires were offered in both online and paper formats. The inclusion criteria were to be between 21 and 65 years of age; to be able to read and write; and to be living in Egypt for Egyptians, or to be living in, or to have fled after 2011 from, Syria for Syrians. For the Egyptian sample, 82.7% of total responses were received online and 17.3% in paper format, whereas for the Syrian sample the percentages were 27.7% and 72.3%, respectively.

The online version was applied through Qualtrics and distributed using emails and social media platforms, which included circulation via Facebook among various individuals and groups, including university student groups, researchers' groups, Syrian expats and refugee groups, and civil society platforms.

The paper version was filled in group sessions with Egyptian public university students in Egypt and with the members of the Syrian displaced population in Lebanon. The sessions with the Syrian sample were facilitated by several Syrian and Lebanese NGOs. Each session included between 15 to 20 people and lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour. Principles of confidentiality and voluntary participation were explained to the participants at the beginning of the sessions, and the right to withdraw at any point during the session was ensured. Both the paper and online versions were anonymized. All participants were offered an option to contact the first author to receive psychological support at no charge in case participation in the study triggered negative emotions. The purpose of including a paper version was to mitigate possible demographic bias due to limited internet access, especially by including a less privileged population like Syrian displaced communities in informal settlements in Lebanon. The characteristics of each of the two samples are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Study Samples Characteristics

	Egyptian sample	Syrian sample
Sample Size	307	159
Age	M:28.93, *SD* 8.78	M: 33.34, *SD* 8.86
Socio-economic Level	Below average: 5.9%, Average: 71%, Above average 23.1%	Below average: 49.1%, Average: 45.9%, Above average 5%
Education	Below BA degree: 22.4%, BA level degree 59.9%; Post-graduate degree: 17.7%.	Below BA degree: 64.9%, BA level degree 27%; Post-graduate degree: 8.1%
Marital status	Single: 53.4%; Married: 22.8%, In a relationship: 12.4%; Divorced: 7.7%, Widow:1.3%	Single: 19.5%; Married: 55.3%; In a relationship: 7.5%, Divorced: 5.7%, Widow: 7.5%
Other		Still living in Syria: 10.7%, Expats, displaced and refugees: 88.7%

Note. Education was represented by the highest obtained degree to date; Socio-economic Level was estimated by the respondents themselves based on monthly income, household amenities, and assets.

3.3 Data analysis

The statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS IBM-26 and Stata-16. The applied statistical methods included: (i) Independent sample t-test, to assess whether there are differences between the Syrian and Egyptian samples; (ii) Pearson bivariate correlation, to assess associations between the study variables; (iii) Linear regression, to measure the effect of each femininity profile on AR, depression, and PTSD; and (iv) Structural Equation Modeling to identify the best model that fits the data using exposure to trauma and AR as two mediators. In order to reduce type one error concerning multiple correlations and *t*-test, only tests with a *p-value* less than .01 were considered.

4. Results

No significant differences were found between Egyptian and Syrian women on depression or PTSD means, but significant differences were found in all other variables. Syrian women scored significantly higher than Egyptians for both adopted *Good Wife* and *Assertive Competent Woman* profiles. Egyptian women were higher in AR, and exposure to SV. The effect sizes of the differences varied between medium to high (see Table 6). Accordingly, we decided to investigate the research questions among Syrian and Egyptian women separately.

Table 6. T-test for Equality of Means

	Egyptian sample		Syrian sample		Mean difference	Std error difference	Effect Size	95% Confidence Interval	
	Mean	Std	Mean	Std				Lower Bond	Upper Bond
Assertive Woman	78.09	10.63	81.61	10.64	-3.53**	1.04	.332	-5.57	-1.48
Good Wife	78.48	12.03	89.40	11.92	-10.92**	1.17	.910	-13.22	-8.62
Abstract Rumination	19.68	4.40	18.17	3.82	1.51**	.39	.358	.736	2.286
Depression	51.28	10.00	50.76	8.86	.52	.91		-1.26	2.30
PTSD	57.19	19.10	56.16	17.14	1.03	1.74		-2.40	4.45
Sexual Violence	4.19	2.48	2.65	2.50	1.54**	.24	.618	1.06	2.02

Note. Mean difference and Std error difference when Equal variances not assumed; Effect size was measured using Hedges' g test; ** P < .01.

4.1 Correlation

In the Egyptian women sample, adopting an *Assertive Competent Woman* profile or a *Good Wife* profile significantly negatively correlated with AR and depression, but only *the Good Wife* negatively correlated with SV, and PTSD symptoms (see Table 7). In the Syrian sample, the *Good Wife* profile negatively correlated with SV, while the *Assertive Competent Woman* negatively correlated with AR and depression. None of the two profiles were associated with PTSD nor war trauma (see Table 8).

Abstract rumination correlated positively with SV, depression, and PTSD in the two samples, and it did not correlate with war trauma in the Syrian sample. Exposure to SV correlated with both depression and PTSD in the Egyptian sample, but only with PTSD in the Syrian sample (see Tables 7 and 8). War trauma was only assessed in the Syrian sample, and it correlated only with more exposure to SV.

Table 7. Correlations Matrix for the Egyptian Sample

	Assertive Woman	Good Wife	SV	AR	Depression	PTSD
1. Assertive Woman	1					
2. Good Wife	.23**	1				
3. Sexual Violence	.10	-.31**	1			
4. AR	-.31**	-.24**	.21**	1		
5. Depression	-.22**	-.25**	.25**	.57**	1	
6. PTSD	-.08	-.16**	.41**	.50**	.68**	1

Note. ** P < .01, * P < .05.

Table 8. Correlations Matrix for the Syria Sample

	Assertive Woman	Good Wife	SV	AR	Depression	PTSD	War Trauma
1. Assertive Woman	1						
2. Good Wife	.43**	1					
3. SV	-.10	-.41**	1				
4. AR	-21**	-.13	.33**	1			
5. Depression	-.27**	.17*	.05	.50**	1		
6. PTSD	.15	.15	.32**	.57**	.69**	1	
7. War Trauma	.00	.01	.17*	.15	.06	.14	1

Note. ** P < .01, * P < .05.

4.2 Regression

Using the linear regression analysis, in the Egyptian sample, more exposure to SV was predicted by adopting the *Assertive Competent Woman* profile, while adopting the *Good Wife* profile predicted less exposure to SV. AR and depression were negatively predicted by both the *Assertive competent woman* and the *Good Wife* profiles. Adopting the *Good Wife* profile predicted less PTSD symptoms, whereas the *Assertive Competent Woman* profile failed to predict PTSD when controlling for the effect of the *Good Wife* (see Table 9).

In the Syrian sample, less SV was predicted by adopting the *Good Wife* profile, and the *Assertive Competent Woman* profile failed to predict SV. Both AR and depression were negatively predicted by the *Assertive Competent Woman*, but not the *Good Wife*. Neither of the two profiles predicted PTSD (see Table 10).

Table 9. Linear Regression of Femininity Profiles as Predictors in the Egyptian Sample

Dependent	Predictor	B	β	Coefficient Std. Error	t	CI for B Lower Bound	Upper Bound	R^2	F	Std error of the Estimate
SV	Model							.13	22.29**	2.32
	Assertive Woman	.04**	.18**	.01	3.22	.02	.07			
	Good Wife	-.07**	-.35**	.01	-6.43	-.10	-.05			
AR	Model							.13	22.41**	4.13
	Assertive Woman	-.11**	-.27**	.02	-4.95	-.16	-.07			
	Good Wife	-.07**	-.18**	.02	-3.27	-.11	-.03			
D	Model							.09	14.50**	9.59
	Assertive Woman	-.16**	-.17**	.05	-3.01	-.26	-.06			
	Good Wife	-.17**	-.21**	.05	-3.67	-.26	-.08			
PTSD	Model							.03	4.24*	18.90
	Assertive Woman	-.09	-.05	.10	-.82	-.29	.12			
	Good Wife	-.23**	-.15**	.09	-2.53	-.42	-.05			

Note. B, Unstandardized coefficient, β, Standardized coefficients, CI, 95% Confidence Interval for B; * indicates P < .05, **indicates P <.01.

Table 10. Linear Regression of Femininity Profiles as Predictors in the Syrian Sample

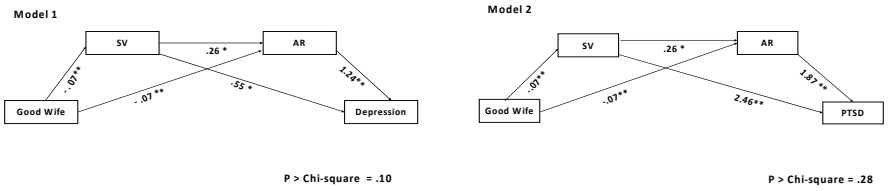
Dependent	Predictor	B	β	Coefficient Std. Error	t	CI for B Lower Bound	Upper Bound	R^2	F	Std error of the Estimate
SV	Model							.17	16.44**	2.29
	Assertive Woman	.02	.09	.02	1.17	-.01	.06			
	Good Wife	-.09**	-.45**	.02	-5.57	-.13	-.06			
AR	Model							.05	3.633*	3.76
	Assertive Woman	-.07*	-.19*	.03	-2.16	-.13	-.01			
	Good Wife	-.02	-.05	.03	-.53	-.07	.04			
D	Model							.07	6.24**	8.58
	Assertive Woman	-.20**	-.24**	.07	2.80	-.34	-.06			
	Good Wife	-.05	.06	.06	-.75	-.17	.08			
PTSD	Model							.03	2.47	16.98
	Assertive Woman	-.17	-.10	.14	-1.19	-.45	.11			
	Good Wife	-.15	-.10	.13	-1.18	-.40	.10			

Note. B, Unstandardized coefficient, β, Standardized coefficients, CI, 95% Confidence Interval for B; * indicates P < .05, ** indicates P < .01.

4.3 Trauma outcome models

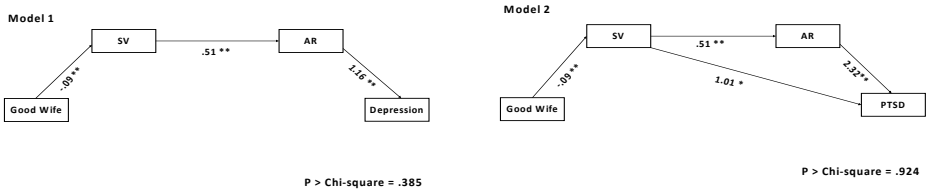
Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was applied on both samples using Stata-16 to test whether SV and AR mediate the relationship between each of the two profiles and the trauma outcomes (Depression and PTSD). The paths between the two profiles and AR and between SV and trauma outcomes were also tested. The paths that were found to be statistically insignificant were removed from the model, and re-estimation was conducted to reach the model that fits the data best (i.e., where all paths between variables are significant, P < Chi-square value is greater than .05 indicating an accepted overall Goodness of fit of the model).

In the two samples, SV then AR, consecutively, mediated the relationship between adopting the *Good Wife* profile and both depression and PTSD, while the *Assertive Competent Woman* profile failed to predict depression or PTSD through the two mediators. In the Egyptian sample, in addition to the paths from the *Good Wife* profile to depression and PTSD through the two mediators, a direct effect of SV on PTSD and depression was indicated, and a direct negative effect of the *Good Wife* on AR appeared significant (see Figure 3). In the Syrian sample, only the paths between the *Good Wife* profile and depression through the two mediators were significant, while a direct effect of SV on PTSD was indicated (see Figure 4). Moreover, all indirect effects were significant (from *Good Wife* to AR through SV, and from *Good Wife* to depression and PTSD through both SV and AR) (see Table 11).



Note. SV, sexual violence; AR, abstract rumination, P** > 0.01; P* < .05; P > Chi-square indicates the goodness-of-fit as estimated by the likelihood ratio.

Figure 3. Sexual Violence and Abstract Rumination as Mediators between Adopted Femininity and Trauma Outcomes in the Egyptian Sample



Note. SV, sexual violence; AR, abstract rumination, P** > 0.01; P* < .05; P > Chi-square indicates the goodness-of-fit as estimated by the likelihood ratio.

Figure 4. Sexual Violence and Abstract Rumination as Mediators between Adopted Femininity and Trauma Outcomes in the Syrian Sample

Table 11. Indirect Effects in SEM Models

	Outcome Variable	Independent	Coef.		OIM Std. Err		z		[95% Conf. Interval]	
			Egyptian	Syrian	Egyptian	Syrian	Egyptian	Syrian	Egyptian	Syrian
Model 1	Rumination	Good Wife	-.02*	-.04**	.01	.01	-2.29	-3.50	-.031, -.002	-.068, -.019
	Depression	Sexual Violence	.32*	.59**	.13	.16	2.44	3.80	.063, .572	.286, .894
		Good Wife	-.15**	-.05**	.03	.02	-4.82	-3.15	-.203, -.086	-.082, -.019
Model 2	Rumination	Good Wife	-.02*	-.04**	.01	.01	-2.29	-3.50	-.030, -.002	-.068, -.019
	PTSD	Sexual Violence	.48*	1.18*	.20	.31	2.41	3.85	.090, .872	.580, 1.784
		Good Wife	-.33**	-.19**	.06	.06	-5.74	-3.40	-.435, -.214	-.297, -.080

Note. Models 1 and 2 show indirect paths for the Egyptians and Syrian samples * indicates P < .05, ** indicates P < .01.

5. Discussion

Femininity is conceptualized and dealt with in this paper as a multi-faceted socio-cultural construct that is represented by multiple co-existing profiles. Accordingly, this paper investigated women's adoption of two femininity profiles, the *Assertive Competent Woman* and the *Good Wife*, which were identified, based on previous research by the authors, (Barakat & Philippot, 2021a), as two prototypical forms of femininities that co-exist in the two cultures of interest.

This was pursued in line with conceptualizing feminine and masculine gender roles as context-dependent constructs, stressing the role of the socio-cultural, political, and economic factors in shaping gender norms and stereotypes to which women and men are expected/required to adhere (see; Bem, 1993; Connell, 1995; Eagly and Wood, 2011; Morawski, 1985; Paechter, 2018). Therefore, the way femininity profiles are constructed, adopted, negotiated, or reconstructed, as well as the consequences of adopting a specific femininity profile, should be considered in relation to the context in which women live.

In light of these two main foundations, we hypothesized that each of the two investigated profiles would differ in terms of predicting exposure to SV, AR, depression, and PTSD, and that this relationship may differ according to the cultural context. We tested a model employing each of the two profiles as an independent variable, exposure to SV trauma as a first mediator, AR as a second mediator, and depression and PTSD as two outcomes.

The results of our study partially supported our hypotheses. Significant differences were observed between the two investigated profiles in the way each of them correlates with and predicts the other study variables. Yet, the mediation model was fully supported only when the *Good Wife* profile is the independent variable.

On the other hand, clear differences were found between the Egyptian and Syrian samples in correlation patterns, which further demonstrates the necessity of contextualizing gender roles and the consequences of adopting a specific gender profile. The discussion below deals with the identified similarities between the two samples, which can be explained by socio-cultural commonalities between the two cultures and pinpoints the differences and how they might be interpreted.

In both samples, the *Assertive Competent Woman* profile negatively correlated with depression, and it negatively correlated with and predicted AR. Conversely, the *Good Wife* profile negatively correlated with and predicted SV. As these results need to be read in light of the trait composition of each of the two profiles, and the socio-cultural significance of adopting these traits in the two cultures, each profile should be discussed separately.

First, countering conventional stereotypes concerning women in patriarchal contexts (Fiske & Stevens, 1993), the *Assertive Competent Woman* profile is represented mostly by a sense of agency and self-efficacy traits (e.g., can protect others, ambitious, courageous, gives priority to work, independent, decisive, self-assured, capable of facing challenges, and seasoned), which are stereotypically associated with hegemonic masculinity. The results

showed that, although this profile is not likely to play a protective role in relation to exposure to SV, it negatively correlates with its possible negative consequences, such as rumination and depression. This is in line with several studies that found a substantial negative correlation between embracing more stereotypically masculine traits and depression among women (Bassoff & Glass, 1982; Markstrom-Adams, 1989). Other studies suggested that agency, self-efficacy, and coping strategies that were framed stereotypically as masculine (e.g., problem-solving) play a protective role among women in the face of stressful events (Nezu, 1987; Lam & McBride-Chang, 2007). In the particular context of our samples, the narratives of Egyptian and Syrian women highlighted that the main motives that helped these women to keep going were a sense of agency, growing resilience, and an ability to control one's environment despite extreme adversity and recurrent traumas. In particular, these traits helped those women construct meaning from their traumatic experiences and alleviated their trauma-related symptoms (Barakat & Philippot, 2018; Barakat & Philippot, 2021c).

Second, representing the dominant stereotypes defining conventional femininity (Budgeon, 2013; Fiske & Stevens, 1993), the *Good Wife* profile was characterized in the study by emotionality traits (e.g., kind-hearted, emotional, romantic, empathetic), compliance to traditional femininity norms (e.g., shy, obedient, polite, dresses modestly), in addition to traits that define the maternal and the traditional wife roles (e.g., pretty, sexy, family-oriented, loves children, efficient with household chores, maternal). Embracing conventional femininity characteristics was traditionally conceived to be associated with more manifestations of maladjustment and affective disorders in women, particularly depression, which was mostly explained by low instrumentality, low agency, and low self-esteem (see Bem, 1974; Spence & Helmreich, 1978; Travis, 1988; Widom, 1984). This was not supported by the results of our current research, as no positive correlation was found between the *Good Wife* profile and depression. On the contrary, a negative correlation was found in the Egyptian sample, and an indication of a negative correlation was noted in the Syrian sample.

Several scholars have criticized the established link within prior psychology research between adhering to traditional femininity and maladjustment, due to its disregard for the contextual nature of gender roles and gender role preferences. This criticism emphasized how this link goes hand in hand with blaming women who embrace traditional femininity for their disadvantages, such as depression, while portraying them as powerless, passive, and subordinate victims (Bluhm, 2011; Crawford & Marecek, 1989).

Meanwhile, several studies discussed the possible positive influence of conformity to gender stereotypes, i.e., "gender typicality" on women's adjustment (Egan & Perry, 2001). They emphasized how adhering to dominant stereotypes is generally socially rewarded, while violating or challenging prescriptions about how women should behave is usually punished (Burgress & Borgida, 1999; Morgenroth & Ryan, 2018; Glick & Fiske, 2001; Glick, et al., 2000; Wood & Eagly, 2010). Thus, women who conform to social prescriptions regarding gender are expected to enjoy better adjustment.

In light of this perspective, it is not assumed that women who adopt traditional femininity are less able to cope or adjust. Rather, the social response to women's adopted form of femininity, which is determined by the degree to which this form is socially desirable/rejected for women, is the factor that shapes the psychological consequences of adopting a specific profile.

As shown in an earlier study by the authors, in the Syrian and Egyptian contexts, the *Good Wife* profile contained the traits that were described as the most desirable for women from a normative cultural perspective (Barakat & Philippot, 2021a). Consequently, women who adhere to this profile are expected to be under less social pressure to conform on the one hand; and on the other hand, they are possibly less exposed to the negative social sanctions, including sexism and sexual violence (Burgress & Borgida, 1999; Conner, Glick & Fiske, 2017). Social pressure for gender conformity, sexism, and SV are all posited to be main factors contributing to women's depression (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001; Stoppard, 1999).

Moreover, the *Good Wife* profile negatively correlated with and predicted SV. As the majority of reported SV experiences in the two contexts of the study take place in the public space (El Deeb, 2013; International Federation for Human Rights, 2012; Zaki & Abd Alhamid, 2014), women who adopt the *Good Wife* profile, which is centered around the mother and wife roles, are expected to be relatively less exposed to the public space. It is therefore expected that, in comparison to women who embrace the *Assertive Competent Woman* profile, they would report less SV. Nevertheless, the associations between adopting the *Assertive Competent Woman* and the *Good Wife* profiles and exposure to SV and to the consequences of SV markedly differed between the Egyptian and Syrian samples. In the Egyptian sample, adopting an *Assertive Competent Woman* profile predicted more exposure to SV when controlling for the effect of the *Good Wife* profile, while no similar significant relationship was observed in the Syrian sample. Meanwhile, the *Good Wife* profile was found to be significantly associated with less depression, less AR, and less PTSD, but only in the Egyptian sample. These differences should be considered in relation to two main aspects: (a) the current contextual factors in the Egyptian and Syrian societies; and (b) the identified differences in demographic variables between the two samples, i.e., the educational level, the socio-economic status, and whether respondents live in their home country or as refugees or members of a displaced community.

Among the core foundations of the conventional gender status quo, which the patriarchal forces need to maintain and protect, are the conventional structure of gender roles, the binary system of feminine/masculine roles, and the hierarchy of power associated with these roles (Butler, 1990; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan & Nauts, 2012; Wood & Eagly, 2010). Thus, as the *Good Wife* profile is more in conformity with these foundations, women who embrace it are expected to face less negative social consequences. On the other hand, as the *Assertive Competent Woman* profile threatens or challenges, to some extent, the gender status quo, women who adopt it are expected to be negatively sanctioned or punished as a way to ensure the sustainability of the hegemonic structure of power. This is in line with the Ambivalent Sexism theory (Glick & Fiske, 1996), which explained how two different facets of sexism, hostile and benevolent, function in tandem to ensure rewarding and reinforcing women who

meet the traditional gender expectations, while punishing women who try to claim power or challenge men's dominance. Further, the theory identified SV and the cultural norms that justify or support it as features of hostile sexism through which the patriarchal gender system ensures its maintenance (Conner, Glick, & Fiske, 2017).

We argue that the identified differences between the Egyptian and Syrian samples highlight that, under the current contextual conditions, adopting a *Good Wife* profile is more socially rewarded in Egypt in comparison to in Syria, while the *Assertive Competent Woman* Profile is more socially punished. This may be attributed to the differences in how the patriarchal system has fared in every country after the massive changes of 2011 and beyond.

To further elaborate, in line with ambivalent sexism theory, this paper adopts a hypothesis that SV is a tool to reinforce the patriarchy, in particular against non-conformist rebellious women who challenge it. This echoes our previous findings on trauma among Egyptian women after the 2011 revolution, in which the participants emphasized how their acts of pushing the boundaries of gender norms were linked to more exposure to violence and in particular SV (Barakat & Philippot, 2021c). This is also in line with Brownmiller's (1993) emphasis on how rape was historically used as a tool for the establishment and re-establishment of male domination. In the same vein, as mentioned earlier, Kandiyoti attributes the rise in SV in the Middle East, during and after the Arab uprisings, to attempts of a *masculinist restoration* in response to women's increased engagement in the public sphere, which threatened the dominance of the binary gender system (Kandiyoti, 2013). As such, SV is used by the State and the society as a tool to push women back to their traditional roles, represented here by the *Good Wife* profile.

Yet, the ability of the patriarchy to defend its dominance depends on the extent to which its various forces and actors are effective and to which gender relations in both, private and public spheres, are sustained. Therefore, the results of this paper could be construed to suggest that while patriarchal forces and gender relations were significantly disrupted in Syria after 2011, they remained relatively intact in Egypt.

In fact, several recent studies demonstrated that Syrian traditional masculinity and its supporting patriarchal forces were no longer able to act or take control when Syrian men failed to fulfill their normative roles as breadwinners and family protectors, under the extreme and life-threatening conditions of the war in Syria and under the challenging novel conditions in the countries where Syrians were displaced. Meanwhile, seeking their own and their family's survival, Syrian women needed to take up many responsibilities that were traditionally assigned to men, which directly led to more independence, more engagement in the job market, and generally, in the public space. This significantly shattered the construction of Syrian hegemonic masculinity, challenged the gender binary (i.e., women being more restricted to the private sphere and men dominating the public sphere), and possibly contributed to a new gender hierarchy (Barakat & Philippot, 2018; El-Masri, Harvey & Garwood, 2013; Gren, 2018; Suerbaum, 2018).

This may be particularly relevant in the context of this study, as 88.7% of the Syrian sample were refugees or in displaced communities, and 49.1% of them had a below-average socioeconomic status. Consequently, it is expected that patriarchal forces will be less efficient due to the new contextual conditions of the culture to which they were displaced and adopting an *Assertive Competent Woman* profile will be a matter of survival for the woman and the whole family.

Concerning the investigated model, while the *Assertive Competent Woman* profile fell short of explaining the path between the adopted femininity profile and SV outcomes, adopting a *Good Wife* profile would predict less exposure to SV. However, when women who adopt the *Good Wife* profile do experience SV, they would ruminate, which would predict depression and PTSD symptoms. Even though the main paths were similar across the two samples, which further corroborates the indicated models, a direct effect of SV on depression appears only in the Egyptian sample. Similarly, only the Egyptian sample showed a direct negative effect of the *Good Wife* profile on AR. This, on the one hand, indicates a possible greater shielding function of adopting traditional femininity in Egypt, which is consistent with other findings above. On the other hand, it suggests a stronger effect of SV on trauma-related symptoms among Egyptian women, which is in line with the higher prevalence of SV in the Egyptian sample compared to the Syrian sample.

A deeper understanding of the underlying reasons behind the differences identified between the Syrian and Egyptian samples requires a closer reading of the context of SV and the socio-cultural meanings associated therewith. In Egypt, as mentioned earlier, several reports have documented the massive prevalence of SV against women, revealing that SV, particularly in the form of street sexual harassment and assault, is a widespread social phenomenon affecting almost all Egyptian women on a daily basis (El Deeb, 2013; International Federation for Human Rights, 2012). SV is socially tolerated and supported by rape culture, typically blaming survivors for their real or presumed non-conformist behavior or appearance (e.g., the way they dressed, being out alone late at night) (Aboul Komsan, 2009; Sadler, 2018; Shoukry, Hassan & Abul Komsan, 2005). Other reports and studies have dealt with the significant increase in SV after 2011, mostly manifested in new patterns, such as gang rape and gang sexual assaults against women who participated in mass protests, which were interpreted as a backlash, and a sort of punishment, against women's increased involvement in political and social movements (Amar, 2011b; Langhor, 2013; Zaki & Abd Alhamid, 2014).

In the Syrian context, several studies highlighted that the presence of Syrian women in the public sphere was tightly restricted before 2011, especially for women from a less privileged background (Alsaba & Kapilashrami, 2013). The majority of participants in the Syrian sample have a below-average socioeconomic level and a lower educational level, compared to the Egyptian sample. Consequently, their involvement in the public sphere, especially before 2011, would be expected to have been less pronounced. This is a factor that may have contributed to less exposure to SV, particularly in terms of sexual harassment and assaults in the streets.

Moreover, most studies on SV in the public sphere highlight the connection with the armed conflict and underline how SV has been systematically used, both by the Syrian regime and opposition militias, as a weapon of war against Syrian women, to punish or threaten opponents or to collect information (Human Rights and Gender Justice, International Women's Rights Organization & Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 2016; Seif & Nassif, 2020; Independent International Commission of Inquiry, 2018; The Lancet, 2013).

Against this backdrop, we argue that despite the noticeable increase in SV after the outbreak of the Syrian war, it has remained conflict-related and, to a large extent, without much social justification, unlike Egypt, where SV is socio-culturally rooted and justified. This might have facilitated appraisal and meaning-making for trauma survivors among Syrian women, where SV is a direct manifestation of the collective war trauma (see Engelbrecht & Jobson, 2014; Park & Ai, 2006). Moreover, it could explain why correlations between femininity profiles, exposure to SV trauma, and trauma consequences are generally more evident in the Egyptian context, where the mainstream culture directly attributes SV to women's behavior.

This thesis echoes Harvey's (1996) ecological framework of women's victimization, in which she underlined how features of the environment, in addition to serving as mechanisms to promote violence against women, shape trauma consequences. She emphasized that community values and attitudes towards women, and beliefs regarding violence against women, are both factors that directly affect trauma consequences and shape the recovery process.

6. Conclusion and Limitations

The results of the study support our main thesis that it is necessary to contextualize femininity when (a) investigating how different femininity profiles are formulated as social constructs, and adopted, practiced, and negotiated by individuals; and when (b) examining the consequences of the gendered behaviors associated with each profile. Further, the study departs from explaining women's depression by the features of traditional femininity, attributing it to the context's reactions to women's adopted femininity, which might take forms of negative or positive social sanctions.

As this is a cross-sectional, correlational study, we cannot establish causality regarding the relationship between femininity profiles and exposure to sexual trauma, AR, depression, and PTSD. Moreover, as the two samples of the study are not representative, we cannot claim to have identified a generalized pattern in the Syrian and Egyptian cultures, especially knowing how multilayered and diverse each of the two cultures is. However, there are clear indications of the relationship between adopted femininity profiles and exposure to SV on the one hand, and depression and PTSD symptoms on the other, in which AR presented a mediating process.

In this context, the results suggest that a key factor in women's mental health is the degree to which the socio-cultural context is open to various adaptations and expressions of gender roles, or whether it would rigidly reject, and perhaps punish, women who do not adhere to traditional femininities as imagined by the hegemonic culture that relies on a binary system. A clear example of that was the association between more exposure to SV and PTSD and embracing an *Assertive Competent woman* femininity profile, which was shown in the Egyptian sample, in contrast with the shielding role of the *Good Wife* profile. This echoes Bem's assertion, in the context of highlighting the importance of flexible gender roles, that the prescription "is not that the individual be androgynous, but that the society be aschematic" (Bem, 1981, p. 363).

As the study employed a contextual perspective to femininities, it tried to understand how social markers and women's different settings and social locations (e.g., displacement experiences and socio-economic conditions) may influence women's adopted gender profiles and affect their consequences, yet a more pronounced intersectionality lens would be needed to better analyze how these different social locations and markers interact with the contextual settings, shaping women's adopted femininities and associated psychological outcomes.

Chapter 5

Beyond Trauma, What Kept them Going?

An Analysis of the Lives and Narratives of Five Syrian Women in Lebanon

Abstract

Using interpretive phenomenological analysis, this paper analyzes the narratives of five women who fled from Syria to Lebanon, with the objective of understanding how they continue to lead their lives beyond trauma. Results showed that these women's ability to create meaning of their traumatic experiences and link it to their current lives is a determining factor in understanding their ability to move on. Finding a reason to keep going, creating a way to cope with loss, and perceiving an evolving sense of agency were significant aspects of getting over the traumatic event or enduring pain. Finally, changes in gender roles were identified by all five women, but their evaluation of these changes differed.

Keywords

Trauma, Agency, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, Meaning-making, Gender roles, Syrian women

Reference

Barakat, K. S., & Philippot, P. (2018). Beyond trauma: What kept them going? *Middle East-Topics & Arguments, 11*, 44-57. doi: 10.17192/meta.2018.11.7802.

Beyond Trauma, What Kept them Going?

An Analysis of the Lives and Narratives of Five Syrian Women in Lebanon

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1. Introduction and Background

The topic of psychological consequences of armed conflict is not new to psychology. Since WWI, several waves of studies have investigated the possible psychopathology associated with experiencing severely violent events. For decades, research efforts primarily adopted a neurological approach in explaining psychological responses of soldiers in war situations. In the early 1970s, towards and after the end of the Vietnam War, the term *psychological trauma* began to be widely used to refer to pathological responses to severe adversity, including violent events, mostly in the context of armed conflict (Jones & Wessely, 2006). Soon after, the notion of trauma was expanded to refer to a pathological response to various life-threatening events. The American Psychological Association (APA) defines trauma as "an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer-term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and physical symptoms like headaches or nausea". These symptoms of trauma were soon collated under the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which appeared for the first time in 1980 in the third edition of the APA's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) (McHugh & Treisman, 2007). PTSD now serves as a key diagnostic criterion, heavily relied upon by clinical psychology practitioners and academics alike.

Trauma and PTSD are useful indicators in the context of therapeutic practices, as they could be used to take stock of improvement for individuals who suffer from psychological symptoms after a life-threatening event. They are, however, problematic analytical tools in the context of research. Not only do they remain conceptually affected by their military roots (Andreasen, 2010), but they have also become loaded with political and economic implications, as they are used to grant recognition of victimization, and consequently economic benefits and/or political acknowledgment (Humphrey, 2012).

These shortcomings of using PTSD and trauma as analytical tools are aggravated by solely relying on quantitative research methods, and when focusing on an area of research such as refugees, which is already dominated by oversimplified preconceptions and victimization paradigms, and severely influenced by the politics of Western academia.

Moreover, the medical approach to applying the concepts of trauma and PTSD is built on the assumption that people who have witnessed life-threatening experiences "described as traumatic events" are expected to show responses that fall under previously defined categories (McHugh & Treisman, 2007). This restricts our ability to understand personalized interpretations of, and responses to, such events.

Most research conducted in the context of the Syrian conflict has employed this traditional medical approach, positing Syrians, and especially Syrian refugees, as passive victims in pursuit of universal recognition of their suffering. This becomes more problematic in the case of Syrian women, who suffer from structured gender-based societal, economic, and sexual violence, along with sharing the traumatic experiences of war and displacement with men (El-Masri, Harvey, & Garwood, 2013). Consequently, the voices of the survivors, in terms of the unique meanings they give to their traumatic experiences and how they deal with them, have so far remained largely unheard.

2. Context and Concepts

This paper is based on doctoral research in the field of clinical psychology, conducted by the first author and supervised by the second author. Originally, the research was aimed at examining depressive symptoms and PTSD among Syrian women in Lebanon in the aftermath of traumatic events in the contexts of war and displacement.

Shortly after starting interviews, it became clear that the war had further consequences for women that had not received much attention. In fact, early fieldwork insights were far from expected, as we were struck by the evolving strength, agency, and resilience of the interviewees. We therefore moved to the research question of this paper, i.e., what kept them going?, focusing on the narratives constructed by these women, and how they shed a different light on their unique modes of surviving and coping.

The intention is not to deny the persistence of depression and PTSD, but rather to focus on the fact that the interviewees themselves centered their stories around how they were capable of going on, managing their everyday lives along with the feelings of pain, anger, and loss, as well as symptoms of depression and PTSD.

To that end, four main concepts are employed in this paper as units of analysis: traumatic events, resilience, agency, and coping.

A *traumatic event* refers to a serious threat, whether directly, where the threat affected one's own life, safety, or physical integrity, or indirectly, where one has witnessed such a threat affecting someone else or learned about it affecting a close friend or family member. In this paper, any reference to a traumatic event refers to a war or displacement related event experienced and mentioned by an interviewee, apart from any subsequent meaning or response to that event. This separation is key, as the objective is to discuss and understand how each woman interpreted and responded to the traumatic events of her life in her unique, personalized way. This is also the reason why the term *traumatic event* is employed rather than simply *trauma*, which is associated with the event, its meaning, and the response to it.

Resilience is one of the most commonly used notions in modern psychological studies of trauma, refugees, and post-conflict situations. However, the way in which it should be defined and investigated remains a subject of much disagreement. For a long time, it was seen as synonymous with invulnerability, i.e., the ability to successfully cope with adversity (Rutter, 1985). This definition is constrained by predefined expected patterns of responses,

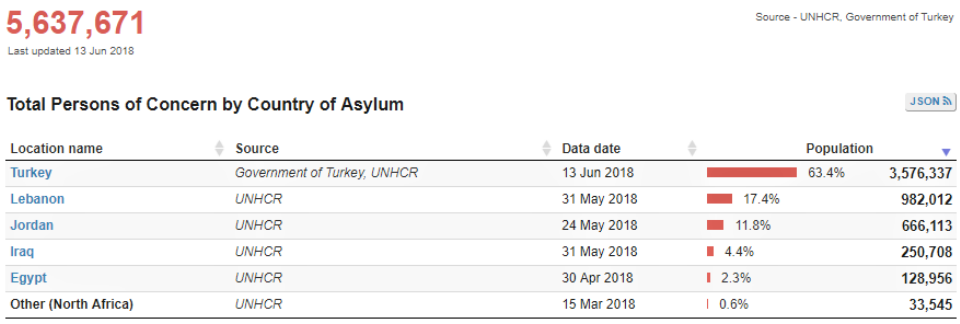
where successful coping refers to responding to adversity in an "adaptive" way. More recently, resilience has been defined as "positive patterns of functioning or development during or following exposure to adversity" (Masten, 2006), posited as a dynamic active process, rather than a pre-existing ability (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Most importantly, recent approaches have highlighted that resilience is determined by cultural and social factors, which define, in the first place, what constitutes risk, and protective factors in a specific time and space (Zraly & Nyirazinyoye, 2010; Rousseau, Said, Gagne, & Bibeau, 1998).

Agency traditionally refers to the ability to act or control one's environment. As such, agency is considered the exception rather than the rule for marginalized groups such as women refugees (Davies, 1991). In this paper, however, agency is employed to refer to the sense of agency, i.e., ability to act and control one's environment as perceived by oneself, regardless of whether others share that perception.

Finally, coping refers to the acts and thoughts used with the aim of reducing the stress associated with a traumatic experience.

3. Method

This paper is based on research conducted in Lebanon between June and September 2017. Lebanon was selected for several reasons. First, Lebanon is the country which has received the second highest number of Syrians since the outbreak of conflict in 2011 (see Figure 5).



5,637,671

Last updated 13 Jun 2018

Source - UNHCR, Government of Turkey

Total Persons of Concern by Country of Asylum

JSON

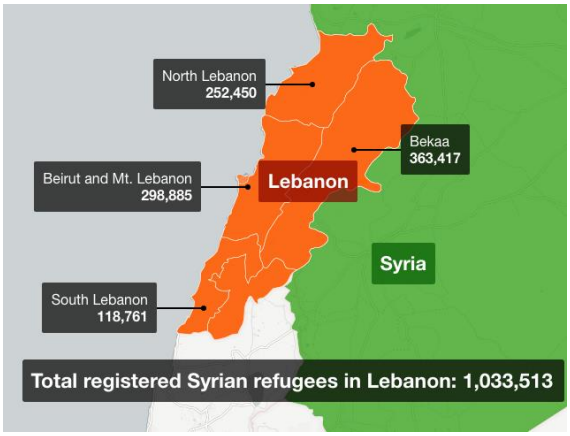
Location name	Source	Data date	Population	
Turkey	*Government of Turkey, UNHCR*	13 Jun 2018	63.4%	3,576,337
Lebanon	*UNHCR*	31 May 2018	17.4%	982,012
Jordan	*UNHCR*	24 May 2018	11.8%	666,113
Iraq	*UNHCR*	31 May 2018	4.4%	250,708
Egypt	*UNHCR*	30 Apr 2018	2.3%	128,956
Other (North Africa)	*UNHCR*	15 Mar 2018	0.6%	33,545

Note. Reprinted from "Operational Portal: Refugee situations", by UNHCR. 2018. Retrieved from https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71

Figure 5. Total Number of Syrians by Country of Asylum

Second, the Syrian population in Lebanon is particularly vulnerable, as they primarily come from less privileged socioeconomic backgrounds and currently live under tough social and economic conditions. As Lebanon did not sign the 1951 Refugee Convention, Syrians in Lebanon are not afforded legal refugee status. Consequently, they lack adequate and sustainable services, including food aid, medical care, housing, and education.

Third, through her previous work on psychological support to Arab women activists, the first author had built a network of Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian NGOs that are in direct contact with Syrian women in Lebanon, and that were willing to facilitate the research. In total, seven NGOs working in three different regions in Lebanon (North Lebanon, Beirut, and Bekaa) provided support to the research (See Fig. 6). The cooperating NGOs included The Syrian League for Citizenship, Women Now for Development, Restart Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture, Al Najdeh Association, Basma & Zaytouna, Basamat for Development, and Abaad Resource Center for Gender Equality. They work in various locations in Lebanon covering the main areas that have the highest density of Syrians, including Beirut (Shatila Refugee Camp, Bourj el Barajneh), Beqaa (Chatura, El Ain, and Arsal), and Tripoli (Al-Badawi and Nahr Al Bared refugee camps).



Note. Reprinted from "When a bomb goes off in Lebanon, Syrians suffer" by Hall (2016) Retrieved from https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-08-11/when-bomb-goes-lebanon-syrians-suffer.

Figure 6. Registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon by region

Each contact NGO arranged a meeting with a group of Syrian women from their staff members or their beneficiaries, who were then given a choice to participate in answering a set of questionnaires (as part of a different quantitative study under the same doctoral project), as well as a choice to be also included in a qualitative study requiring a one-to-one one-hour interview.

Participants were briefed about the objective of the study prior to interviews. Confidentiality and anonymity were warranted. It was explained that participation was voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw at any point. Most importantly, it was made clear that no data would be shared with the contact NGO, and that participation or withdrawal would have no effect on the participant's relation with them. The option of receiving psychological support after the interview was offered to participants in case they wanted to talk further about their experiences or to deal with possible distress evoked during the interview.

One of the main concerns when starting the fieldwork was how to earn the trust and cooperation of participants. Contrary to expectations, very high levels of motivation and cooperation were observed, to the extent that more women than initially planned were included upon their request. The interviewees provided two main common reasons for why they wanted to participate. The first was the fact that the researcher is an outsider. These women live in small, closed refugee communities, where they are very concerned about their privacy and security. A researcher who does not live in the same community, who would not share their stories with others from the community, and who would not be part of their everyday realities, was a suitable person to open up to, and provided a chance for disclosure. Second, many of the interviewees were receiving services, including psychosocial support, from Lebanese practitioners. The political and social tensions between the Lebanese host community and Syrians, and the perceived sense of being unwelcome, create a barrier that hinders cooperation. In some specific cases, participants mentioned incidents of racism, including sexual harassment and physical assault, which they were not willing to share with Lebanese practitioners. The fact that the researcher is Egyptian made them willing to participate and open up.

In-depth interviews were conducted primarily with a prospective sample of 30 women. All were above 18 years of age, fled from Syria after 2011 from areas directly affected by the conflict, and experienced one or more marked traumatic events related to the conflict and/or the displacement experience. Nine were volunteers or worked for the NGOs, thirteen were direct beneficiaries of contact NGO services, and eight were from the larger population who attended a one-time awareness event.

All interviews were conducted in Arabic by the first author and were audio-recorded after obtaining the participant's written consent. They took place in a private room at the office of one of the contact NGOs. Each lasted around one hour using a semi-structured interview guide that covered several themes, including background information about pre-2011 life in Syria, displacement experience, and the overall current living context; gender role and possible influences of conflict and displacement; war- or displacement-related traumatic experiences; responses to traumatic events; and personal techniques of coping.

As IPA analysis requires a small number of participants, and to allow for an in-depth examination of participant experiences, it was decided to include only five women of the thirty initially interviewed. As one of the aims of the study was to investigate participant experiences as a function of demographic data (e.g., age, education, occupation), and of factors shaping current living conditions in Lebanon (e.g., family context, socio-economic status, location in Lebanon, contact NGO), the five women were selected to reflect diversity in demographic background and current living conditions (see table 12).

Table 12. Descriptive Data of five Interviewed Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Citizenship	Familial situation	Household situation	Education	Occupation history	Region/displacement year	Traumatic event/s
Eman	27	Syrian	Married at 19, currently separated as husband forcibly disappeared since 2012. Started a legal proceeding for divorce	lives alone with 8-year-old son	University degree in psychology	Never worked in Syria, worked as a journalist in Jordan. Now psychologist at a Syrian NGO in Beqaa	Daria – Damascus/left Syria in 2013 to Jordan then to Beqaa	Three attempts of arrest in Syria
Shyma'	21	Syrian	Married at 15, has two children	Abandoned by husband, lives alone with her children, depends on financial aid and loans	Primary school	Worked for one month for a tailor at Shatela for 3$ a week. Currently unemployed	Aleppo suburbs/fled in 2016 to Shatela	Intimate partner violence + death of her three cousins in a bombing
Om-Belal	43	Syrian	Married at 18, has 3 children, divorced	Lives with daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren	Secondary school	Housewife in Syria. Currently a teacher at a Syrian NGO	Daria – Damascus/ Fled in 2013 to Beqaa	Son's death (he was a fighter at the Free Syrian Army)
Majda	48	Palestinian from Syria	First marriage at 18, has 3 children, divorced and remarried a year later.	Provider for her family (second husband and children from first marriage)	Secondary school	Hairdresser for 25 years Has a hair salon in North Lebanon	Yarmouk Camp - Damascus/fled to North Lebanon in 2013	Former Intimate partner violence + Cancer survivor + several war-related traumatic events
Rana	37	Syrian	Married at 16, has 5 children, her husband forcibly disappeared in 2012	Lives with elderly parents, 5 children, sister and sister-in-law and their 5 children	Preparatory school	Admin assistant at Syrian NGO	Daria-Damascus. Fled from her hometown in 2013, to other areas in Syria, Fled to Beqaa in 2014	Arrest and forced disappearance of husband and brother-in-law, death of brother + several war-related traumatic events

4. Data Analysis

The five interviews were transcribed by the first author. The parts deemed directly related to the research question were translated into English to validate the analysis with the second author. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was applied to transcripts to identify prominent themes in each case, and subsequently common themes across cases.

IPA is a qualitative research approach, used mostly in psychology, concerned with the detailed examination of human lived experience in a way that enables that experience to be expressed in its own terms, rather than according to predefined category systems. Inspired by the ideas of Edmund Husserl, IPA aims to examine how people make sense of their major life experiences, especially when the everyday is interrupted by a particular significant experience or major transition. The analysis started with initial comments on the transcript, through initial clustering and thematic development, into the final structure of themes (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Each of the themes presented below was identified in at least four of the five narratives. Quotes under each theme (taken from one or more participants), were chosen as examples for illustration (see figure 7).

5. Results

The Identified Themes

Theme I: Theme I: Creating Meaning through Building a Narrative	Sub-theme I-1: Redefining the Traumatic Event
	Sub-theme I-2: Ascribing Value to Loss
Theme II: Finding Reasons to Keep Going	Sub-theme II-1: Adopting a Cause
	Sub-theme II-2: Evolving Agency
	Sub-theme III-3: Embracing Hardship as Foundation for Resilience
Theme III: Finding Ways to Keep Going	Sub-theme III-1: Dealing with Memories of the Traumatic Event: a Decision to Forget or Not to Forget
	Sub-theme III-2: Coping through Social Comparison
Theme IV: Changing Gender Roles	Sub-theme IV-1: Reclaiming Spaces for Women
	Sub-theme IV-2: Evaluating the feeling of being less "Woman" than Before

Figure 7. Themes and Sub-themes of Data Analysis

5.1 Theme I: Creating Meaning through Building a Narrative

A major theme identified throughout the interviews was the importance of the meaning that participants ascribed to their traumatic experiences. Through building their own

narratives about what had happened, they gave it meaning and linked it to their current realities.

This is in line with Janoff-Bulman's thesis, which highlights appraisal as a key process when experiencing a traumatic event. Appraisal refers to the interpretation each person gives to his/her trauma. Appraisal of a particular traumatic event differs based on characteristics both of the event itself and of the person undertaking the appraisal. In the case of several potentially traumatic events, the appraisal includes also determining what is traumatic and what is not, or what is the most traumatic and most significant to the person. Moreover, the appraisal process includes assessing the possible gains of the traumatic experience, reflected in *meaning-making* (Janoff-Bulman, 1992).

Sub-theme I-1: Redefining the traumatic event

Although all participants went through several war- and displacement-related traumatic experiences, the event that they considered as the main traumatic event and center of their narrative varied markedly.

Shyma', for example, fled from Syria after the house of her parents-in-law, where she used to live, was destroyed by airstrikes. She spent nights in horror with her two children. She lost three cousins in the war. However, Shyma' only told war-related stories when asked direct questions about them. When asked if she thought those events were still affecting her, she spoke of nightmares and terror she still feels "all the time".

Obviously, Shyma' suffered from psychological symptoms, including symptoms of depression and PTSD. Nonetheless, the story that remarkably dominated the interview with Shyma' was that of her husband abandoning her, which she described as the turning point of her life. "After we joined him in Lebanon, he started to feel the responsibility is heavy on him. He asked me to go back to Syria, or else he would not be responsible for me anymore." She recounted, "he threatened me: 'I won't pay anything, and you manage yourself and the children,' and then he left." It was then that she started to feel lost. "It was scary, being alone in a strange country, where I do not know anyone" she said. It was also the point at which she decided to be stronger, however, her fears and worries remain primarily centered around being solely responsible for feeding and protecting her two children.

Sub-theme II-2: Ascribing value to loss

The narrative created by each participant about her main traumatic event, and how it relates to her current life, played a crucial role in how she was enduring both. That was obvious in Om-Belal's story about her 19-year-old son who was killed in 2013 by Assad regime forces while fighting for the Free Syrian Army. She had initially been totally against her son joining the combat, not only for the obvious reason of worrying about losing him, but also because she was ideologically opposed to the cause he was pursuing. After his death, to deal with feelings of loss and pain, she needed to create a narrative in which her son's choice was not only accepted but also depicted as an act of courage and heroism.

"You know what was a consolation for me? His reputation was really good, before his martyrdom and after […] I feel he died with honor. He refused to retreat until the last moment. Syrians were his people and he died fighting for them, she said, "He was not like others who promised to protect them and then left them facing death".

Ascribing value to loss emerged, for example in the interview of Om-Belal, as a key approach to meaning-making as described by Janoff-Bulman (1992).

5.2 Theme II: Finding a Reason to Keep Going

Each of the five women was able to find a reason to keep going, handle the hassles of everyday life, and gain agency and resilience. Identifying with the needs of one's children or pursuing a political struggle were the two main reasons given during interviews. The perception of the growing agency and relicense were supporting factors.

For four of the five women interviewed, the first motive to keep going was based on identification with the mother role. Motherhood as a motive for survival is rooted in psychoanalytical literature. A main drive for a mother to survive is to protect her child and to offer ground for nonpathological development (Baraitser & Noack, 2006). Moreover, the prototypical feminine gender role in Syrian culture is centered around motherhood. Women are socialized to be good mothers, and a good mother in adversity will stand for her children. In this sense, motherhood was a drive to survive and gain agency and resilience.

Identifying with a social or political cause was also mentioned as a protecting factor in the context of adversity. Recent studies have suggested that political activism should be classified as a resilient response, especially to political violence (Afana, Tremblay, Ghannam, Ronsbo, & Veronese, 2018). The literature on political trauma among Palestinians has indicated that civic and political engagement are protecting variables that lead to better psychological outcomes.

Sub-theme II-1: Adopting a cause

Ola, a single mother living with her elderly parents and other women from her family after her husband forcibly disappeared and her brother died, explained how as a mother responsible for five children she does not have the choice to collapse. "I have children", she said, "you must appear strong in front of them not to weaken them," and that is why she kept struggling.

In contrast, Eman, who is a psychologist and political and civil rights activist, fled from Syria after her husband was arrested and she faced several attempted arrests. She is also a single mother responsible for an 8-year-old son, yet she finds in political activism a reason to overcome her pain. "After I was forcibly displaced, and my friends were detained, I felt work is the way not to think about the hardships I am living in", she said, "I was working day and night at the [Anti-Assad] newspaper". Eman works now as a psychologist with Syrian women. Meanwhile, she collects women's stories for an oral history project. She clearly sees her role in supporting Syrian women and the Syrian revolution as a reason to keep going.

Om-Belal combined the two reasons together. She decided to deal with losing her son by keeping his name alive. She is trying to achieve that through civic engagement as a teacher for Syrian children whom she described as the future of Syria. "I was struggling with myself to keep myself alive and to go on", she said, "It is the memory of my son that made me do that, after his death, I lost hope in life, for some time I stopped eating, […] then I told myself I should be strong to continue his journey as far as I can".

Sub-theme II-2: Evolving agency

Gaining agency was a marked consequence among the five women, as they all described how they feel that they became stronger after what they went through. It was obvious that they came to this perception through a process of comparing their current and old selves. "I feel I am strong, my husband used to make me feel like a weak person", Om-Belal said, "but after all that happened, I find myself remembering everything and I tell myself, no, not at all. They wanted me to be weak, both my husband and my family".

Majda, who survived cancer and two abusive relationships as well as war and displacement, described how she restarted her career as a hairdresser since she fled to Lebanon without having anything but a hairdryer. She eventually found success and brought her children to live with her. "The feeling that I can work, I am financially independent, I am capable of supporting my children […] I thank God, all I went through, I was able to stand it, to bear, and to get over it. She added, "there is no woman like me, I am not conceited, but I have self-confidence".

Sub-theme II-3: Embracing hardship as foundation for resilience

Some participants made a clear link between facing hardships and being able to keep going. Shyma', explaining how she was forced to be stronger, said: "the things I went through, my husband's abandonment, being alone in a foreign country, where I do not know anyone, […] I should be able to defend myself".

In other cases, the interviewee mentioned that she made a conscious decision to be stronger to face a specific traumatic event. Majda, describing her feeling when she was first diagnosed with cancer, said: "I decided to be stronger than cancer, I struggled. This period affected me a lot, […] but I do not want to be weak, I want to be stronger than any circumstances".

5.3 Theme III: Finding Ways to Keep Going

Dealing with pain related to a traumatic event, and managing the associated psychological symptoms, is a common challenge in the aftermath of severe adversity. The dominant approach in psychology is based on a pre-defined categorization of coping strategies, divided mainly into active/internal or passive/external strategies that aim at adaptive emotional regulation (Erdener, 2017). As this paper focuses on understanding the unique personalized techniques each woman developed to deal with the psychological aftermath of her traumatic

experiences, two main themes emerged, one related to dealing with memories of traumatic events and the other to emotions related to them.

Sub-theme III-1: Dealing with memories of the traumatic event: A decision to forget or not to forget

When the first author apologized to Om-Belal for making her revisit tragic memories of her son's death, she responded: "It is true I still get emotional when I tell his story, but it could not be compared with what I was feeling the first and second years […] I like telling the story of his martyrdom, I even wrote two blog posts about him." She emphasized how she does not want to forget. Despite the pain she feels when talking about her son, sharing his story and keeping his memory alive are her coping strategies. She also stressed how she stopped using her given name after his death, and she asks people to call her after his name [*The mother of Belal*].

Other participants stated that they deal with war-related memories by trying to forget them or distracting themselves by keeping busy. Majda presented this strategy when responding to the question about what she does when she recalls war-related events. "I try to get busy with something," she said, "I tell myself it has ended; may God have mercy on those who died. We should take care of ourselves, life should go on, it should not stop at that point, we should go on".

Sub-theme III-2: Coping through social comparison

A key coping mechanism employed to evaluate one’s overall situation and regulate associated feelings relies on social comparison, i.e., comparison of one's tragedy with that of others. "Coping happens when I see what other people went through, much more than what I went through," Eman (2018) said, "I have a job and income […], my situation is better than others".

It should be noted that social comparison as expressed here is in line with Janoff-Bulman's description of a major strategy in the appraisal processes using comparisons with experiences of other survivors (Janoff-Bulman, 1992).

5.4 Theme IV: Changing Gender Roles

The five participants underlined pre-2011 restrictions on women's mobility, education, and work. They agreed that marked changes have been happening with respect to gender roles. Some attributed these changes to concrete new aspects of life in Syria or asylum countries (i.e., men being less present due to mass killings or arrests, financial hardships, and work regulations in asylum counties). Others also explained how these new conditions led to a realization of the unfairness of gender relations and norms, which contributed to the re-evaluation of past and present situations as part of the post-traumatic appraisal process.

Sub-theme IV-1: Reclaiming spaces for women

All five participants agreed that women's employment and freedom of movement significantly increased after 2011. They all reported obvious changes in gender roles in terms of access to public space, decision-making, and employment.

Eman explained how the war forced women to enter the job market. "Because of the financial need, women were given an additional role, besides the old traditional role which they still do," she said. "Women now generally have more chances to find jobs." She also pointed out how this influenced gender relations: "A woman now knows she has the right to confront her husband" she asserted.

During the interview with Om-Belal, she expressed much anger at the situation before 2011, in which she believes women were suppressed and controlled. "Honestly, despite all disasters, the changes that happened are very positive," she said. "I always wanted to participate in building society, at least to continue my education. That was not allowed." Om-Belal emphasized how she realized that men used to manipulate women. "Men did not allow us to work or to go out alone, they used to claim they worried about us facing the outside world," she said, "but during the revolution, they were sending us out to protect them. In the checkpoint, if a man was accompanied by a woman, they would let him go. What a contradiction." She concluded: "I am sorry, but they were liars".

Om-Belal's narrative is a clear example of realization of the previous unbalanced gender relation, and the potential for - less restricted - new roles. This is consistent with the feminist approach in dealing with trauma, where severe adversity could be a driver of feminist consciousness.

Sub-theme IV-2: Evaluating the feeling of being less "Woman" than Before

Although all five participants agreed that Syrian women, in general, gained agency and strength, two of them, contrary to the other three, expressed their preference for the previous situation.

When asked how she perceives the changes in women's position, Shyma’ answered: "Before was better. Women originally were not used to having a say, they were like a piece of furniture. But they were safe […] Now there are a lot of women who are alone after losing their husbands." (Shyma' 2017). Shyma’s dissatisfaction about the changing gender roles is clearly linked to being threatened and overwhelmed, and the challenges she is facing to provide food and shelter to her children after her husband abandoned her.

Rana also clarified why she believes women's position to have been better before: "I used to be happier and more relaxed, I was not running around […]. Now, you do not think of yourself as a woman anymore, you are a mother responsible for children, and a father as well […] Now we have to go out among the men […] I see this affecting our womanhood".

Two factors could explain why the five women differ in how they evaluate overall changes in their personal strength in relation to gender roles: first, the perception and evaluation of gender relations and norms before 2011, which is shaped by the personal history and constructed narratives of each woman (i.e., history of gender relations and gender role satisfaction), and second, the extent to which current challenges are compromising basic needs or safety.

However, despite differences in levels of satisfaction of current role responsibilities, growing agency and perceived strength were obvious in all interviews.

6. General Discussion and Conclusion

Traumatic events generally have a profound impact on the fundamental assumptions of individuals, as one's core assumptions about oneself and the world are shattered (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). The processes of reappraisal that lead to possible positive changes after the traumatic event/s include examining assumptions about oneself, others, and the world, and rebuilding them in a constructive way (Triplett, Tedeschi, Cann, Calhoun, & Reeve, 2012). One of the processes used when rebuilding assumptions focuses on the re-evaluation of the traumatic experience, considering possible benefits and purpose, which contributes to meaning-making (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Another process is a comparative evaluation of life before and after the traumatic experience.

In the context of Syrian women, one area of shattered assumptions is gender roles. Experiences of war and displacement unveiled how unbalanced gender relations and norms were, leading to the questioning of previous cultural beliefs and assumptions and the evaluation of ongoing changes in gender roles, which generally contributed to increased sense of agency.

Syrian women were forced to undertake new responsibilities, particularly to find means of survival for themselves and their families. For some, this was a perceived opportunity of empowerment through which they broke the restraints of patriarchy and made the most of the current fluidity of gender norms. In contrast, others saw it as an overwhelming burden that threatened their established notions about their womanhood (El-Masri, Harvey, & Garwood, 2013). However, in all cases, changes in gender roles markedly contributed to their sense of agency.

Through the process of rebuilding assumptions, each of the five women created a narrative about her most significant traumatic experience. That narrative, influenced by current living conditions and giving meaning to what had happened, is reflected in the value of the new life or in the reason to keep going.

All interviewees gained increased agency as a result of the adversity they went through; however, their overall appreciation of this gained agency varied based on current living conditions. Meanwhile, all five women were able to find an adequate reason to live for, despite the persistent pain of traumatic experiences in the past and tough living conditions in the present. Motherhood was a key driver for most interviewees, while social and political

activism was also a clear motive to keep going, as an independent factor or, in one case of a mother pursuing the political cause of a son killed in battle, in conjunction with motherhood.

Each woman used unique modes of coping to deal with the memories of their traumatic experience and manage the emotions associated with it. Those who succeeded in creating a continuity of narrative between their traumatic experience and the meaning ascribed thereto on the one hand, and the reasons and values of their current life on the other, showed better coping with their pain and higher appreciation of their growing agency.

As a final note, by choosing in-depth interviews as a method to collect stories of Syrian women and IPA to analyze them, we have been operating under the assumption that each one of those stories is unique. Nevertheless, this does not preclude that there are patterns that could be extrapolated. The five women shared stories of war, structured gender-based violence, and hardships in the country of asylum, yet each developed her unique narrative as well as reasons and tools to survive. These women definitely are not representative of all Syrian women, or even all Syrian women in Lebanon, but their stories open the way for understanding the suffering, and hope, of all these women.

Chapter 6

The Lives of Egyptian Women between Continuous Trauma and Resistance

A Feminist Analysis of Narratives of Five Survivors after the 2011 Revolution

Abstract

This paper aims at understanding how the socio-political context shapes women's exposure to traumas and influences their perception of these traumas while contributing to their responses. Based on the narratives of five Egyptian trauma survivors, several themes were extracted to explain the modes of victimization of and resistance by these women in the context of Egypt post-2011 revolution. The paper focuses on sexual violence and political traumas as two forms of gendered traumas that are tightly connected to socio-political changes after 2011. Applying interpretative phenomenological analysis, six themes emerged highlighting the survivors' readings of the context in which their traumas occurred, how gender roles shaped exposure and response to trauma, their everyday resistance, their resistance during the traumatic events, their sense of victimization versus agency, and finally their sense of guilt following their survival. This research underlines the fundamental need to consider women's traumas within their wider socio-cultural and political context, while highlighting the possible value of employing a feminist lens that investigates these traumas and women's responses to them in light of cultural and social representations of gender roles.

Keywords

Resistance, victimization, gender roles, political trauma, sexual violence trauma, Egyptian women

The Lives of Egyptian Women between Continuous Trauma and Resistance

A Feminist Analysis of Narratives of Five Survivors after the 2011 Revolution

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1. Introduction

In examining early accounts of trauma within psychology and beyond, feminist scholars have emphasized how women's experiences of trauma have been misread under the influence of the dominant patriarchy. Such early readings isolated women's suffering from their social and political contexts and ignored the systemic patterns of violence that make women more prone to interpersonal traumas. This has led to women's voices being silenced for decades, their narratives distorted, their suffering normalized, and the significance of their resistance ignored (Griffiths, 2018; Webster & Dunn, 2005).

Through his effort on treating the trauma of gender-based violence (GBV), Wade (1997) demonstrated how the narrative approach incorporates an assumption that individuals possess a pre-existing ability to resist violence and other forms of oppression. He stressed the importance of widening the definition of resistance beyond the dominating masculine assumptions that merely recognize physical acts of fighting back. He defined resistance as "any mental or behavioral act through which a person attempts to expose, withstand, repel, stop, prevent, abstain from, strive against, impede, refuse to comply with, or oppose any form of violence or oppression […], or the conditions that make such acts possible" (p. 25).

Over the last decades, cultural and feminist critiques of the medical approach to trauma have been increasingly highlighting the limitations and drawbacks of this approach. These critiques mainly addressed the fact that the medical approach was centered around the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a diagnostic category, basing its analysis on an oversimplified assumption of specific homogenous acontextual patterns of responses to severe adversity and extreme threatening events. Consequently, many scholars called for revisiting the dominant approaches of studying and treating trauma in psychology (Mattar & Vogel, 2014; Muldoon, Lowe, Jetten, Cruwys, & Haslam, 2021). Most notably, it was argued that the frameworks and methods used should consider the uniqueness of the living realities of survivors, represent their histories, and echo the meanings they ascribe to their experiences, while reflecting the specificity of the socio-political contexts in which the traumatic experiences have occurred (Allsopp, Read, Corcoran, & Kinderman, 2019, Brown, 2008, Webster & Dunn, 2005).

A growing body of research has been accentuating the centrality of contextual factors in shaping trauma, and its aftermath, determining both victimization and recovery. According to these efforts, political, social, and cultural foundations of trauma place specific groups at

higher risks of being exposed to specific types of systematic violence. Factors such as social identities, cultural properties, and relationships of power directly contribute to group vulnerabilities while influencing psychological responses to trauma. Therefore, these foundations and factors need to be integrated into theories on trauma, and to be considered in trauma intervention efforts (Carswell, Blackburn, & Barker, 2011; Marlowe, 2010; Muldoon, Lowe, Jetten, Cruwys, & Haslam, 2021).

A clear example of this perspective is Harvey's ecological framework of women's victimization, through which she unpacked the interrelationships between the individual and the community. Harvey emphasized how features of the environment can serve as mechanisms to promote violence against women, while shaping trauma consequences, facilitating or hindering recovery. She specifically discussed how community values and attitudes towards women, and beliefs regarding violence against women, are factors that directly influence the recovery process (Harvey, 1996, Koss & Harvey, 1991). Similarly, Webster and Dunn (2005) emphasized how different feminist scholars recognized violence against women in general, and sexual violence (SV) in particular, as being tightly linked to the social construction of femininities and masculinities and their associated gendered schemas, e.g., dominance versus subservience, in addition to the power structures associated with class and race.

Furthermore, through her intensive work with women of color, Root (1992) stressed the importance of considering the different social locations that shape women's positions of power, such as ethnicity, race, sexuality, social class, and economic status, when investigating women's traumas. This intersectionality lens helps achieve two objectives: (a) investigating how these multiple factors act together to determine women's positions of power within the social structure, shaping their living realities, including their exposure to violence; and (b) examining how interaction among these factors influences women's perception of, and response to, violence, while contributing to the psychological and psychosocial consequences of such violence (Stewart & McDermott, 2004).

Along similar lines, Brownmiller (1993) emphasized how SV against women directly serves the patriarchy and the associated hierarchy of power. She demonstrated that rape has been historically used as a tool for establishing foundations of the patriarchal social structure, e.g., women's need for men's protection and men's ownership of women. Several subsequent accounts posited SV as a clear manifestation of sexism and the underlying gender norms, showing how SV is usually used to maintain the gender status quo of male domination, and protect against women who threaten such status quo when behaving in a counter-stereotypic manner (Conner, Glick, & Fiske, 2017; Vandello, Bosson, & Cohen, Burnaford & Weaver, 2008).

Many subsequent feminist scholars employed narratives of women trauma survivors to show that patterns of violence against women are systemic abuses constituting a structured socio-political phenomenon that should not be treated as private, isolated, or random occurrences (Griffiths, 2018). Such narratives were also used as foundations to engage with, and mobilize against, the political, legal, social, and cultural forces that underline violence

against women. In these lines of research, SV was explicitly conceptualized as a gendered trauma, and as a social and political issue that is systematically produced within a patriarchal binary gender system, targeting women based on the conventional cultural notions associated with femininity (Conner, Glick, & Fiske, 2017). Therefore, to understand and treat women's SV traumas, psychological research needs to integrate the socio-cultural representations of gender roles and the related contextual factors.

Beyond the feminist reading of SV traumas, a number of scholars used a gendered lens to examine other types of women's trauma, including political violence (PV), i.e., forms of violence perpetrated by the State, such as arrest and violence by the police or the military against protestors. Several studies highlighted the degree to which PV takes specific gendered forms when targeting women (Hadzic & Tavits, 2019). Bardall, Bjarnegård, & Piscopo (2019) presented a framework on State PV against women through which they identified three elements: (a) the gendered motivation of PV, i.e., maintaining the dominance of patriarchal gender norms over the public sphere; (b) the gendered forms of PV, e.g., sexual assault, shaming women's sexual conduct, and sexualized online attacks against women engaged in politics; and (c) the gendered impact on women, as women may interpret and construct narratives and meanings, as well as respond to PV differently, in light of their understanding of the feminine gender roles. Within this line of research, feminist scholars called for collecting and analyzing not only the narratives of women activists, but also narratives on women's engagement in the public sphere, specifically in moments of political tension or conflict, to highlight how this engagement, and its consequences, are colored by the foundations of gender roles (Bryant-Davis, Adams, Alejandre, & Gray, 2017; Burdryte, 2010; Heberle, Obus, & Gray, 2020; Punamaki, 2020).

Feminist psychology scholarship showed the great academic, social, and moral value of relying on own women's understanding of their victimization and resistance and integrating survivors' voices into the study of violence and gendered traumas (Koss, 1985; E. Cole, 2009). Over the years, feminist scholars criticized and challenged the dominant epistemological and methodological approaches in psychology, highlighting how these approaches adopt restrictive perspectives concerning the nature and purpose of psychological research, and marginalize women's lived experiences for the purpose of "objectivity-maximizing" or generalization (Harding, 1992). Instead, feminist theorists argue for centering the lives of women and other marginalized groups, as a starting point, in the heart of psychological knowledge, integrating their subjective perceptions of their social realities, and relying on their own narratives to understand psychological responses to traumatic experience. The narrative approach was thus advanced as an adequate tool that conveys ethical commitment and empirical values, as it may (a) contribute to social justice through giving voice to marginalized groups and restore visibility to their obscured experiences; and (b) facilitate, through the process of storytelling itself, meaning-making of traumatic experiences, helping trauma survivors develop a sense of ownership and control over their challenging living conditions (B. Cole, 2009; De Hanene, Grietens, & Verschueren, 2010).

Needless to say, the multilayered context in which women's experiences are produced is a central point of departure when seeking to understand these experiences and interpret women's perceptions of them (Brooks, 2007; Eagly & Riger, 2014; Harding, 1992).

2. Context of the Study

In January 2011, a popular revolution broke out in Egypt calling for political and social reforms. After 18 days of massive protests and sit-ins, former Egyptian president Mubarak, who had remained in power for 30 years, was successfully deposed (Kirkpatrick, 2011). Following the downfall of the Mubarak regime, Egypt entered a phase of political instability, during which waves of State and social violence occurred. In June 2012, the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist opposition group, came to power through presidential elections. A year later, a military coup supported by populist demonstrations removed the Muslim Brotherhood from power after a brutal crackdown on their supporters. Since the coup of 2013, Egypt has been living under an extremely oppressive political and social environment. Arbitrary arrests, forced disappearances, torture in detention centers, and unjust trials have been extensively used against opponents of the regime, including civil and human rights activists and members of the secular opposition (Amnesty International, 2019; Human Rights Watch, 2014).

Matthies-Boon (2017) emphasizes how extreme PV and oppression in Egypt, post-2011 revolution, have created an environment of continuous traumatic stress. She calls for consideration not only of events that are traditionally classified as traumatic events, e.g., killings, arrests, torture, and SV, but also of the continuous structural forms of extreme political repression, especially in the period following the military coup in 2013 (Matthies-Boon, 2018).

Looking particularly at women's situation, the 2011 revolution brought about significant challenges and risks while opening up new spaces and opportunities. During and following the 2011 revolution and consequent socio-political changes, Egyptian women have gained new spaces of engagement, which has reflected on the emergence of new gender politics and roles (Biagini, 2019). Through their massive involvement in the protests and other channels of political and social mobilization, women challenged the patriarchal structure of power and negotiated with a wide range of socio-cultural and political oppressing forces (Hafez, 2014). Many newcomers, especially young women from social and geographical peripheries, joined the public sphere and became engaged in the emerging political and social movements or were organized in social and feminist initiatives (Hassan, 2015). Women's involvement in the public sphere contributed to breaching the silence on established practices of GBV, motivated more women to speak up and resist, created a public debate on GBV, particularly SV, and opened a door for change (Hassan, 2015; Zaki & Abd Alhamid, 2014).

Meanwhile, accompanying and following the 2011 revolution, a massive rise in SV was documented (Abdelmonem, 2015). Zaki & Abd Alhamid (2014) described how SV is a daily reality for women in Egypt, making them largely vulnerable to a wide range of threats (e.g., verbal harassment, sexual assault, and rape). They underlined specifically the emergence of

new forms of violence, such as gang rape and mob sexual assault, which took place primarily during protests and mass gatherings. Yet, SV in Egypt is not a post-2011 phenomenon. Several reports from women's rights organizations had underscored the massive prevalence of SV against women prior to 2011 in both, the private and public spheres (McRobie, 2014). In a 2005 report by the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR), 83% of Egyptian women reported exposure to sexual harassment, and 46.1% reported experiencing it on a daily basis (Shoukry, Hassan, & Abul Komsan, 2005). Furthermore, according to ECWR, a report by security agencies confirmed 20,000 rape cases in Egypt in 2007 (Aboul Komsan, 2009). Many other forms of violence against Egyptian women in the private sphere were documented by both the Egyptian civil society and the Egyptian State over the past decade. This includes domestic violence, child sexual abuse, and female genital mutilation (FGM), i.e., the practice of cutting parts of external female genitalia, mostly happening to girls between the age of 8 and 12. According to the 2014 Egypt Demographic Health Survey, 92% of ever-married women between the age of 15 and 49 have been subjected to FGM (Rossem, Meekers, & Gage, 2016).

In parallel, many reports highlighted how since 2011, Egyptian women have been exposed to gendered forms of PV, which increased in relation to the massive crackdown on the public sphere after the 2013 coup. In addition to the systematic targeting of women human rights defenders and political activists through arrests and other forms of detention, many Egyptian women were exposed to several gendered forms of PV and violations by State actors (e.g., virginity tests, forced pregnancy tests, defamation campaigns using women's personal choices, sexual harassment and assault, and threats of rape during detention) (Amnesty International, 2011; Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance, El Nadeem, & WILPF, 2019; McRobie, 2014). Against this backdrop, this paper adopts the notion that the 2011 revolution and its aftermaths directly contributed to Egyptian women's victimization, especially for those who were directly engaged in political or social movements following the revolution, while at the same time opening spaces for them to practice resistance.

Relying on the narratives of women trauma survivors, this paper investigates how the socio-political context shapes women's exposure to, perception of, and responses to traumas. The paper focuses on SV and gendered PV as two forms of gendered traumas that are tightly connected to the political and social changes after 2011. The narratives of five Egyptian survivors are employed to examine women's modes of victimization and resistance in the context of post-2011 Egypt. Through this approach, a deeper understanding can be reached regarding how political, social, and cultural forces shape women's victimization, which contributes to our global understanding of the specificity of women's gendered traumas and the significance of their resistance. Furthermore, this approach constitutes a foundation for designing more culturally relevant therapeutic interventions and more grounded engagements with the calls and efforts for social change.

3. Method

In line with the feminist theoretical framework elaborated above, this paper adopts a qualitative in-depth approach through collecting and analyzing the narratives of five Egyptian women SV and PV trauma survivors. The objective is to identify common themes in women's perception of the context and nature of their traumas and in their psychological responses to those traumas.

The narrative approach to trauma is concerned with the meaning-making of the lived experiences of individuals. This takes place via the storytelling process as participants construct narratives about their experiences (van Manen, 2002). Nevertheless, it has been emphasized that narrative construction is a collaborative and interactive process between the narrator and the listener, i.e., the participant and the researcher (Kevers, Rober, & De Haene, 2017; Riessman, 2008). Through this interactive process, a wide range of factors directly influences the way in which the narrative is constructed. These factors include the researcher's actions, both intentional (e.g., briefing on the research and researcher, phrasing of questions, and management of moments of silence and length of pauses), and unintentional (e.g., non-verbal signals and spontaneous comments); in addition to features of the data collection context, the researcher's subjectivity, and the participant's perception of the researcher's positionality (Bishop & Shepherd, 2011; Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 2008). As such, the researcher is not simply a recipient of the participant's narrative, but she/he also co-constructs that narrative within a specific socio-political context (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995; Kevers, Rober, & De Haene, 2017). An account of interview settings and the researcher's positionality would therefore help better understand the context of this research project.

3.1 Statement of Researcher's Positionality

This study was carried out at a moment of intense political polarization in Egypt that was marked by significant tension between the supporters and opponents of the incumbent regime. Additionally, members of diverse opposition groups were facing high risks of arrest and detention. The study was implemented at El Nadeem Center for Management and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, a prominent Egyptian NGO established in 1993 to support GBV and PV survivors and provide them with psychological and psychiatric interventions and legal aid, in addition to documenting and mobilizing against State violence and GBV. El Nadeem is well-known as an opposition NGO with a feminist orientation. It is highly vocal against State violations, while its staff are recognized as human rights doctors and feminist activists.

The first author, who conducted the interviews, is a secular middle-class Egyptian woman, feminist clinical psychologist, doctoral researcher, and human rights activist. She previously worked with several Egyptian feminist and human rights organizations, through which she became deeply involved in the political and feminist movements. During the Egyptian revolution of 2011, and subsequent events, she actively took part in the protests and mobilization. Since the rise of SV, as well as mass sexual assaults and gang rape during

demonstrations, she participated in the civic and feminist movement in response to the assaults, particularly providing emergency interventions and psychological support to women survivors.

The political position of the first author, the profile of the hosting organization, and the relationship between the organization and the researcher were made clear to the participants before the interviews. On one hand, it is believed that this helped gain the trust of the participants in a highly threatening political environment. Some of the participants had obvious security concerns and they explicitly emphasized that they would not feel comfortable and safe to share their stories unless they are confident that the hosting organization and the researcher share their political position. On the other hand, it is also believed that the political identity of the researcher may have had an influence on the way in which the participants' narratives were constructed.

Unlike the political position of the researcher, which needed to be articulated to gain the trust of participants, her feminist identity was not explicitly mentioned. Yet, one of the five participants was previously active in the feminist movement, so she had already been acquainted with the researcher's feminist work from feminist circles. The other four had not heard of the researcher prior to interview meetings, nor were they familiar with her feminist activism. Further reflection on the possible influence of the researcher's political and feminist ideologies on the constructed narratives will be presented in the discussion section.

The second author is a white, Belgian, French-speaking male professor of clinical psychology. His areas of expertise include emotional regulation, autobiographical memory, and trauma, on both research and practice levels. He has a long experience in supervising a wide range of psychological research, including research on political trauma and on trauma in the context of conflict areas. The identity and the role of the second author were discussed with the participants, including the fact that he will have access to the translated transcripts of the interviews, but not to the audio records, and that he will take part in the analysis process.

3.2 Participants

Six women initially volunteered for this study after reading a recruitment communication on Facebook, and five volunteered after learning about the study through El Nadeem center. After briefing about the study and the researcher, all eleven women were interviewed and offered a short screening questionnaire to ensure their compatibility with the study inclusion criteria: (a) being above 21 years old; (b) having experienced at least one major traumatic event during adulthood that can be classified as SV or gendered PV (see Table 13); (c) being engaged in the 2011-revolution political or subsequent social movements following it; (d) having not received structured therapy prior to the study. Among the 11 women, seven met the study inclusion criteria. And among the seven, two withdrew after the first interview for time constraints, and five completed the research project. Four of the five participants were on anti-depressants and/or tranquilizers, and all five were receiving psychosocial support from El Nadeem doctors prior to the study.

Table 13. Summary Table of Participant Data

Pseudonym	Age	Main Traumatic Event
Aisha	21	Imprisonment under harsh conditions for four months
Mariam	25	Several sexual assaults by her father
Nour	30	Rape by her 60 years old mentor
Hala	24	Arrest and persecution of her older brother
Mona	45	Rape by a taxi driver

Aisha is in her early twenties. She always wore a *niqāb* covering her face, unless she was alone with the researcher in a closed room. She lived in a semi-rural area in the Nile Delta of Egypt, where she was born. She hails from a religiously conservative, middle-class family, and she received her education in religious schools. She has been a high achiever with marked competitive, assertive, and controlling personality features. In 2016, during a wave of mass arrests of Islamist opponents after the 2013 coup, she was arrested and imprisoned for four months under the false allegations of managing an Islamist Facebook page. Although she was only 17, she was imprisoned in a prison for adults under harsh conditions. During imprisonment, she was exposed to several traumatic events including threats of rape, verbal insults, and dehumanizing treatment. She identified being forced to carry out a pregnancy test as her most traumatic moment. She was initially able to maintain a sense of control over the prison environment and her vulnerability, until she collapsed after being transferred to a much harsher prison. Aisha expressed that, since her release, she been suffering from extreme anxiety, marked symptoms of depression, inability to adjust to her social environment, and significant personality changes.

Mariam, who is 25 years old, was born in a less privileged family, in a semi-urban region. Her father has been abusive to her, her sisters, and her mother since her early childhood. She lived her high school and university years under extreme financial hardship. She was exposed to several physical assaults by her father during childhood and adolescence. She underwent FGM at the age of nine, and several instances of sexual assault and rape between the age of 10 and 11. When the Egyptian revolution started, she decided, at the age of 18, to travel to Cairo to join the protests, after which she became involved in several political activities. At the age of 21, her father started to repeatedly sexually assault her and her sisters. The assaults continued for two years until she managed to confront him. A couple of months later, she reported him to the police to end the assaults against her mother and sisters. Although the police authorities resisted to file a case, and everyone around her was pressuring her to drop the charges, she insisted on going on and managed to put an end to the father's assaults. Shortly after, she left the family house, found a job, and became fully independent. Mariam shared that she has been experiencing marked symptoms of depression and PTSD since she left her family home, accompanied by very low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, a sense of guilt, and self-blame.

Nour, who is 30 years old, was born to a middle-class family belonging to one of the main tribes in Upper-Egypt, which has a high social status in the local community and adopts restrictive traditional social and gender norms. Her main childhood trauma was undergoing FGM at the age of 8. She was sexually assaulted by a cousin at age 13, and verbally abused

by her father during childhood. After the 2011 revolution, she became engaged in several political and social activities during which she markedly expanded her social network. She was raped at the age of 27 by her sixty-year-old mentor. A year later, she separated from her family and moved to Cairo. Until the interview, she was unable to process the rape incident, she was describing it as a minor sexual assault that had a small impact in comparison to her other prior traumas. Meanwhile, in the first interview, she reported marked symptoms that fit the description of depression and PTSD.

Hala, who is 24 years old, was born to a middle-class family in a Cairo suburb. She studied car mechanics in a men-only department at a technical institute after she convinced the institute administration to accept her. Challenging social gender norms, she worked at a car workshop for a short period, in a remote area, until she stopped after a significant incident of sexual harassment on her way back home. During childhood, she experienced an incident of sexual assault when she was 5, the sudden death of her father in a car accident when she was 11, and recurrent sexual harassment in public spaces during adolescence and adulthood. When she was 19, her older brother was arrested and prosecuted in the context of a peaceful protest during one of the revolution anniversaries. Throughout the few months of her brother's detention, she was exposed to severe adversity during her biweekly visits to him at the prison. She considered the inspection before prison visits, i.e., the searching of her private body parts, as one of the main traumatizing assaults. During the imprisonment of her brother, she was fully occupied with handling legal and logistical issues related to his detention while suppressing all her negative feelings. She mentioned that after her brother's release, she has started to experience severe anxiety and depression symptoms with marked features of guilt.

Mona, who is in her mid-forties, comes from an upper-middle-class family in Cairo. She is a single mother of an eighteen-year-old girl and a political activist. She got married when she was 25, lived an abusive relationship, and got a divorce seven years later. She has a history of drug abuse. She was exposed to sexual and physical assaults by her older brother when she was 5. During adulthood, she experienced rape by a male friend, the death of a close friend due to drug overdose, a threat of arrest, and the kidnapping of her daughter by police officers, to be released after one hour, to pressure the mother to stop her political activism. In 2018, she was kidnaped and raped by a taxi driver. Immediately after he let her go, she headed to the police and reported, and the offender was arrested the same day. Yet, he was released after failing to prove the rape claims as no "clear signs of resistance" were found by forensic authorities. At the moment of the interview, she was experiencing severe symptoms of PTSD and depression with psychomotor retardation. She had completely withdrawn from all her social responsibilities, quit her job, stopped taking care of her daughter and became fully dependent on the financial and logistical assistance of the NGOs that were managing her case.

All five participants explicitly expressed their political opposition to the incumbent regime, and associated themselves, in diverse ways, with the Egyptian revolution. None of them self-identified as feminist, neither before nor during the interviews.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

The study conforms to APA ethical standards on the treatment of research participants (APA, 2017). EL Nadeem psychiatric board reviewed and approved the study protocol and its ethical considerations prior to the start of the study. The notion of voluntary participation was explained to the participants, including their right to refuse participation, withdraw from the study, refuse to answer specific questions, or refuse the use of their data after the interviews, with no consequences on their relationship with the hosting organization. A detailed informed consent form was discussed and signed prior to the interviews. The possibility that the interviews may activate traumatizing memories and trigger heavy emotions was explained and discussed with the participants before the interviews. Following the interviews, all five participants were offered to join a brief trauma-focused intervention by the first author. Alternatively, they were offered the option of receiving further psychological support sessions from the host organization or receiving free-of-charge psycho-social support sessions by the researcher. All five choose to join the trauma-focused intervention.

3.4 Procedures

Semi-structured in-depth individual interviews were carried out at a private room at El Nadeem where the first author was alone with each participant. After screening interviews to ensure the participants' compatibility with the study inclusion criteria and briefing the participants about the study, the narratives interviews were carried out. They lasted between one session of one hour and a half, and two sessions spanning three hours and a half, depending on how much time was required to cover all pre-determined aspects of the interview. The flexible approach in conducting the interview sessions (duration and structure) was intended to allow a deep understanding of each participant's experience, in addition to allowing time for ventilation and self-disclosure. The interviews were audio-recorded with the prior written consent of the participants.

The interview schedule was designed in light of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) principles of data collection (see Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), and the previous literature concerning the feminist reading of women's trauma, and the impact of the 2011-revolution on Egyptian women. The interview schedule was used only to guide the interview process. The decision to add or skip questions, or to change the questions' order or formatting, was made according to the context of each interview. Each interview covered the following aspects: (a) background information; (b) the participant's perception of gender roles in her society, gender role satisfaction, and any perceived changes in prototypical gender roles, or her own definition of gender roles, post-2011; (c) history of SV, including the most memorable/significant traumatic event; (d) possible gendered traumatic events associated with 2011-revolution and its aftermaths, including the most memorable/significant traumatic event (SV, PV); (e) psychological consequences of traumatic events; (f) meanings ascribed to traumatic events; (g) coping techniques used to confront adversity; (h) the participant's perception of her overall agency/sense of control (i.e., her subjective sense of power and ability to practice control over her living context), which is different from the

concept of being “objectively” agent (see Fahs & McClelland, 2016 and Haffejee & Theron, 2019) (see interview schedule appendix E).

3.5 Data analysis

IPA is a qualitative method that is concerned with the in-depth examination of experiences of individuals. It aims at exploring how people make sense of their major life experiences and their social contexts, especially when everyday life is interrupted by a significant experience. It allows experiences to be expressed in the participants' own terms, rather than according to predefined category systems (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). It is especially concerned with understanding the participant’s “sense-making” processes while positioning the participant’s investigated experiences in their wider social and cultural context (Smith & Osborn, 2003). IPA was chosen for its suitability to the study’s purpose, that is understanding how participants make sense of the multiple traumas they experienced, interpret their responses to them, and read the context in which they occurred.

Another reason IPA was selected was its compatibility with the principle of narrative inquiry (i.e., co-construction of produced narratives and meanings) (Davidsen, 2013; Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006), since IPA is based on the assumption that the accounts emerging from the analytic process are constructed by both the participant and the researcher. Therefore, IPA allows the researcher to take an active role in both, the interview and the analysis processes through their interpretation of the participants’ narratives (Gilkinson, 2009).

The five interviews were transcribed by the first author and the parts that directly related to the study questions were translated into English. IPA was applied by the first author using the original transcripts. The analysis process went through several steps: (a) initial noting, assigning comments to each section of each transcript; (b) descriptive comments, identifying the key features of each transcript; (c) conceptual comments, interpreting the data, and constructing meanings concerning each participant narrative and life context, (d) developing emergent themes across the transcripts of the five participants, identifying the relationships and patterns between the five narratives. Aiming at identifying and tackling the possible biases in the first author’s interpretation, the second author extracted themes using the translated version of the transcripts. The themes extracted showed high consistency between the two examiners.

4. Results

Applying IPA, six key themes emerged from the survivors' narratives, highlighting elements of victimization, resistance, and survival. Themes (i) to (iv) were identified in interviews with all participants, Theme (v) among four of them, and Theme (vi) among three of them. Themes (i) and (ii) address the participants’ perception of the underlying gendered features of their traumas and the contexts in which their traumas happened, while the other four themes highlight the participants’ responses to the overall traumatic context and the

specific traumatic events they experienced. In the following section, each theme will be discussed and supported by examples from the survivors' narratives.

4.1 2011: A Moment of Personal and Global Change in Gender Politics

When asked whether recent changes took place in normative gender roles and their adopted femininities according to their self-construal, all five participants agreed that there were major changes in their own position as women, as well as women's situation in general, in the Egyptian society. They unanimously attributed these changes to the 2011-revolution and the socio-political aftermaths thereof. Yet, they differed in the way in which they evaluated these changes.

Nour stated that "with the revolution, things changed completely. It is not just me who became independent in my hometown. Many other girls also left their families, many took their headscarves off, and many started to travel alone. That was never possible before […]. People started to accept that women can be engaged in politics. Even my mother told me that I should join a political party […]. With the revolution, many established certainties have fallen. We broke a taboo when we forced Mubarak [Egyptian president 1981-2011] to step down, so other taboos started to fall as well".

For Hala, 2011 revealed the unfairness of women's situation. Women were encouraged to speak up and to fight for their presence and rights, but in the end, the reality did not change much. "When the revolution happened, ugly things started to appear on the surface" she said. "I was shocked by how ugly things are, but I was also happy that many people are trying to change them. […] I feel that men got scared, and any woman who tries to do something atypical now is being crushed".

Meanwhile, Mona evaluated the post-2011 changes negatively, stressing the marked rise in SV, specifically sexual harassment in the public sphere. "It was never like that before. Men became much more aggressive and brutal".

For Aisha, subsequent political and social changes were more significant than the revolution itself. As many men from her circle were arrested or killed during and after the military coup of 2013 for suspected connections with the Islamist opposition, their wives were pushed to the public space. "A change happened to many women due to the political situation, along with the harsh economic situation" she explained. "Women suddenly found their husbands forcibly disappeared, arrested, or killed, and in a day, they were forced to solely carry the responsibility of the family […]. I heard many stories of women who used to be housewives and suddenly had to work, to be able to get some money that can cover the expenses of their detained husbands [e.g., lawyer fees, external sustenance provisions], or just to feed their children".

Moreover, Mariam, Nour, and Hala saw 2011 as a moment of significant personal change. They all described becoming politically and socially engaged, more grounded, and gaining agency and self-confidence. "2011 had a huge influence on me, and on how I see myself,"

Mariam stated. “I did not know before that I am capable of doing such things […]. I started to see that I have rights I should stand for. I started to learn how to defend my rights, and how to say no […] I was always against things around me, but I was not able to speak up and say no out loud. For me, that was a chance to say no to so many things, including my father’s abuse”.

4.2 Her Traumas are Gendered

The second key theme reflected the participants’ consciousness of the gendered nature of their traumatic experiences, specifically that their gender roles and identities influenced their victimization, and that political and socio-cultural representations of dominant femininity and masculinity shaped their traumas and their consequences. Moreover, their narratives reflected an intersectional perspective, highlighting how their multidimensional identities, such as socioeconomic status and tribal affiliation, shaped their respective positions of power during the traumatic experience. Out of the five participants, three identified their main traumatic events during adulthood as rape or sexual assault, whereas the other two gave prominence to traumas that were political in nature, highlighting how these experiences were shaped by their gender roles. Furthermore, all five participants identified several other sexual traumas during childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (e.g., sexual abuse and FGM, in addition to everyday street sexual harassment).

Nour’s narrative of her rape experience by her mentor reflected an intersectional perspective of how the nexus of socio-cultural factors play a role in victimization. She highlighted that her position as a young woman from a conservative family/tribe in upper Egypt with very restrictive gender norms shaped the power relation with her rapist who was her gateway to a more open world and a wider social circle of intellectuals and political activities. With this intersectionality perspective, she emphasized how her tribal affiliation and its associated gender norms, e.g., her fear for her life if her family knew that she was raped, affected her victimization and her healing attempts afterward. She felt compelled not to cry for help during rape, confront by the rapist thereafter, or try to seek support from others. Moreover, Nour highlighted that rape by her mentor was “punishment” for her rebellious gendered conduct. She specified that she was perceived as a non-conformist woman by her rapist, and how he used that to justify his crime. Recounting a phone call with her rapists that took place immediately after the incident, she stated that her rapist thought what he did would make her happy. “I see how nervous, angry, and aggressive you are all the time, and I thought doing this would calm you down,” he told her.

Through her narration, while directly reflecting on how her suffering was shaped by her gender along with her socio-economic status, Mariam portrayed her overall anger regarding what she experienced as a girl throughout her entire life since her childhood, till she was able to break the cycle of violence and put an end her father’s abuse. She continually stressed that her position as a less privileged girl, who lived in a suburban conservative context with restrictive patriarchal gender norms, contributed to her traumas. In addition to multiple sexual assaults by different perpetrators, FGM, physical assaults, and deprivation, she always had to live with a stigma of being a “wayward girl”, because of her non-conformity to the

restrictive gender norms of her community. This contributed to her isolation, lack of self-confidence, and a constant sense of fear. Concerning her main traumatic event, she highlighted how the police authorities, her family, and the community reacted when she reported her father, and how these reactions revealed the contribution of traditional gender norms to women's victimization. "The police officers refused to file a case in the beginning, they were not believing me until they asked my mother and my sisters […]. After that, the prosecutor refused to hear the complete story saying he cannot stand listening to shocking inappropriate details […]. Later, everyone was pressuring me to withdraw the report, they even organized a family meeting, with all the family men including my father himself, to convince me to drop the case, which they believed was just about physical [i.e., nonsexual] abuse".

Reflecting on the extent to which her rape trauma was shaped by the socio-politically legal context, Mona described how the release of the taxi driver who raped her, when the forensic authorities reported not finding signs of resistance on her body, was a second trauma for her. It showed her how, despite her effort to bring her rapist to justice, he eventually got away with his crime because of the juridical definition of offenses of SV, which for her was part of the rape culture.

Hala and Aisha also provided a gendered reading of their political traumas. Hala described how inspection procedures during her visits to her brother in prison, including the touching of her private body parts, were the most emotionally intense moments, and for her, this was linked to her several sexual harassment and assault experiences. Aisha described how forcing her to take a pregnancy test during her transfer from one prison to another, was the peak of her fear. "I was very upset, and I felt completely crushed" she said. "I am a virgin, and they want me to take a pregnancy test! […] I did not know how the test would be done and I was terrified that someone would see my private parts, what if they would ask a man to do it […] It was killing me".

4.3 Pushing the Boundaries of Gender Norms: A History of Everyday Resistance

When asked how they perceive the gender norms associated with gender roles, all five participants expressed a sense of anger and consciousness of unbalanced gender power relations. Mariam, who survived her father's abuse, stressed her anger and expressed how she sees sexual violence as linked to the gender hierarchy of power. She said: "They want a woman to be silent, passive, submissive, to stick all the time to the specific scenarios assigned to her. If she dares to break the pattern, to be assertive or independent, they try to crush her. I have been having a big problem with all of that since a very early age. I used to get mad when someone was telling me what I should or should not do. […]. I see they also give men a position that makes them entitled to harass and assault women. They think because they are men, they have the right to do whatever they want, including harassing women".

The narratives of all participants showed how, prior to their main traumatic events, they have been challenging the restrictive gender norms and pushing the boundaries of the binary

gender scenarios. Moreover, they were aware of the conflict they were facing, and the price they had to pay, due to their nonconformist behavior.

Mariam described how since her early adolescence she chose a lifestyle different from what was accepted in her community, i.e., to dress more openly, to have multiple romantic and social relations with the opposite sex. This gave her the social stigmatized image of a "wayward girl", exposing her to extreme social pressure and family conflicts. She successfully prevented her family from subjecting her younger sister to FGM, after being subjected to it herself, which reflects her early resistance and continuous attempts to challenge gender norms, not just for herself, but for others around her as well.

Nour, challenging the gender norms of her family and tribe, made a decision to study, and later to work, in another city far from her family, aiming to gain independence and to build a different life. Later, she decided to marry someone who is not from her tribe, which is strictly forbidden under her tribe's norms, especially for a woman, despite knowing the price she was going to pay for her decision. Mona chose to be a single mother and an outspoken political activist while living a lifestyle that exposes her to strong social criticism and a serious risk that the political regime could use information about her private life and personal choices to blackmail her.

Though having a religiously-conservative background, Aisha portrayed herself as a young girl different from any other in her community, being very assertive, confrontational, and a high achiever, competing with male peers and having a high sense of agency and ability to control, while extremely restricting her emotions. Finally, Hala emphasized how she successfully changed the system of a technical educational institute to study car mechanics in a previously men-only department. Later, she worked for a short period in a car repair workshop in an isolated area on a highway outside Cairo, which is something very unusual for a girl. As she quit the job after a sexual harassment incident on her way back from the workshop, this was for her the point at which she was confronted with all the questions about her nonconformity and the price she was paying for challenging gender norms.

4.4 She Kept Resisting even in Situations of Extreme Victimization

In addition to everyday resistance to unfair socio-cultural contexts, other signs of resistance during the traumatic events emerged. The survivors varied in their ability to recognize their resistance and its significance. Some were focused on their inability to stop the harm or to punish the perpetrators. Aisha described how she was able to protect herself from being abused during the first phase of her imprisonment by suppressing her emotions of fear and vulnerability, creating a strong, in-control, and confrontational persona in dealing with guards, officers, and other prisoners.

Mariam's narrative of her battle against her father, who used to have complete social and financial authority over her; her success in putting an end to the harm for herself, her sisters, and her mother; and her persistence to pursue the case against her father despite the social pressure to withdraw, are clear examples of her capacity to resist in a context of extreme

victimization, even with limited resources. Despite her expressed lack of self-esteem and self-confidence, unlike Nour and Mona, she was aware of the significance of her resistance and strength in relation to this experience specifically, portraying this battle as her main life achievement.

Mona and Nour mentioned that they were aware of the fact that physical resistance, screaming, or calling for help during rape might have put them in greater danger. Yet, they were both fixated on their inability to stop the offense, reflecting feelings of guilt and self-blame. After being beaten up by her rapist, Mona described how she figured out that she would not be able to stop him, and she would have been killed had she resisted. Nour recounted that all she was thinking about was her family's reaction if they knew she'd been raped. As the rape took place in the offender's apartment, located in the same neighborhood where most of her tribe lived, she was not able to cry for help, knowing that they would kill them both if they became aware of the incident.

Furthermore, both Mona and Nour highlighted representations of resistance following the rape. Mona, for instance, narrated that directly after the rapist let her go, she headed directly to the nearest police station and reported the rape. She described how she endured the long hours in the police station, having to recount what happened over and over to the officers while still in a state of shock, and then having to undergo forensic investigation, and the other legal procedures, to reach justice. "I did not even think about it. I found myself telling the Uber I took from his place to take me to the nearest police station. At that point, that seemed to me as the normal thing to do, but now I realize how heavy that was. I needed him to be punished. I was ready to do anything to make this happen, but all was in vain".

4.5 A False Dichotomy of Agency and Victimization

Many signs of high agency emerged from the survivor's narratives. Further, the narratives highlighted how a high sense of control was the main coping technique allowing the participants to keep going despite extreme adversity, while hindered their ability to process the situation of victimization in which their ability to control was restricted. Despite Mariam's long-term history of abuse, she managed to make decisions and build a life that is completely different from her social circle and cultural background. Throughout her brother's imprisonment period, Hala was visiting him in prison twice a week, facing harsh treatment and humiliation by police officers and guards, and spending the remaining days in arranging for the next visit, following up with lawyers and leading a large support group of his friends.

Nour explained that she chose a completely different path from what was expected from a woman of her background. She stressed how her sense of uniqueness in comparison to other girls in her context, and her sense of ability to control her life, were the main motives that helped her to keep going despite adversity. Aisha was able to exercise control over the prison environment, protecting herself from potential violence by other prisoners and guards. Finally, Mona highlighted her strong and in-control personality before her recent rape trauma. Being a working single mother and an outspoken political activist was for her a source of pride and a motivation to keep going.

On the other hand, the narratives of the survivors echoed their inability to accept the fact that they lost control during the traumatic event. Accordingly, they did not process the negative emotions associated with victimization such as vulnerability, fear, and helplessness.

Aisha explained that her main coping technique during imprisonment was to reclaim control over the prison environment, and her emotions of fear and vulnerability, and to create a persona of a strong in-control girl in front of herself and others. “I changed my personality completely, from a kind and calm person to someone very strong who shouts at others and threatens them. I even started using inappropriate swear words. I did so to be able to deal with criminal prisoners, officers, and guards. I knew that they have this image of political prisoners as vulnerable, inexperienced people whom they can abuse or control, especially with someone like me, at my age and with my background. […] So, I created this persona to make them scared of me, so they would dare to touch me. And I was successful.”

Despite all threats and violence since her arrest, Aisha's highest moment of fear was after being transferred to a harsher prison, when she started to realize she was not in control over her environment anymore. Subsequently, she started to lose control over her emotions, show vulnerability in front of others, and experience symptoms of extreme anxiety and depression. She identified this moment as the peak of her fear network.

Hala, who also had a high sense of agency since childhood, identified her worst fearful moments to be when she lost control over the situation. She highlighted the fact that she was able to deal with severe hardships as long as there was a possibility “to do something about it”, e.g., to exercise control in relation to her brother's imprisonment. Her extreme moments of fear were those when there was nothing she could do to change the context of an overall traumatic situation, e.g., when she was being inspected, having her private parts touched by guards, before each visit to her brother in prison, and being unable to raise objections in order not to expose her brother to punishment. As this moment yielded a feeling of helplessness and lack of control, it activated her fear network.

In the same context, Mariam and Fatma are two examples of refusing the victim role by constructing a distorted narrative about their traumatic events. Mariam used to have a strong feeling of guilt, shame, and self-blame about her early rape experience that happened at the age of 11 by her “boyfriend” who was 12 years older. She narrated the story with much shame and guilt portraying herself as someone who had a sexual encounter at an early age, which for her was an early sign of “indecency” and “waywardness”.

In the case of Nour, she labeled her rape trauma at the beginning of the interview as an attempt of sexual assault that did not leave much impact in comparison to her other traumas. Yet, when she started to tell the details she mentioned that she realized she was not able to deal with this specific incident nor speak about it to anyone because she was not able to process nor recognize she was raped by someone she trusted and considered a godfather. She explained that she downplayed the event and its effects to avoid facing what had happened and placing herself in the role of a victim.

4.6 A Meaning they Constructed, a Source of Guilt

Both Hala and Aisha emphasized a sense of guilt linked to their post-trauma emotional and moral involvement in political and human rights endeavors. They described becoming preoccupied with politics and experiencing over-identification with other political prisoners.

Aisha defined a role for herself in prison, that is helping other women prisoners be "better people", teaching them to read and write, and giving them religious lessons on Islam. She defined this as a "mission from God she was chosen for", and the main mitigating factor of her suffering in prison. At the same time, she described a marked sense of guilt towards other political prisoners after her release. "I spent a long period not being able to sleep in my bed, just sleeping on the floor. I was thinking about other political prisoners all the time. I was not letting myself enjoy anything. When I went out with my friends, I felt guilt and I immediately started thinking about the suffering of other prisoners. I was not able to accept the idea that I am out of prison while many are still in".

Similarly, Hala described how, after her brother's release, she developed a sense of guilt towards other political prisoners who continued to suffer. At the same time, she defined her gained political awareness of the misery of political prisoners and their families as the primary meaning that helped her endure her brother's imprisonment. She stressed that she has mentioned several times to her mother that "God did that to make us aware of the amount of injustice in our country".

5. Discussion

The narratives of the five survivors corroborate the premise that each of the traumatic events investigated can only be understood within the wider gendered socio-cultural political context, and in relation to the survivors' own reading of that context. On the one hand, the traumatic experiences these five women lived were produced by the socio-political and cultural context in Egypt, in which women are highly exposed to structured GBV. On the other hand, the notions each survivor holds regarding gender roles, and the associated socio-cultural constructs, shaped her appraisal of the trauma and determined its aftermath. This corresponds to the feminist approach to trauma, which emphasized how GBV is a product of women's living context and a representation of the gender norms and relationships of power dominating this context (Webster & Dunn, 2005).

Furthermore, the realization each survivor had regarding the gendered representations of her traumatic experience, and how the socio-cultural gender norms shaped her victimization, contributed to an early non-conformist behavior and a rebellious attitude against patriarchal gender norms, and it also instigated strong resistance to the foundational conditions of victimization. In line with this, several feminist scholars have emphasized how the realization of injustice and discrimination associated with conventional patriarchal norms may lead individuals to adopt non-conformist attitudes in opposition of traditional gender scripts. This opposition is expressed through explicit or implicit acts that aim to challenge the restrictive boundaries of dominant prototypical femininities or masculinities (Bem, 1993; Butler, 2005)

On the other hand, the participants portrayed the 2011 revolution and its aftermath as moments of fluidity in gender norms and reconstruction of gender roles. They associated the changes with women's increased engagement in the public sphere, the emerging awareness emanating from newly opened spaces and mobilization, the undermining of the patriarchy represented by the political regime itself, and economic and political changes following the 2013 coup, which pushed many women, especially Islamist women, to be the breadwinners of their families after the mass arrests and killings of their husbands. This echoed the emphasis of several reports and studies on changes in gender roles and gender politics in Egypt following the 2011 revolution, particularly in relation to women and femininities (Al-Ali, 2012, 2014; Amar, 2011b; Biagini, 2019; Hassan, 2015)

Likewise, the participants also highlighted how 2011 and its aftermath brought about moments of personal change, through which they gained resources, awareness, and a sense of agency. Biagini (2019), focusing specifically on the Muslim Sisterhood activists, emphasized how the intense politicization of Islamist women activists since 2011 has contributed to an emerging gender consciousness. She illustrated that, although the majority of Islamist women activists do not define themselves as feminists, they embrace feminist politics and convey a feminist consciousness in their practices in both, public and private spheres, opposing the patriarchal norms of their own groups.

Building on the survivors' narratives, and in line with Biagini's thesis, which can be extended to non-Islamist Egyptian women, we argue that 2011, and the massive waves of violence and oppression that followed, shaped a gender consciousness and sharpened the feminist voice among many Egyptian women, especially those who felt connected to, or involved in, the public sphere, including the five participants in our study. In their narratives, this can be seen in the expressed anger towards patriarchal values, their gendered reading of violence against women, and their persisting resistance to normative gender ideologies and the roles through which they challenged patriarchal authorities.

Nevertheless, as reflected in the narratives of their early life, the revolution of 2011, as a collective moment of change and resistance, did not provide the five survivors with new gender ideologies. Rather, it widened their pre-existing gendered questions, and sharpened their feminist consciousness, through linking their personal suffering and their history of everyday resistance to the broader socio-cultural and political contexts.

The participants' developing feminist consciousness, and their awareness of the gendered nature of their traumatic experiences may have been influenced as well by the rise of GBV following 2011, which many scholars and activists framed as a backlash to the mobilization of women and a tool of punishment to deter efforts towards the emancipation of women (Zaki & Abd Alhamid, 2014, Marcus, 2011). This echoes Kandiyoti's (2013) notion of *masculinist restoration* which refers to a time "[w]hen patriarchy as usual no longer feels secure," she explains, "it requires a higher level of coercion and the deployment of more varied ideological state apparatuses to ensure its reproduction." This can be expanded to the employment (or condoning) of a wider range of violent acts against women who challenge the patriarchy (Kandiyoti, 2013, Al-Ali, 2014).

Nour's narration of her rape experience and how her rapist tried to justify his crime by claiming it was a reaction to her allegedly angry and aggressive personality and an attempt to "calm her down," was a concrete example of the use of SV as a tool of punishment for challenging conventional gender norms, corresponding with Brownmiller's (1993) thesis that rape, specifically, was historically associated with the establishment of male-domination and patriarchy. This is also in line with the ambivalent sexism model, in which hostile sexism, embodied sometimes in sexual violence, can be used against women who demonstrate non-stereotypical performance, including showing assertiveness, competence and agency (Conner, Glick, & Fiske, 2017).

The narratives of the survivors are also very much in line with Harvey's ecological framework of victimization, which epitomizes how environmental factors (social, cultural, political, and communal) can promote violence against women and hinder the recovery of survivors (Harvey, 1996). The results also echo Brown (2008) in stressing the importance of considering the complexity of the multiple social identities of each trauma survivor, e.g., the gender role identity, class, and living contexts, as well as political, social, cultural, and familial backgrounds. From an intersectional perspective, the five participants illustrated the role of their local communities (in the cases of Mariam and Nour) and their broader social or political context (in the cases of Mona, Aisha, and Hala) in contributing to their victimization and restraining their efforts towards recovery. One example is Mona's response to her rapist being released, as forensic and prosecution authorities denied her rape claim for not finding "clear signs of resistance". This resonates with what Brownmiller (1993) denoted as the male logic of resistance, in this case requiring material evidence to legitimize rape charges, which she considered one of the main areas that feminist trauma specialists should challenge using survivors' narratives.

Drawing on Wade's (1997) definition of resistance as any small act to oppose violence or conditions associated therewith, the narratives of the five survivors showed clear explicit and symbolic acts of resistance throughout their life course, which went beyond confronting the direct context of violence or the perpetrator to challenging the wider socio-cultural conditions that made this violence possible. Doing so involved defying the normative oppressive gender norms and pushing the boundaries of ascribed gender roles. This corresponds with a large body of literature addressing women's resistance to patriarchy and different forms of violence through everyday living strategies (see; Rubenberg, 2001), and with what Kandiyoti (1988) profiled as "bargaining with patriarchy".

Although the survivors were generally able to recognize their overall everyday resistance to patriarchy, they markedly varied in their ability to recognize their resistance in the specific moments of their traumatic experiences. Despite an overall perceived strength and resilience, those who experienced rape showed a marked sense of helplessness, guilt, and self-blame. While Mona and Nour were aware that their physical resistance could have cost them their lives, they expressed a significant feeling of self-blame about failing to stop the rapist, ignoring the contextual conditions and the significance of their subsequent strength, e.g., reporting the rape.

Koss argued for considering sexual victimization through a multi-dimensional view, instead of treating it as a dichotomous variable that requires positioning women in the category of a victim (or non-victim), ascribing to them assumptions of strength or vulnerability (Koss & Oros, 1982). Moreover, she emphasized the role of a nexus of factors that shape women's victimization and their evaluation of their victimization (e.g., event characteristics, victim-offender relationship, environment characteristics) (Koss, 1985; Koss & Harvey, 1991). In addition to the fact that sexual violence trauma is generally associated with guilt and self-blame, the variation in the survivors' sense of victimization, their ability to resist, and their ability to recognize their resistance can be explained by the nexus of factors suggested by Koss. For Nour, her pre-rape relationship with the offender, and her shock at the realization that he could be a rapist, in addition to environmental characteristics (worrying about her family's reaction), contributed to her victimization. For Mona, the violent nature of the event contributed to her sense of victimization, while environmental factors (the denial of the legal ground for the rape charge in her case) hindered her ability to recognize the significance of her resistance (reporting the rape and challenging the associated stigma), which contributed to her trauma outcomes.

Evidence of a sense of agency emerged from the survivors' narratives, reflecting their overall ability to reclaim control over their living environments, even with limited resources and under difficult conditions of victimizations. At the same time, their narratives highlighted their inability to accept the fact that they lost control, even if partially, during their traumatic events. Refusing to accept the victim role has led to denial and suppression of the emotions associated with victimization (in the cases of Aisha and Hala) and to the construction of a distorted narrative about the traumatic event (in the cases of Nour and Mariam). We argue that this inability to accept the moment of victimization can be explained by having internalized a dichotomous view of agency and victimization. As the participants' self-concept is centered around their ability to control their environment, they rejected what they considered to contradict, and possibly to threaten, this notion, i.e., losing control during the traumatic event, since it may shatter one's fundamental assumption about the self (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). This argument echoes what Griffiths (2018) identified as a hypothesized binary notion of agency/victimization in the works of earlier generations of feminist scholars. According to her, this binary remained one of the main sources of tension among feminist trauma therapists and theorists, as some of them continued to classify women under one of the two categories.

Following their political trauma experience, Hala and Aisha's narratives reflected a marked sense of guilt about other political prisoners who were still in detention. Although the experiences of Aisha and Hala did not involve life-threatening situations, we argue that the features of guilt they described are very similar to the features of survival guilt, i.e., feeling guilty about surviving when many others did not (APA, 1994). Meanwhile, they considered knowing about the suffering of other prisoners to be the primary meaning they constructed from their experiences. Survival guilt was investigated in several studies in relation to fatal traumatic events, wars, and mass killings (Glover, 1984; Murray, 2018), yet it is relatively understudied in relation to political trauma in the contexts of oppressive

regimes. Emphasizing the nature of the emotional and moral bond PV survivors may develop with those who are severely oppressed, and the function of that bond in the meaning-making process, while considering the survivors' political readings of their contexts, can help reach a better understanding of the aftermath of political trauma.

6. Reflexive Account

The narrative approach is characterized by a dialogical nature, as both the researchers' and narrators' subjectivities influence the produced narrative (B. Cole, 2009). Moreover, the researcher's subjectivity is also present in the way in which the narratives are analyzed, producing meaningful interpretative accounts (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Hence, exploring the way in which the researchers' subjectivities were possibly reflected in the study outcomes is an important question in narrative research. Based on this understanding, we will try to reflect on three main aspects of the identity of the first author, who carried out the interviews and the initial analysis, while discussing the possible ways in which they impacted the participants' narratives.

As mentioned earlier, I, the first author, am an Egyptian, secular, feminist activist who identifies as a member of the opposition to the incumbent regime in Egypt. My positionality was discernible to the research participants, which is believed to have facilitated gaining their trust in the tense and politically polarized research environment. Moreover, being perceived as a member of the same political "camp" as the five participants possibly created a shared political identity, which stands in opposition to the dominant political and social powers in the research's context. This identity is possibly imbued with shared meanings and emotions, such as sorrow and pain over the perceived failure of the revolution, the romanticization of collective memories of the revolution, anger towards the incumbent regime and its supporting social forces, a sense of marginalization in the current socio-political context, and fear and anxiety due to ongoing security threats. On the one hand, this possibly contributed to a sense of understanding and sympathy, bridging the distance between myself and the participants. On the other hand, it also possibly increased the level of politicization of the constructed narratives, by encouraging and facilitating political readings of the participants' life events.

Meanwhile, my feminist identity was less overt to the participants, except for Nour who was involved before in feminist groups. However, I believe that this feminist identity was an underlying factor of key importance throughout the different phases of the research, and the participants' constructed narratives are no exception. Concretely, this research project pursues a feminist reading of women's traumas. As such, the whole project is based on pre-assumptions concerning the underlying factors of investigated traumas and their consequences. A clear example is the proposed reading of the 2011 revolution as a moment of change in gender roles and gender politics in Egypt. This core assumption, which was constructed through prior direct observations and readings of the relevant literature, is very likely to have shaped the interview questions, affected interactions with participants during interviews, and influenced the way in which the narratives were interpreted.

Finally, I identify as a secular woman in a highly religious socio-cultural context. Although that was not explicitly mentioned to the participants, it was still easy to be inferred from my appearance, style of clothing, behavior, and language. Four of the five participants showed moderate signs of religiosity, and one of them, Aisha, was a very religious young woman who explicitly adopts an Islamist ideology. However, religious references and emphases were much less present in the narratives than expected in such context, especially as possible foundations for the meaning-making process (except in Aisha's account of her imprisonment experience as being on a mission assigned by God to help other women prisoners). Possible contributing factors to that are both my perceived identity and my subjectivity as a secular woman, which perhaps did not encourage or stimulate the potential religious meanings associated with the participants' narratives.

7. Conclusion and Limitations

Unlike quantitative approaches, which pursue numerical generalizations through representative samples, a qualitative approach seeks to achieve a theoretical generalization based on placing "subjectivity-in-context". The objective in the latter is to reach a deep understanding of human experiences, through analyzing internal relations and processes of meaning-making that shape a psychological phenomenon (Schraube & Højholt, 2019). From this perspective, the study results give significant insights that may add to our general understanding of women's traumas, while indicating possible directions to trauma interventions.

The study emphasized the potential value of employing a feminist reading of women's gendered traumatic experiences, taking into consideration the socio-cultural and political contexts of trauma, especially when investigating SV and PV traumas that were shaped in the light of the gender roles of the survivors. Through this reading, an understanding of the contextual gendered nature of violence against women and women's varied psychological responses thereto can be reached. The study also highlighted how women who live under structured patriarchal forms of severe violence show persistent efforts for survival, continuous acts of resistance, and a struggle to challenge the oppressive context. They push the boundaries of gender roles and challenge traditional gender ideologies, producing patterns of everyday gender resistance that change their direct environment, and possibly the larger context as well. Further, as the study adds to our understanding of the specificity of women's traumas and women's persistent resistance, it provides possible grounds for designing and applying more culturally specific feminist trauma interventions.

Based on the analysis of the five narratives covered in this study, several directions for trauma interventions can be recommended: (a) it is crucial to integrate the survivors' own reading of their traumatic experiences and contexts to reach a better understanding of trauma aftermath; (b) a feminist reading of women's traumatic experiences caused by GBV, which takes into consideration the socio-cultural and political contexts of trauma and the associated representations of gender constructs, is necessary for grounding our understanding of women's traumatic experiences; (c) encouraging women trauma survivors to integrate a

coherent gendered and contextual reading of their traumatic experiences, and helping them to put their trauma in its wider socio-cultural and political contexts, might lead them to recognize the significance of their resistance, mitigate their suffering, and contribute to meaning-making; (d) identifying different layers and ways of resistance during traumatic events, helping survivors recognize these and their significance, and integrating them in their constructed narrative about traumatic events, may reduce the sense of guilt, shame, and self-blame; and finally, (e) breaking the false dichotomy of victimization-agency, which survivors might have internalized over time, can facilitate the construction of a more coherent narrative on trauma, and ease the processing of negative emotions. Testing the feasibility and effectiveness of designing trauma interventions based on these foundations is a direction for future research.

Chapter 7

How Egyptian Women with Trauma Benefit from a Tailored Feminist Version of Narrative Exposure Therapy?

A Proof-of-Concept Study

Abstract

This study aims at testing the feasibility of a tailored feminist version of Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) with five Egyptian women survivors of political and sexual trauma survivors. Using a mixed-method approach combining both qualitative and quantitative methods, the study examined the survivors' reception and evaluation of the intervention, while considering signs of effectiveness and any possible signs of harm. In addition to using the exposure and narration techniques of NET, the cognitive restructuring process was directed based on the themes that emerged from the survivors' narratives concerning their traumas, their responses to trauma, and their reading of the contexts in which the traumas occurred. The participants' reception and evaluation of the intervention were positive, with no signs of harm. The results indicated success in PTSD symptom remission. The intervention helped participants achieve higher resilience and self-coherence, reduce feelings of heaviness, shame, and self-blame, and gain more self-awareness and self-appreciation. A gendered reading of traumas contributed to meaning-making and constructing positive self-perceptions. Results concerning depression were less satisfactory. The study is an indication of the potential value of a tailored feminist version of NET, integrating a gendered reading of the socio-political contexts of the survivors into their post-trauma narratives.

Keywords

Narrative Exposure Therapy, feminist therapy, political trauma, sexual violence trauma, Egyptian women trauma survivors, PTSD, meaning-making, self-coherence

How Egyptian Women with Trauma Benefit from a Tailored Feminist Version of Narrative Exposure Therapy?

A Proof-of-Concept Study

1. Introduction

Since its first conceptualization in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) in 1980, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has been the most commonly documented and studied response to trauma (Kevers, Rober, Derluyn, & De Haene, 2016; Muldoon, Lowe, Jetten, Cruwys, & Haslam, 2021). As a diagnostic category, PTSD dominated the clinical field of trauma studies and guided trauma therapeutic interventions. Within this perspective, the main target of an effective intervention is to treat PTSD or alleviate its symptoms (Elwood, Hahn, Olatunji, & Williams, 2009; Watkins, Sprang, & Rothbaum, 2018).

The medical approach to trauma, which mostly focuses on PTSD remission, has been the subject of cumulative critiques for being acontextual and depoliticized. These critiques have been urging trauma scholars and therapists to integrate wider perspectives into trauma interventions (Kevers, Rober, Derluyn, & De Haene, 2016). On the one hand, feminist and cultural approaches have been underlining the central role of contextual factors in shaping traumatic events and their aftermath, encouraging therapists to incorporate cultural, social, and political processes in interventions (Brown, 2008; Mattar & Vogel, 2014; Marlowe, 2010; Muldoon, Lowe, Jetten, Cruwys, & Haslam, 2021; Webster & Dunn, 2005). On the other hand, a growing number of intervention studies highlighted the limitations of relying on PTSD remission as a single criterion for trauma recovery, advocating for additional or alternative criteria (Barkil-Oteo, Abdallah, Mourra, & Jefee-Bahloul, 2018; De Haence, Rousseau, Kevers, Deruddere, & Rober, 2018; Harvey, 1996; Mattar & Vogel, 2014; Muldoon, Lowe, Jetten, Cruwys, & Haslam, 2021).

The narrative approach to treating trauma primary attends to the meaning-making process which occurs through the storytelling of experiences of traumas by a narrator (survivor) in the presence of a listener (therapist) through therapeutic dialogues and other forms of interaction within the context of the intervention (Brown & Augusta-Scott, 2007; De Hanene, Grietens, & Verschueren, 2010; Kaminer, 2006). Narrative trauma researchers and therapists have emphasized the value of the narration process in helping survivors reach a sense of coherence and a perception of life continuity and reestablish fragmented memories, while positioning their experiences within a wider context (Harvey, Mishler, Koenen, & Harney, 2000; Janoff-Bulman, 1992). It was argued that narration may reduce a survivor's sense of victimization and of being silenced, as it reinforces the sense of agency and control over

one's life, especially in cases of systematic violence and collective trauma (De Hanene, Grietens, & Verschueren, 2010; B. Cole, 2009). Moreover, narration gives survivors a voice and promotes their ownership of their stories, it can therefore act as a foundation for mobilization against discrimination and marginalization, and for the promotion of social change (De Hanene, Grietens, & Verschueren, 2010; B. Cole, 2009; Combs & Freedman, 2012).

Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) features a unique method, combining exposure and narration to integrate multiple traumatic experiences within an autobiographical context (Robjant & Fazel, 2010). The exposure and narration processes help patients reach desensitization through reducing emotional response *arousal* to traumatic memory, while developing a sense of coherence, control, and integration through the narration process (Schauer, Neuner, & Elbert, 2011).

Having emphasized that traumatic events shatter individuals' fundamental assumptions about themselves and the world, Janoff-Bulman (1992) described how rebuilding these shattered assumptions involves integrating old and new assumptions into an entirely new meaning. This process of meaning-making involves a reevaluation of the traumatic experience, from the perspective of possible benefits or purposes, and facilitates the integration of this experience. In this perspective, meaning-making is considered a core outcome of successful post-trauma recovery.

Furthermore, the literature of trauma establishes resilience as a core concept tightly connected with trauma and trauma recovery, albeit in three different ways: (a) as a personality trait that allows a person to resist adversity; (b) as a process that aims at reconfiguration following severe stress or adversity; and (c) as an outcome that reflects recovery after trauma or an endpoint of stress and coping (Bensimon, 2012; Lepore & Revenson, 2006). The latter is the most represented conceptualization in trauma intervention studies, serving as an additional measure of recovery following an effective intervention, along with meaning-making (Bensimon, 2012; Connor & Davidson, 2003).

Several clinical studies have examined the effectiveness of NET in comparison to other therapies. Although reported effectiveness rates of NET have varied, studies have generally agreed that NET results were highly promising compared to other therapies (Neuner, Schauer, Klaschick, Karunakara, & Elbert, 2004; Schauer, Neuner, & Elbert, 2011). In a meta-analysis combining results from 16 NET studies, it was found that NET showed external validity and effectiveness in treating PTSD and depression symptoms. NET effectiveness was equal to other guideline-supported trauma-focused interventions and significantly superior to non-trauma focused therapies (Lely, Smid, Jongedijk, Knipscheer, & Kleber, 2019). In another review which included data from 11 trials conducted in low and middle-income countries, the data showed that NET is effective in reducing PTSD, especially in contexts of conflict and organized violence (Robjant & Fazel, 2010).

NET originally evolved from Testimony Therapy, which has clear cultural and political emphases (Cienfuegos & Monelli, 1983). As the use of NET is recommended specifically in contexts of organized violence, e.g., political repression, war, and sexual violence (SV),

Schauer, Neuner and Elbert (2011) stressed the importance of considering the foundations and representations of these forms of violence.

However, questions have been raised regarding the extent to which NET gives enough consideration to the political and cultural meanings embedded in systemic violence and associated cultural representations in non-western contexts (Northwood & Orieny, 2014; Wright, Reisig, & Cullen, 2020). In their evaluation of the effectiveness of NET in the contexts of low- and middle-income countries, Mundt, Wunsche, Heinz, & Pross (2014) argued that NET does not provide sufficient consideration for the cultural and political contexts of survivors in non-western contexts. Moreover, they highlighted this as a possible limitation to NET's effectiveness, especially in contexts where there is ongoing adversity or a persistent traumatic and threatening environment that affects the everyday life of survivors.

Furthermore, the cognitive restructuring process, i.e., integrating traumatic memories in new coherent constructed meanings, is a fundamental step in all narrative-based interventions including NET. Cognitive restructuring allows survivors to reach an understanding of their own behavior during the traumatic event, while reflecting on their entire life from a coherent, holistic perspective, which contributes to a sense of personal identity and consequently meaning-making (Neuner, Schauer, & Elbert, 2014). The role of the therapist, and the extent of their directive involvement in this process, varies across different narrative approaches (see. De Haene , Rober, Adriaenssens, & Verschueren, 2012). Schauer, Neuner & Elbert (2011) mentioned that most of cognitive restructuring around trauma in NET happens between sessions in the absence of the therapist, as a consequence of narration. As such, the role of the therapist would be limited to engaging with the survivors' insights if they shared new considerations during sessions.

In contexts of persistent systematic violence, where structures and relationships of power are key to shaping traumatic events and their consequences, we argue that the meaning-making process may be facilitated through a more directive role by the therapist in the cognitive reconstruction, via guided therapeutic dialogues. As the core objective of trauma narrative interventions is to reach a coherent narrative linking the meaning emerging from past traumas to present life context, this directive approach would help survivors place their traumas within a wider socio-political and cultural context, i.e., politicize their reading of traumatic experiences. In turn, this could bring survivors to realize the representations of the power structures that contributed to their victimization, and to recognize and appreciate their ongoing resistance of the traumatic environment. Moreover, emphasizing the themes that explain the survivor's behavioral and emotional responses during and after traumatic events, and integrating them into the new constructive narratives, can add a sense of self-coherence and possibly support the construction of a better self-perception. Both can help the survivor realize the coherence and continuity of their lives as a chain of past and present suffering, resistance, and survival. This argument is based on two foundations, which will be further elaborated on in the following sections: (a) a feminist reading of women's gendered traumas, which is the interest of the current paper; and (b) characteristics of the context in which the investigated traumas occurred.

1.1 A Feminist Reading of Women's Traumas

Feminist literature on women's traumas has been critical of the misrepresentation of women's interpersonal traumatic experiences through the medical approach to trauma research in psychology. According to several feminist trauma scholars, the medical approach deals with such traumatic experiences in isolation from the socio-political contexts that shape them, ignoring connections with the patriarchal structures that make women more prone to systematic gendered forms of violence (Griffiths, 2018; Webster & Dunn, 2005). Using narratives of interpersonal violence survivors, feminist scholars have tried to change the conceptions around violence against women from private, domestic, and isolated experiences to a socio-political phenomenon, by identifying patterns that indicate the systematicity of such abuses and highlighting how they are associated with underlying socio-political and cultural conditions (Griffiths, 2018). Through this cumulative effort, women's traumas, and SV traumas in particular, were framed as representations of the social construction of femininities and masculinities and as tools of the patriarchy to reinforce its establishment and maintain its dominance (Griffiths, 2018; Brownmiller, 1993; Webster & Dunn, 2005).

Stressing the importance of integrating women's narratives in the conceptualization of women's trauma, Koss highlighted that women vary in their understanding of their positions of sexual victimization, due to multidimensional factors, including event and environment characteristics, the nature of the victim-offender relationship, as well as the survivors' self-assumptions regarding strength and vulnerability. Relying on this subjective understanding rather than the traditional false dichotomy of victimization-agency, and integrating it into trauma therapy processes, is a cornerstone in feminist trauma interventions (Griffiths, 2018; Koss, 1985; Koss & Harvey, 1991).

Political violence (PV), i.e., violence perpetrated by State actors, such as arrest, detention, and violence by members of the police or the military against anti-government protestors, is another area that has received attention from feminist scholars. Several efforts highlighted that PV targeting women may take gendered forms, such as sexual assaults, shaming of sexual conduct, and sexualized online attacks. It has also been shown that PV has a gendered impact on women, influencing their access to and presence in the public sphere. This impact is shaped by dominant gender beliefs, on the one hand, and women's adopted notions of femininities on the other, as both influence how women may interpret and respond to PV, and construct narratives and meanings around it (Bardall, Bjarnegård, & Piscopo, 2019; Hadzic & Tavits, 2019).

Through her ecological model of victimization which addressed the relationship between trauma survivors and their communities, Harvey emphasized that features of the environment can contribute to women's traumas as well as to trauma consequences, facilitating or hindering recovery. She highlighted particularly the crucial role of community values and attitudes towards women and beliefs regarding violence against women, which directly impact the recovery process (Harvey, 1996; Koss & Harvey, 1991).

1.2 Context of the Study

The Middle East region is globally known for being rife with long-lasting armed conflicts, PV, and immense levels of gender-based violence (GBV) (Madi, 2013; Shaar, 2013; Neria, Bravova, & Halper, 2013). More specifically, since the 2011 revolution, the Egyptian social and political scenes have been largely traumatic. Matthies-Boon (2018) describes how the country's political and social environment had created "Continuous Traumatic Stress," stemming from severe political repression manifested in mass killings, arrests, torture, and SV, in addition to an ongoing and large-scale structural crackdown on basic rights and freedoms.

Looking particularly at women's situation, social and political changes following the outbreak of the Egyptian revolution have directly impacted their conditions, creating both challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, the Egyptian revolution and its aftermaths opened wider spaces for women in the public sphere, especially younger women from urban peripheries (Biagini, 2019). Through significantly higher levels of social and political involvement, women challenged the boundaries of traditional gender norms and negotiated with a wide range of patriarchal political, societal, and communal forces (Hafez, 2014; Hassan, 2015). On the other hand, the increasing presence of women in the public sphere went hand in hand with increased exposure to wider and more aggressive forms of State and social violence. This included a massive rise in SV, marked in particular by the emergence of gang rapes and mob sexual assaults during protests and mass gatherings (Abdelmonem, 2015; Zaki & Abd Alhamid, 2014). Additionally, higher rates of gendered forms of PV against women by State actors were documented, e.g., forced virginity and pregnancy tests, defamation campaigns targeting women's personal choices, sexual harassment and assault, and threats of rape during detention (Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance, El Nadeem Center, & Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 2019; McRobie, 2014).

In previous research on women's exposure and responses to traumatic events in Egypt after the 2011 revolution, the authors of this paper had pointed out how the narratives of women survivors highlight the gendered nature of their traumas. The survivors emphasized how social and political changes following the revolution influenced gender politics and exposed women to a wider range of gendered traumatic experiences, while also offering them opportunities for resistance and personal growth, which was reflected in a high sense of agency and resilience (Barakat & Philippot, 2018; 2021c).

The current study is the second part of a larger research project. The first part was a qualitative study where interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was applied to the narratives of five Egyptian women trauma survivors, with the purpose of identifying themes to explain these women's reception and appraisal of, as well as response to, their gendered traumas (Barakat & Philippot, 2021c). The present paper is a proof-of-concept study, where the six themes identified in the first part were used for adapting NET intervention to be more relevant to the contexts of the same five survivors in order to foster post-trauma meaning-making and perceived resilience. The purpose of the study is to test the feasibility of a tailored

feminist version of NET, guiding the cognitive restructuring process based on a feminist reading of women's traumas, and the features of the survivors' contexts as reflected in their narratives. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, the study examined the survivors' reception, acceptance, and evaluation of the intervention, while considering the signs of effectiveness and any possible signs of harm.

2. Method

This study was implemented at El Nadeem Center for Management and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, a Cairo-based NGO that was established in 1993 by a group of doctors with a human rights focus, to support GBV and PV survivors, through psychological and psychiatric interventions and legal aid, in addition to documenting and mobilizing against torture and GBV. El Nadeem agreed to host the first author and to facilitate the two phases of the study (first, collection and analysis of the narratives of participants; and second, intervention, which is the subject of this paper).

2.1 Participants

The study was carried out with 5 Egyptian SV and PV women trauma survivors who participated in the previous qualitative study through which the themes used in the cognitive restructuring process were identified (see Barakat & Philippot, 2021c). The criteria for choosing the 5 women were (a) being above 21 years old; (b) having experienced at least one major traumatic event during adulthood that can be classified as SV or gendered PV (see Table 14); (c) being engaged in the 2011-revolution political or social movements; and (d) having not received structured therapy prior to the study. These five women were chosen from a pool of 11 women who responded to a recruitment advertisement, among whom 7 met the study criteria. Two potential participants withdrew later for time constraints, whereas five completed the two studies (the qualitative assessment study and the current proof of concept intervention study). All five reported suffering from major symptoms fitting the description of PTSD and depression, and all met DSM-5 criteria for PTSD. Four were on anti-depressants and/or tranquilizers and all were receiving psychosocial support from doctors at El Nadeem Center.

Table 14. Summary Table of Participant Data

Pseudonym	Age	Main traumatic event
Aisha	21	Imprisonment under harsh conditions for four months.
Mariam	25	Several sexual assaults by her father.
Nour	30	Rape by her 60 years old mentor.
Hala	24	Arrest and persecution of her older brother.
Mona	45	Rape by a taxi driver.

Aisha was raised by a middle-class family in a semi-rural area in the Nile Delta of Egypt. Her family was religiously conservative, and she received her education in religious schools. She wears a "Niqāb" covering her face unless she is alone with the researcher in a closed room. After the 2013 coup, she was arrested in 2016 during an ongoing crackdown on

Islamist opponents. Under false charges of managing an anti-regime Facebook page, she was imprisoned for four months. Despite being a minor at the age of 17, she was imprisoned with adults under harsh conditions. In prison, she suffered several traumatic events including threats of rape, verbal insults, and dehumanizing treatment. However, she considered being forced to undergo a pregnancy test as the most traumatic moment. She managed to keep a sense of control over her vulnerability in the prison environment for a while, but she collapsed after being transferred to a much harsher prison. She reported that, since being released, she has been suffering from symptoms of extreme anxiety and depression, and an inability to adjust to her environment, which she attributed to significant personality changes she had undergone during her experience in prison.

Mariam was born to a less privileged family in a semi-urban region. Her father was abusive to her, her sisters, and her mother since her early childhood. She lived under extreme financial hardship throughout her high school and university years. In addition to undergoing Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) at the age of nine, she suffered numerous physical assaults by her father during childhood and adolescence, as well as several instances of sexual assault and rape between the age of 10 and 11. When the Egyptian revolution broke out, she decided, at the age of 18, to travel to Cairo to join the protests, and she became involved in several political activities. At the age of 21, and for two years, her father started to repeatedly sexually assault her and her sisters until she found the strength to confront him. After a couple of months, she proceeded to report him to the police to end his assaults against her mother and sisters. Though her reporting attempt was met with some resistance, with police authorities reluctant to file a case and everyone around her pressuring her to drop the charges, she insisted on pursuing the legal action and successfully put an end to the father's assaults. Shortly after, she left her family house, found a job and became fully independent. Mariam reported marked symptoms fitting the description of depression and PTSD, accompanied by very low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, a sense of guilt and self-blame.

Nour comes from a middle-class family that is also part of a major tribe in Upper-Egypt, which carries certain prestige in the local community and entails traditional restrictive social and gender norms. Undergoing FGM was her main childhood trauma, which took place when she was eight years old. She was sexually assaulted by a cousin at age thirteen and suffered verbal abuse by her father during childhood. After the 2011 revolution, she markedly expanded her social network through engaging in several political and social activities. She was raped at the age of 27 by a sixty-year-old man she considered to be her mentor. A year later, she left her family home and moved to Cairo. Until the interview, she could not process the rape incident and described it as a minor sexual assault that had a small impact compared to prior traumas. Yet, she reported suffering from marked depression and PTSD symptoms that were directly linked to the rape incident.

Hala was born to a middle-class family living in a Cairo suburb. Choosing a vocational career that is unusual for women in Egypt, she studied car mechanics in a men-only department at a technical institute after convincing the institute administration to accept her. Further challenging social gender norms, she worked at a car workshop in a remote area, but she quit after a short period upon facing a significant incident of sexual harassment on her

way back home. She experienced an incident of sexual assault when she was five, and her father died in a car accident when she was 11 years old. She was exposed to recurrent sexual harassment in public spaces during adolescence and adulthood. When she was 19, her older brother was arrested and prosecuted for his participation in a peaceful protest commemorating the anniversary of the revolution. Her brother was incarcerated for a few months, during which she faced severe adversity during her biweekly prison visits. To her, one of the main traumatizing experiences was having to suffer through inspection before prison visits, particularly the searching her private body parts. During her brother's time in prison, she fully undertook the handling of legal and logistical issues related to his detention, while suppressing any negative feelings. She mentioned that upon her brother's release, she began to experience severe anxiety and depression symptoms with marked features of survival guilt.

Mona grew up in an upper-middle-class family in Cairo. She is a political activist and a single mother of a girl who was 18 years old at the time of the interview. She got married at the age of 25 but ended her marriage after 7 years of living in an abusive relationship. At the age of 5, she suffered sexual and physical assaults by her older brother. As an adult, she experienced rape by a male friend, the death of a close friend due to drug overdose, and threats of arrest for her political activities. Her daughter was kidnapped by police officers, to be released after one hour, to pressure the mother to give up her political activism. In 2018, she was kidnaped and raped by a taxi driver. When he let her go, she immediately reported to the police and the offender was arrested the same day. However, he was released after the rape claims could not be proven due to the lack of "clear signs of resistance" according to forensic authorities. At the time of the interview, she was experiencing severe symptoms of PTSD and depression with psychomotor retardation. She had completely withdrawn from all social responsibilities, quit her job, stopped taking care of her daughter and became fully dependent on the financial and logistical assistance of the NGOs that were managing her case. Mona reported having a history of drug abuse and being diagnosed before with borderline personality disorder. Accordingly, DSM-5 criteria of borderline personality disorder were applied in the first meeting, and she met them. The most significant identified features were impulsivity and risk-taking behavior, unstable interpersonal relationships, alternating between extremes of devaluation and idealization of her close relationships including family members and close friends, and extreme fear of abandonment.

2.2 Ethical considerations

The study has been conducted according to the ethical standards of the Helsinki declaration (World Medical Association, 2018). El Nadeem Center's board of psychiatrists had reviewed and approved the study protocol and its ethical considerations prior to the implementation of the intervention. The notion of voluntary participation was explained to the participants, including the fact that their participation, refusal of participation, or withdrawal from the study would not affect their treatment and relationship with the hosting institute. Their right to receive further free of charge psychological support sessions by El Nadeem Center psychiatrists, or to be referred to another therapist, in case they decided to

withdraw from the study at any of its phases, was also explained. A detailed informed consent form was discussed and signed before intervention implementation. The form included a comprehensive description of the intervention rationale and procedures, as well as the possible risks associated with exposure (i.e., activating traumatic memories and triggering heavy intense emotions).

2.3 Statement of The Researchers' Positionality

The study took place in a highly intense and polarized political moment in Egypt, in which members of the opposition, including the five participants of the study, feared the continuous risk of harassment by the State, such as arrest or detention. The fact that the study was facilitated by El Nadeem center, which is a well-known NGO with a long record of advocating human rights and condemning violations by the State, helped gain the trust of the five participants.

The first author, who implemented the intervention, is an Egyptian, secular, feminist activist and a human rights defender, who was involved in the 2011 revolution and the ensuing events, especially as part of the feminist movement's response to increased SV against women during and following the revolution. The first author's political identity, along with the political profile of the hosting organization, were made clear to the participants prior to the intervention. We argue that the political identity of the first author not only facilitated gaining the participants' trust and cooperation, but also created a common ground of understanding, built on the shared political position towards the revolution and its aftermath. Furthermore, the first author had different overlapping roles during the two phases of the research (the qualitative study and the intervention), which impacted the implementation and results of the intervention: (a) as a listener to the participants' narratives of their traumas and the consequences thereof; (b) as a co-author of the narratives, impacting the construction of these narratives through the interview questions, the verbal and non-verbal responses to the participants' narration, and the possible effects of the researcher's multiple identities; (c) as a researcher who analyzed participants' narratives to identify the underlying themes that explain the participants' modes of victimization and resistance (see further elaboration on these three roles in Barakat and Philippot 2021c); and (d) as a therapist who directed the cognitive reconstruction process during intervention sessions based on the identified themes. These roles were imbued with the first author's different identities, the feminist and political identities being the most relevant to this study. The way in which these identities possibly impacted the intervention and the results will be unpacked in the discussion of the results. The second author of this paper is a white, Belgian French-speaking male professor of clinical psychology. His areas of expertise include emotional regulation, autobiographical memory, and trauma on both, research and practice levels. He has a long experience in supervising a wide range of psychological research, including research on political trauma and trauma in the context of conflict areas. The identity and the role of the second author were discussed with the participants, i.e., his supervision role during the whole course of the intervention.

2.4 Procedures and Assessment Tools

Before the intervention and as part of the first study (Barakat & Philippot, 2021c), semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted to identify themes that explain the five survivors' reception and appraisal of, and response to, traumas. to be used in directing the cognitive restructuring process. Six themes were identified highlighting the survivors' readings of the context in which their traumas occurred, how gender roles shaped exposure and response to trauma, their everyday resistance, their resistance during the traumatic events, their sense of victimization versus agency, and their sense of guilt following their survival (see Table 15).

To investigate the validity of the identified themes, a member check process was implemented prior to the intervention. This means that provisional research reports underwent scrutiny by the participants to determine whether their stories were accurately captured (Koelsch, 2013). This took place through an interview in which the reports on the participants' narratives (how the participants' stories were featured) and the analysis of those narratives (the identified themes) were presented to and discussed with the participants. They were then asked to give feedback on the extent to which they agreed with the reports and the analysis. It was pointed out to the participants that the analysis of the themes was carried out in line with the feminist perspective on trauma, which constitutes the research's theoretical framework, and it was also highlighted that these themes would be integrated in the intervention process. The five participants showed a high degree of satisfaction with both aspects and shared positive reflections on how their stories were retold in a way that adequately represents who they are and what they went through.

Table 15. The Themes Identified from the Survivors' Narratives

Theme I: 2011, a moment of personal and global change in gender politics	Reflecting the survivors' perception of the context in which their trauma occurred, all participants agreed that the 2011 revolution was a moment of global change in gender roles and gender politics, as well as personal change concerning their feminine roles according to their self-construal.
Theme II: Her traumas are gendered	The gendered nature of the survivors' sexual and political traumas emerged from the five survivors' narratives, highlighting how their gender roles, associated gender norms and the underlying sociopolitical conditions influenced their victimization and the consequences thereof.
Theme III: Pushing the boundaries of gender norms: A history of everyday resistance	The narratives of the survivors reflected a history of various practices of resistance, which included resisting the direct acts of GBV, the contexts in which this violence occurred and the underlying conditions that created or maintained violence.
Theme IV: She kept resisting even in situations of extreme victimization	Signs of resistance during the traumatic events emerged from the narratives. The survivors varied in their ability to recognize their resistance and its significance, as some of them were focused on their inability to stop the harm or to punish the perpetrators.
Theme V: A False binary between agency and victimization	Many signs of high control/agency emerged from the survivor's narratives. The narratives highlighted how a high sense of control was the main coping technique during extreme adversity, which also hindered their ability to process the situations of victimization during which their ability to control was restricted.
Theme VI: A Meaning they constructed, a source of guilt	Two of the participants showed marked survival guilt concerning their gendered political traumas.

Upon the conclusion of theme identification, a baseline session (T1) was conducted during which a first assessment was carried out. In addition to using the remission of PTSD symptoms as a main evaluation criterion for the intervention, the study used three additional measures: (a) remission of depression symptoms, (b) meaning-making and (c) perceived resilience. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to assess depression, PTSD and resilience. Meaning-making was assessed only qualitatively. In addition to the T1 baseline assessment, three other assessments were carried out: T2 post-intervention, T3 three-month-follow-up and T4 six-month-follow-up.

A semi-structured interview was used to assess the qualitative aspects of the four measures. The interview schedule contained multiple open-ended questions covering different aspects, including the constructed meanings of traumas after the intervention, perception of trauma-related symptoms, perception of resilience and the participants' general evaluation of the intervention and therapeutic gains thereafter. Further, in the T2 post-intervention session, another member check was carried out, including a reflective discussion on the identified themes and how they were used during intervention sessions. This will be reported on at the end of the section on intervention implementation.

The quantitative methods included:

1. The PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL5) (National Center for PTSD, 2015b), which is a 20-item self-report measure for different PTSD symptoms. It has a strong internal consistency with a Cronbach's α of 0.94 (Blevins, Weathers, Davis, Witte, & Domino, 2015).

2. Zung Self-Rating, 20-item, Depression Scale (ZSD) measuring symptoms of depression during the two weeks before the assessment. It obtained 0.82 Cronbach's α value in de Jonghe and Baneke's (1989) study. Both PCL5 and ZSD were translated to Arabic by the first author, then back-translated. The original and back-translated versions showed high consistency. Using a sample of 307 Egyptians, the Arabic versions obtained 0.94 and 0.85 Cronbach's α value for the PCL5 and ZSD respectively (Barakat & Philippot, 2021b).

3. Conner Resilience Scale (CD-RISC), a 25-item self-rating scale, assesses different features of resilience, such as the ability to adapt to change, feeling in control of one's life and the tendency to bounce back after hardships. CD-RISC demonstrated good psychometric properties with Cronbach's α value of 0.89 (Connor & Davidson, 2003). The Arabic version used in the study was the original translation approved by the questionnaire authors.

2.5 Intervention Modality

The intervention was based on the exposure and narration techniques of NET. The cognitive restructuring process was directed through guided therapeutic dialogues based on the themes extracted from the narratives of survivors (see Table 2). The following section presents the five main strategies of the directed cognitive restructuring process.

(1) Politicizing and gendering traumas

The narratives of the five participants highlighted how their different investigated SV and PV traumas are gendered traumas, as they cannot be fully understood without putting them

within their wider gendered socio-political cultural context. While SV is clearly a gendered violence experience, PV had also been shaped by the survivors' gender identity, e.g., rape threats or physically invasive inspection in prison (Barakat & Philippot, 2021c). On the one hand, the social, political and cultural contexts before and during trauma, where women were highly exposed to structured GBV, produced the traumatic experiences of these five women. On the other hand, the survivors' notions of gender roles and associated socio-cultural constructs shaped their perception and appraisal of trauma and determined its aftermath.

The Feminist literature on trauma emphasizes the importance of politicizing the study of trauma, encouraging therapists and scholars to study women's trauma within its context of dominant cultural factors and within the existing structures of power. Therapists are also encouraged to employ an intersectionality lens to underline the position of the survivor within these multidimensional structures of power, highlighting how this determined their exposure and response to trauma (Griffiths, 2018).

Building on feminist literature and the analysis of the participants' narratives, we argue that politicizing the survivors' readings of their own traumas may contribute to the meaning-making process. What we mean by this politicization is encouraging the survivors to put their trauma into a wider socio-political perspective, recognizing their traumas as phenomena that reflect power structures and socio-political patterns in dealing with women rather than individualistic problems. This is expected to lead to better therapeutic outcomes, grounding the survivors' experiences and linking their past and present realities. Further, as the survivors' narratives also underlined how they have been performing everyday gendered resistance, politicizing their GBV experiences may help them recognize their acts of resistance not only as tools for survival but also for fighting back the structured GBV and pushing the boundaries of restrictive gender norms.

During the intervention, the first author guided a dialogue with each participant on how and why their traumas represented social patterns. Concrete examples from their own narratives were used to underline the political and cultural foundations of these patterns and illustrate how their acts of resistance had significant implications that went beyond mere survival to personal growth and possibly further contributing to future change of an unjust reality.

(2) Recognizing acts of resistance

Trauma aftermaths, including the survivor's possible sense of vulnerability and guilt following a traumatic event, is highly influenced by the survivors' lack of sense of control during the event. Throughout her early work in the 1980s, Mary P. Koss argued that a woman's own definition of rape and her assessment of her victim status vary according to multiple factors, including her beliefs about rape and her conceptualization of the rape experience (Webster & Dunn, 2005). This consequently affects the extent to which a woman can recognize her acts of resistance during a traumatic situation.

Encountering the traditional male to male combat model, under which resistance was considered limited to direct physical acts, Wade argued for widening the definition of resistance to include any mental or behavioral act through which a person attempts to prevent,

escape, survive, end or oppose any form of violence or oppression; or the conditions that make such acts possible (Wade, 1997, p. 25). We thus argue that recognizing and highlighting different acts of resistance, no matter how small, in a survivor's narrative during and after the traumatic experiences, can directly decrease her sense of vulnerability and helplessness. Consequently, symptoms of depression and PTSD can be reduced, and post-traumatic growth can be achieved. Accordingly, the acts of resistance performed by each survivor were highlighted and discussed to be integrated into the reconstructed narratives.

(3) Reclaiming agency

Agency refers to the "capacity of individuals to act independently and shape their life circumstances" (Haffejee & Theron, 2019, p. 686). Agency involves the ability to perceive and analyze environmental requirements and risks, use available resources, make autonomous decisions and choose suitable actions. Meanwhile, the notion of the "sense of agency" refers to one's subjective perception and evaluation of one's ability to exercise control over their life.

A high level of agency was evident in the narratives of the five survivors. All five experienced extreme adversity with limited access to typical resources and all were able to shape their lives by making autonomous, radically unexpected decisions, despite their challenging socio-cultural context and the constraints associated with their assigned gender roles. As the survivors had limited recognition of their agency especially in relation to the traumatic environment, signs of agency were highlighted and discussed with them as a step towards integration into reconstructed narratives.

(4) Breaking the false dichotomy of agency and victimization

Victimization is usually seen as a result of losing control over a specific situation (Webster & Dunn, 2005). Based on the survivors' narratives, we argue that for people with a high sense of agency who position their ability to control as a core characteristic in their self-construal and as a main source of security, recognizing victimization during a traumatic event is a real threat to their self-concept (Barakat & Philippot, 2021c). Several scholars highlighted the role of the self-concept, including gendered traits such as dominance and assertiveness, as a self-regulatory mechanism, underlining how one's inability to meet their self-standards in a specific situation is associated with significant negative thoughts and emotions (Carver, Scheier, & Fulforf, 2008; Wood & Eagly, 2010). The narratives of the survivors, especially those who had a higher sense of agency before their traumas, showed their inability to accept the loss of control during the traumatic event. These narratives reflected how the survivors had been adopting a false dichotomy of agency versus victimization, which made them distort the narratives around their traumatic events, e.g., constructing a narrative around a rape event where it is portrayed as a consensual sexual encounter, and therefore deny the effects of these traumatic events and suppress the associated negative emotions.

Reconceiving agency-victimization as non-dichotomous concepts was discussed with the survivors. The discussions covered how agency and victimization are multi-dimensional variables, and how people may vary in their perception of each based on a nexus of personal

and environmental factors, including the specific characteristics of experienced situations. The survivors were urged to reread their moments of victimization while considering the underlying power structure thereof and recognizing their own position of power on the one hand and their acts of resistance on the other. The discussions also included an explanation of the importance and main principles of emotional processing concerning trauma, with the purpose of integrating emotions associated with traumatic experiences into the new constructed narratives.

(5) Reconstructing guilt

Survivor's guilt in relation to PV trauma emerged from the narratives of two survivors. It was deemed that encouraging these two survivors towards building a reconstructed reading of the political situation while connecting their traumas to the wider political context was likely to help rationalize their feelings of guilt and possibly turn them into a motive to keep going. Consequently, it would contribute to the meanings they ascribed to their traumas. Therefore, their desire to help others facing PV was encouraged, while discussing available tools that would minimize their exposure to high risks of further violence.

3. Intervention Implementation

The intervention was carried out through 90 to 120 minute weekly individual sessions, with the number of sessions varying between 10 to 12 for each participant. Following the baseline assessment session, the first intervention session was a psycho-educational session about trauma, PTSD and intervention techniques. In the second session, the participant's lifeline was constructed, marking all major positive events by flowers and negative events by stones (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Example of a Participant's NET Lifeline

The following sessions pursued a chronological review of the lifeline, covering all major traumatic events. Exposure was implemented for each event until reaching habituation while discussing feelings, thoughts and behaviors during and after traumatic events, to reach a coherent explanation of conflicting feelings, fragmented thoughts and behaviors produced

during or after the event, e.g., freezing during the event, and avoidance, self-blame, rage, feelings of shame or guilt afterward. Following exposure, the cognitive restructuring process was implemented through directive therapeutic dialogues guided by the extracted themes, as described above.

A closing session was dedicated to an overall discussion of what had been accomplished. The discussion focused on all themes used during the narrative's restructuring process. In the same session, a full written biography was handed to each survivor. The biographies included the participants' narration of their traumatic experiences and the constructed meanings associated therewith, which were established through the directed therapeutic dialogues. Parts of the therapeutic dialogues were also incorporated as examples of how the new constructed narratives and meanings were reached.

One week after, a post-assessment session was held, during which the qualitative and quantitative assessments of the intervention outcomes were carried out, and feedback on the intervention was collected from the participants. In this session, the participants were asked to share their reflections on their written biographies and to give their feedback on how the themes explaining their responses to traumatic events were used during the sessions. The participants expressed a high level of satisfaction with the way their biographies were written, and shared positive emotions concerning having a full detailed and representative written account of their stories. They specifically expressed that having this written text is an asset, as they can revisit it in future moments of adversity to remember what they have been through, and how they were able to survive it. Two other follow-ups were implemented three and six months after the intervention.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Assessment

PCL-5 determines a clinically meaningful improvement in response to PTSD treatment with 10 points as a minimum threshold (National Center for PTSD, 2015b). Table 16 shows a significant improvement in post-intervention assessments for four of the five participants. Most notably, among the four participants, PTSD scores kept decreasing over post-assessments and the three- and six-month follow-ups.

Applying two different diagnostic criteria of PTSD (DSM-IV criteria and PCL-5 cut-off point which is indicated by a score of 33), all four participants fell below the PTSD diagnostic level in the 6-month-follow-up. Depression scores for three of the five participants showed a significant improvement, dropping below clinical depression level (score below 50) in the three- and six-month follow-ups assessments. Resilience scores showed an increase in the six-month follow-up in comparison to pre-intervention assessments among four of the five participants (see Table 16 and Figure 9).

Table 16. Scores of the Five Participates for PTSD, Depression and Resilience

	PCL5-PTSD				ZDS-Depression				CD-RISC-Resilience			
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M1	M2	M3	M4	M1	M2	M3	M4
Aisha	54	43	33	9	54	45	46	39	77	84	66	89
Mariam	52	35	27	27	51	50	44	48	53	68	60	60
Nour	55	23	18	17	62	44	47	44	65	78	88	80
Hala	45	29	37	31	54	52	63	54	58	70	68	66
Mona	70	45	75	66	55	52	65	66	43	79	49	44

Note. M1: pre-intervention assessment, M2 post-intervention assessment, M3: 3-month follow-up, M4: 6-month follow-up.

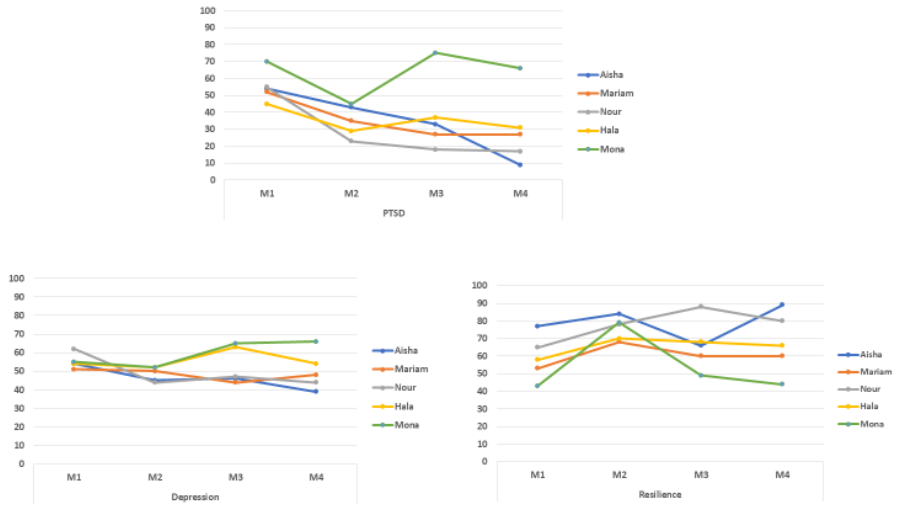

Figure 9. Diagrams of depression, PTSD and resilience over the four-points assessments

According to Jacobson and Traux (1991), a reliable clinical change should be greater than 1.96 when applying the reliable change index (RCI) ($RCI = \frac{x_2 - x_1}{\sqrt{2(SD\sqrt{1-r_{xx}})^2}}$).

Applying RCI, a clinically significant change in PTSD was achieved for three of the five participants, comparing follow-up assessments to the pre-intervention. RCI measures for depression and resilience were less consistent and less stable. Depression showed significant improvement among three of the five participants at the three-month follow-up and two at the six-month follow-up. While resilience scores reflected a more significant positive change in post-assessments than the follow-ups (see Table 17).

Table 17. RCI Measures for the five participants

		PCL5-PTSD	ZDS-Depression	CD-RISC-Resilience
Aisha	RCI-1	-1.25	-3.55	1.073
	RCI-2	-2.38	-3.15	-1.99
	RCI-3	-5.1	-5.9	1.84
Mariam	RCI-1	-1.90	-0.4	2.29
	RCI-2	-2.83	-2.76	1.07
	RCI-3	-2.83	-1.18	1.07
Nour	RCI-1	-3.62	-7.09	2.15
	RCI-2	-4.19	-5.91	3.52
	RCI-3	-4.30	-7.09	2.30
Hala	RCI-1	-1.81	-0.79	1.84
	RCI-2	-0.91	3.55	1.53
	RCI-3	-1.47	0	1.23
Mona	RCI-1	-2.83	-1.18	5.52
	RCI-2	0.57	3.94	0.92
	RCI-3	-0.45	4.34	0.15

Note. RCI-1: Post-intervention VS Pre-assessment, RCI-2**:** Three- month follow-up VS pre-intervention, RCI-3: Six-month follow up VS pre-intervention *Significant difference if RCI > 1.96.

4.2 Qualitative Assessment

The qualitative assessment focused on the following aspects: constructed meaning following the intervention; the current level of trauma-related symptoms, specifically of intrusion and avoidance; perception of resilience; and the participants' general evaluation of the intervention and therapeutic gains. Responses of the participants in the post-intervention session and two follow-ups were transcribed and analyzed using IPA and then compared against the pre-intervention assessments.

PTSD and depression symptoms

Mariam and Nour reported a significant decrease in arousal and distress when remembering, or being reminded of, traumatic events. They reported that they no longer felt the urge to avoid memories or things associated with the trauma. "Before, when I remembered something, I used to feel as if life had stopped and time froze […] My heart rate would even go faster," stated Mariam. "Now, when a memory comes to my mind, I do not push it away [...] I feel it's ok. Life does not stop."

Before the intervention, Hala and Aisha had been highly avoiding negative emotions associated with their traumas. Both had denied being still affected by their traumatic experiences and both had not made the link between their symptoms of PTSD and depression and the traumatic experience. In post-intervention and follow-up assessments, Hala reported an acceptable level of desensitization, with markedly less arousal and distress. She stated: "I think I deal with all previous events in a much better way [...] I no longer get distressed when I remember one of the events". In the follow-ups, she reported negative mood, low energy and social withdrawal, which she considered to be related to current living issues (e.g., the death of her uncle, quitting her job, sexual harassment in public spaces, and family conflicts).

Aisha reported a good level of desensitization in post-intervention and follow-up assessments. She said she had read back her NET biography and felt a level of acceptance. She stated: "I felt as if it was a dream and it ended […] I am still sad about who I became after the experience, isolated and unhappy. But I think I am Ok with all the scenes from the prison period."

In the post-intervention assessment, Mona showed significant improvement in all PTSD and depression symptoms, specifically in comparison with the extreme level of arousal and distress at the beginning of the intervention. She pointed out that, despite the sorrow and pain she felt because she was not able to achieve justice regarding her rape incident, she felt the intervention helped her carry on with her life. She stated: "The therapy made me determined to stop suspending life at what had happened". Nevertheless, Mona reported a noticeable relapse at the follow-ups. When she was asked about the reason for this relapse, she attributed it to having lost a new job she had started after the intervention and to severe financial hardships she was facing.

Meaning-making

Two major meanings emerged from statements of the survivors in post-intervention assessments: gaining resilience through hardships and a sense of self-coherence.

Gaining resilience through hardships. All participants described a sense of strength they ascribed to experiencing traumatic events. They attributed their growing sense of resilience to the narration and cognitive restructuring process. Mariam stated: "Now when I look at what I have been through, I feel I can bear anything. I have been through very tough events, which makes me able to resist any other situation".

Along the same lines, Nour stated: "I think what I went through since my childhood, like FGM, made me angry. I developed a feeling that I should stand up for myself. […] Those events made me unhappy and I felt it is not normal to live unhappy, so I tried to change things around me […] When I look back now to specific periods of my life and see how I have survived, I feel strong, others may not be able to survive such tough events."

When describing how she sees her life course after the intervention, Mona shared the following statement: "In the beginning, I was looking at my life in a very negative way, I was focused on the level of adversity and complications I have been through. […] Now I see that I got over all that, so definitely I can get over anything else. [...] I learned that I was resisting all the time, so I should keep resisting."

A sense of self-coherence. Mariam, Nour and Hala highlighted that they have come to realize how each event had contributed to their current self, making them more grounded, creating a sense of uniqueness, and shaping who they are. They linked this to the process of narration of all major life events. "I think without those events I was going to be a senseless girl," stated Mariam. "I was going to be just like the other women around me, having an average, pointless life. […] Those events made me who I am now. […] The therapy helped me put the pieces of my life together. [...] I am now able to evaluate the bad moments of my

life, [...] but also to see how the good moments affected me. [...] I feel that I should feel pride, not shame as I used to feel. […] I started to see things as a whole, in total, the right way."

Hala emphasized a similar meaning saying: "Now I see that what I went through made me understand life more. I became more experienced and aware of what is happening around me […] I started to think about the bad things that had happened in a totally new way. Maybe if they did not happen, I would not have been who I am and I am generally happy with who I am".

Aisha was able to appreciate aspects of the changes that happened to her after trauma. She stated: "I gained experience. I understood life better, in a more realistic way. I was introduced to totally unfamiliar people and environments. I also understood myself and appreciated it more". However, she still had significant difficulties in integrating the personality changes that have happened due to her traumatic experience.

Main benefits of the intervention

All participants were asked to identify the main gains from the intervention and any possible drawbacks. Getting rid of a sense of heaviness, getting rid of shame and guilt and gaining more self-awareness were three main themes that emerged. Failing to dedicate enough time to the current life context was the only drawback identified by Aisha.

"Before therapy, I used to feel heaviness, as if there was a weight I was carrying all the time," Mariam explained. "I was trying hard to avoid thinking about that weight as if I was running away from something. […] I was sad all the time. […] Before, every time something minor annoyed me, I would remember all the bad things that had happened to me, [...] now that does not happen anymore. [...] Whenever I am annoyed about something, it is about the present moment, not the past. […] The therapy helped me get rid of the weight I was carrying".

Moreover, Mariam thought another main gain from the intervention was that she no longer felt ashamed, which she ascribed to the directed discussions around dominant gender norms, her gendered conduct, and her feelings of shame and guilt. "I think I even used to think that I was the reason why they were sexually assaulting me. [...] I was always scared to tell what happened to anyone, or even think about it. […] Now, I no longer feel any shame. I know it was not my fault".

Nour echoed the idea of getting rid of the sense of heaviness and guilt saying: "I used to feel scared of looking at myself in a mirror, but through therapy, I did look. […] It made me face what I was escaping from all the time. […] It made me recognize who I am. […] I feel as if I was carrying a heavy rock on my chest all the time and now I got rid of it".

Processing negative emotions was a main theme in Hala and Aisha's interventions. Both identified the main gain of the intervention to be helping them recognize the risks associated with suppressing emotions of vulnerability and victimization. Hala stated: "I believe now that I need to face things more, even if nothing specific can be done. […] I regret all the energy I invested in avoiding processing the sad events I lived. […] I generally learned through the

therapy that I should take care of my emotions more. […] It helped me understand myself much more. I am able to identify now the tricks I was using sometimes not to deal with my emotions. [...] It gave me keys to myself and my personality and finally, my actions and feelings started to make sense".

5. Discussion

The participants' overall evaluation of the intervention was positive, specifically in relation to the directed cognitive restructuring and narrative construction. In addition to the main therapeutic goals, they reported other major gains such as getting rid of shame and guilt; getting rid of a sense of heaviness; gaining awareness regarding their maladaptive coping mechanisms in relation to emotional regulation; and gaining a sense of self-coherence, self-understanding, self-acceptance, and self-appreciation.

In previous NET studies, reports on remission of PTSD below the diagnostic level averaged between 40% to 75%, measured at six-month and one-year follow-ups (Bichescu, Neuner, Schauer, & Elbert, 2007; Neuner, Schauer, Klaschick, Karunakara, & Elbert, 2004; Halvorsen & Stenmark, 2010; Neuner, Onyut, Ert, Odenwald, Schauer, & Elbert, 2009). It needs to be noted, however, that a control group was not included in the current study. That, in addition to the small number of participants, does not allow a reliable comparison of the effectiveness of this tailored feminist version of NET versus NET standard modality. Nevertheless, at the six-month follow-up, four of the five participants no longer met the DSM-5 criteria of PTSD, and three of five reached clinically significant improvement according to RCI criteria. These results give promising indications that applying this tailored version could lead to significant improvement in PTSD symptoms, an initial finding which needs further support by wider clinical trials.

One participant, Mona, showed dramatic relapse in the three-month follow-up. She responded with the highest extreme for all PCL-5 items expect one, reflecting a high PTSD level, which contradicted the perceived improvement noticed through the clinical observations of the first author (e.g., improvement in physical appearance, level of psychomotor retardation, concentration, decision-making abilities, and the ability to pursue life activities). This result raises concerns regarding the level of effectiveness of NET interventions to treat trauma accompanied by a comorbid personality disorder. Further, this can be interpreted through what Schauer, Neuner & Elbert (2011) stressed regarding treating trauma combined with borderline personality disorder, as they highlighted that it is more complex process which needs much more time. They estimated the average number of sessions needed to treat PTSD with NET to be between 8 to 12 sessions of 90 minutes each, suggesting that PTSD with a borderline personality disorder may need twice the number of these sessions.

Qualitative assessment of PTSD symptoms indicated significant improvement among four of the five participants. The improvement was seen specifically in avoidance related symptoms, level of arousal and intrusive memories. This suggested that desensitization was successfully met by four of the five participants, which confirms the effectiveness of the

exposure elements of NET. It is also in line with a study by Bichescu, Neuner, Schauer, & Elbert (2007) on former political prisoners treated with NET, where the main significant improvement of PTSD symptoms took place in relation to avoidance and arousal.

Depression is the second most commonly used criterion to judge the effectiveness of trauma therapy. Although it is generally expected that remission of PTSD symptoms will lead to a remission in depression, previous studies reported less satisfying improvement rates of depression (Neuner, Schauer, Klaschick, Karunakara, & Elbert, 2004; Halvorsen & Stenmark, 2010; Lely, Smid, Jongedijk, Knipscheer, & Kleber, 2019; Bichescu, Neuner, Schauer, & Elbert, 2007). Similarly, the present results are less consistent and satisfactory regarding depression compared to PTSD across the post-intervention three points of assessment. Both qualitative and quantitative reports of participants showed several persisting depressive symptoms. Although the participants' depression symptoms were mostly associated with their current living conditions and life events, e.g., ongoing political oppression, financial difficulties, interpersonal conflicts and everyday sexual harassments in public spaces, these symptoms were also linked to their history of adversity, especially with respect to political oppression and GBV. This supports the explanation of the lower effectiveness of NET in treating depressive symptoms among refugee trauma survivors by Neuner et al. (2004), which they attributed to the ongoing desperate living conditions of participants and how they impact the intervention outcomes, which also applies in the current study. Although one of the main purposes of the directed cognitive restructuring process was to help survivors better handle current adversity through building links between previous traumas and current tough living conditions, the results concerning depression may suggest that deeper and longer discussions concerning these current conditions might be needed.

In line with the study hypothesis, each participant concluded the intervention with a constructed meaning of her trauma which combined her trauma appraisal with her pre-and post-trauma self-perceptions. Resilience came as a major common meaning among participants, as all five participants attributed to the intervention their sense of strength facing the adversity they lived and their ability to perceive their strength. This highlighted specifically the value of discussions during the directed cognitive restructuring process on resistance and victimization from the gender roles and gender-relations perspectives.

This supports the notion of resilience as an outcome of successful intervention as advanced by Connor & Davidson (2003), according to whom “improvement in CD-RISC score [measuring resilience] was noted in proportion to overall clinical global improvement, with the greatest increase noted in subjects with the highest global improvement and deterioration in CD-RISC score in those with minimal or no global improvement” (p.76). Quantitative assessments of resilience indicated that all participants gained a higher sense of resilience through the intervention. Nevertheless, the scores showed less stability and consistency across the three post-assessment measures in comparison to PTSD scores. A possible explanation would be that the sense of resilience, as measured with CD-RISC, is affected by the level of current adversity and not just success in handling previous adversity. Further investigation regarding the stability of resilience gained through trauma therapy is needed.

The sense of self-coherence was a second common constructed meaning following the intervention. According to three participants, their newly constructed narratives and the in-depth discussions during the sessions helped them see continuity and coherence in life, and enhance their self-understanding. Moreover, the intervention helped develop a sense of uniqueness and self-appreciation. Sense of coherence has been connected to resilience the within trauma literature (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Nygren, Aléx, Jonsén, Gustafson, Norberg, & Lundman, 2005). Further, it was reported in several studies as an expected outcome of a successful application of the narrative approach and as an end result of reconstructing the narrative about one's traumatic events and life adversity (Almedom, 2005; De Haence, Rousseau, Kevers, Deruddere, & Rober, 2018; Ville & Khlat, 2007).

One participant, Aisha, showed a low sense of self-coherence as she stressed inability to cope with her social context after release from prison, and inability to accept the personality changes consecutive to her imprisonment. This suggests that the wider the gap between the pre-and post-personalities is, the more difficult it is to reach integration and construct a sense of coherence. Aisha also identified failure to dedicate enough time to her life after the traumatic event as the therapy's main weakness. This could be taken as a recommendation for future interventions, that is to devote more time for life after trauma, i.e., integration of personality changes and handling of current adversity, in order to achieve better self-coherence and possibly less depression.

6. Reflexive Account

As emphasized earlier in the section on method, I, the first author, had several roles during the two phases of this project (i.e., the qualitative study in which the themes underlying the participants' victimization and resistance were identified, and the current intervention study). As the researcher role was previously discussed in relation to the co-construction of the participants' narratives and their interpretation as represented in the identified themes (Barakat, Philippot, 2021c), the therapist role is the most relevant to this paper. As emphasized in the introduction, a feminist perspective on trauma and trauma intervention was used as the overarching framework of this study. The rationale behind adopting this perspective and the possible impact of this on the intervention process were pointed out to the participants prior to the intervention and their explicit consent was obtained.

In addition to influencing the way in which the narratives of the participants were constructed, and the underlying themes were identified (Barakat, Philippot, 2021c), the feminist perspective directly influenced the intervention strategies. An example for that is directing the participants towards a political reading of their traumas, i.e., perceiving the forms of violence they experienced as instances within broader patterns of structured gendered violence and appreciating their responses to these instances as forms of resistance. On the one hand, I believe that this political reading, which was facilitated by the established bond between the participants and myself due to common political and ethical positions, has likely contributed to meaning-making, reduced the participants' sense of isolation, and reinforced better self-perception through appreciating acts of resistance. On the other hand,

such politicization may have also increased the level of frustration and despair, contributing to the participants' eventual depression, as reflected in the results. The participants live under ongoing conditions of extreme oppression and GBV, with no aspirations for change in the near future, whether in the political or social situations. Thereof, it can be assumed that helping the participants link their previous suffering and resistance to the context without exploring with them further individual or collective strategies to deal with and change this context might have contributed to their identified level of depression. This was especially highlighted by Aisha, as she criticized the intervention for not giving sufficient attention to her current living conditions, or to helping her find coping strategies to deal with her sense of sorrow and anger, perpetuated by the surrounding injustice and ongoing threats.

Moreover, this study followed a directive approach in the intervention, which meant being guided by the themes that were already determined as foundations for the cognitive reconstruction. Hence, another possible issue of concern is the extent of sensitivity and responsiveness I demonstrated in regard to new points that emerged from dialogues with the participants during the intervention sessions. Although I believe that I remained relatively open to changing and refining the previously identified themes, and to responding to new inputs, the possibility that I may have missed some key points cannot be ruled out. In particular, since the identified themes were mostly about the participants' reading of their previous traumas, I failed to engage enough with the participants' current suffering due to current adversity. This was most obvious in the case of Aisha, as mentioned above, and it was also present in the case of Mona, who was struggling with extreme financial hardships that possibly restricted her ability to better deal with her past traumatic events.

Finally, managing power relationships to minimize power gaps between researchers and participants is a serious ethical and methodological issue in qualitative research, especially in the context of clinical interventions (Karnieli-Miller, Strier, & Pessach, 2009). Managing relationships of authority, and possible dependency, throughout the course of therapeutic intervention is a challenge that requires great effort and continuous reflexivity. During the implementation of the study, I have worked consciously to minimize power gaps between the five participants and myself as much as was possible. I believe the attempt was relatively successful with most participants. Examples of practices to minimize the power gaps included leading conversations on the nature of the therapeutic relationship within the feminist perspective, explicitly highlighting the objective of reducing authority and power, underlining the fact that I am a doctoral researcher who is gaining knowledge and experience through the participants' engagements, and continuously asking for the participants' feedback including via structurally implemented member check processes. Yet, I believe that signs of a problematic power imbalance emerged in my interactions with Mona, mostly in the form of marked dependency and resistance to end the therapeutic relationship. To eliminate the possible harm, several conversations after the end of the intervention and the follow-ups were carried out with Mona, which continued until a smooth closure to the therapeutic relationship could be reached. Nevertheless, concerns over the possible effects of this dependency relationship on the results remain open.

In light of these insights, a number of important issues that need in-depth investigation and persistent scrutiny in clinical research were identified, including: how to negotiate the boundaries and overlapping amongst the different possible roles of a researcher, who is undertaking a multilayered research effort; how to explore the possible effects of each role on the others; how to unpack the impact of the researcher's subjectivity and the context in which the research is implemented on research outcomes; and what the possible ethical implications of these factors might be.

7. Conclusion and Limitations

The tailored feminist version of NET was positively received and evaluated by participants. The results confirmed successful PTSD remission. Exposure was mostly successful in reducing intrusion symptoms and avoidance, while narration, with directed cognitive restructuring process, contributed to meaning-making, identified in perceived resilience and self-coherence. The intervention also helped participants get rid of a sense of heaviness, shame and self-blame and gain more self-awareness and self-appreciation, which they viewed as main gains.

The present results give primary indications, however, further investigation via clinical comparative studies is needed to evaluate the importance of the cognitive element of NET (directed cognitive restructuring). The participants stressed the usefulness of integrating a gendered political reading that placed their trauma and resistance in a wider social-political context, which contributed to their sense of strength, uniqueness and meaning-making following the intervention. Less satisfactory results concerning depression suggest that more consideration should be given in future studies to the present experiences of survivors and their lives after trauma, especially targeting the implications of their history in their present and helping them find ways to deal with current adversity.

In addition to being a non-randomized trial, the study has other limitations, most notably, the small number of participants. Nonetheless, we hope, that by combining the feminist perspective with trauma focused therapies such as NET, this study can be considered a contribution to the literature on feminist trauma interventions which are based on a contextualized political understanding of women's suffering and resistance. A clinical randomized study that compares the effectiveness of the tailored feminist NET using directed cognitive restructuring to traditional NET is required, though, to examine the possible advantages of the suggested modifications.

Finally, the study pointed out several issues concerning trauma interventions in contexts of continued adversity. In compliance with the view which stresses the value of politicizing women's traumas, encouraging women to recognize the structured nature of the violence they are subjected to should go hand in hand with helping them find further collective and individual strategies to confront this structured violence and change its founding conditions.

Chapter 8

General Discussion

General Discussion

This final chapter aims at articulating the main insights gained throughout the journey of this research project. It will offer a reflexive account through which I will try to look critically at the different positions I assumed through the Ph.D. journey, while summarizing the main results and articulating possible conclusions, clinical implications, and potential directions for future research. The discussion will deal with the following topics: (a) the background of this research project; (b) a reflexive account, self-critique, and lessons learned throughout the doctoral journey; (c) main highlights from the empirical findings; (d) insights for clinical implications; (e) limitations of the research project; (f) directions for future research; and (g) final concluding remarks.

1. Background of this Research Project

I aim in this section to give a brief background on how this research project evolved over the years of my doctoral study at both, the theoretical and methodological levels. Meanwhile, this account will serve as a starting point to develop critical insights and reflective accounts on the whole Ph.D. journey and my shifting standpoints along the way.

When I started this research project in October 2015, I was mostly interested in exploring how symptoms associated with sexual violence trauma may vary among Egyptian women as a function of their adopted femininity and style of rumination. Shortly after, I expanded my scope to the Syrian context, developing an interest in comparing how the two contexts may differ in the forms of the gendered traumas to which women are subjected, and in women's psychological responses to these traumas. Initially, I had planned to rely only on quantitative data, using self-report questionnaires, to assess the level of adherence to normative femininity, and how it may relate to women's reported PTSD and depression symptoms. Yet, as I explored deeper into the research topic, I started to realize the complexity of the multiple layers underlying this ostensibly simple question, and the problematic theoretical and methodological assumptions embedded therein.

I started reading psychological literature on femininity and masculinity, focusing on how they were initially conceptualized, measured, criticized and reconceptualized in various ways. This close examination of the literature has led me to sense a tension between different waves and lines of research in psychology (as presented in chapter 1) regarding how these two constructs can be best conceptualized and measured, and for which purpose. I was also able to recognize the political and social emphases associated with using femininity and masculinity as units of analysis when studying gender phenomena, and how these emphases fueled different directions of research. Moreover, I recognized how, under more recent approaches, the two constructs were harshly criticized for implying several problematic theoretical, methodological, and political assumptions, leading to their relative retreat from the central position they had occupied in gender scholarship in the 1970s (Bem, 1993; Morawski, 1985).

On the other hand, I came to see how debates on femininity and masculinity, both as socio-cultural norms to which women and men are required to adhere, and as self-construal concepts, are still very present in social, political, and academic spheres in the Arab world (Amar, 2011a, 2011b, Mustafa, 2014). With the 2011 Egyptian revolution, Egyptian women gained increasing presence in public spaces, only to be confronted with a violent backlash which took the specific form of increasing sexual violence. Over the following years, I became occupied with how women in my homeland, and more generally in the Arab region, are able to negotiate with patriarchal gender systems and engage in various forms of resistance within a traumatizing context. Against this backdrop, I considered the investigation of how femininity is formulated as a social construct, how it is adopted by women, and how it relates to women's responses to sexual violence as very relevant questions. Hence, I decided to attempt to reframe femininity/masculinity constructs, using a contextual lens, while trying to avoid the main historical drawbacks associated with using these constructs.

One of the main points of criticism I was able to identify with regard to the traditional conceptualization of femininity/masculinity is the fact that these concepts were initially introduced in psychological research as, single global acontextual concepts. As such, they were detached from social and cultural shaping factors, and positioned in a binary relationship of polar opposites. Realizing the need for contextualizing gender constructs, and being aware of their relative malleability, I turned to other social science disciplines where I found the context to be at the heart of research inquiries investigating femininity and masculinity. Framing femininities and masculinities as multiple co-existing profiles organized in a more complex gender hierarchy was a key insight I gained from this line of research (Connell, 1995). Thus, I became interested in investigating how different profiles of femininities and masculinities are possibly formed in the two contexts of my study, Egypt and Syria; how these profiles may be ordered in a gender hierarchy based on the degree of support they receive from socio-cultural and political forces; and how women's internalization of different femininities may relate to the other variables of interest, i.e., exposure to trauma and the psychological consequences thereof.

With respect to investigating women's trauma, as a feminist practitioner, I was committed to feminist perspectives and principles in providing psychological support to women survivors of trauma. Meanwhile, I had become aware of the gap and tension between my earlier education within the mainstream tradition of clinical psychology, and my "ideological" beliefs about how women's traumas should be investigated and treated. In line with the feminist perspective on trauma, and with the aim to gain more in-depth insights that help me better articulate my inquiries, I decided to integrate a qualitative approach into investigating the consequences of trauma among Syrian and Egyptian women. Yet, at this stage, despite being critical of the medical perspective, I was still deeply influenced by my earlier training within the mainstream clinical psychology tradition. Consequently, I formulated the initial research questions mostly around trauma-related symptoms.

I began the qualitative fieldwork research with displaced Syrian women in Lebanon, as part of the third study (Chapter 5). This experience challenged my assumptions even further. Shortly after, as I started conducting the interviews, it became very clear that the traditional

medical approach to trauma would be inadequate. Instead of PTSD and depressive symptoms, which I was searching for, the main emerging themes from the interviews were (a) evolving strength, agency, and resilience; (b) how the survivor's constructed new meanings from their traumas which helped them keep going; and (c) to which extent the traumatic contexts have pushed the survivors to question gender norms and embrace and practice new gender roles. Insights from fieldwork helped me become more conscious of my critical stance towards how women's suffering and resistance were being depoliticized and de-contextualized, i.e., isolated from their shaping context and underlying socio-political forces, within mainstream clinical psychology on both research and practice levels. I found in the feminist psychological literature on trauma a framework that I can rely on both, the theoretical and applied levels. Thereof, I needed to refine my initial ideas and redirect my research plans towards a project that explicitly builds on a feminist reading of women's suffering and resistance.

Against this backdrop, I rephrased the research questions to focus on the contextual and socio-political aspects, not only of women's suffering but also of women's resistance to traumatic environments. The Arab uprisings of 2011 had evidently marked a defining moment with grave implications for Arab women, leading to more gendered traumatic experiences and, simultaneously, creating more spaces for women to resist and push for social change. I therefore decided to anchor this research project around that historical moment.

Finally, since I believe in the value of incorporating the voices of survivors into psychological research and practice, I decided to integrate women's narratives on their traumas and the consequences thereof as a key pillar of this research project. These narratives, along with the feminist reading of women's traumas, served as the basis for the intervention that was designed and tested in the last study (Chapter 7).

2. Reflexive account and Self-critique

In the previous section, I focused on how the research itself developed along the doctoral journey. In this section, however, my aim is to elaborate on how my own background and multiple identities possibly impacted the different phases of my research project. Afterwards, I will share some critical reflections regarding the way in which I dealt with some of the issues that emerged along the journey, and some of the lessons I have learned by the end of it.

As briefly emphasized in the previous section, and in chapters 6 and 7, I identify as a feminist, Egyptian woman, political activist, psychology researcher, and clinical practitioner. I received my earlier education in a positivist environment which appreciates quantification and the allegedly "objective" and "value-free" knowledge. I was trained as a clinical psychologist and researcher in a medically oriented scholarly setting, where the guiding ideal was "neutrality" in psychological interventions.

Through my early practice at mental health institutions, I developed a critical stance towards the mainstream medical tradition in psychological practice. I recognized that,

contrary to my training which emphasized that a clinical partitioner should be objective and apolitical, the psychological practice in my context was highly imbued with social, political, and cultural values which I am ideologically and morally against (e.g., patriarchal values, violation of the individual's right of choice, and disregard for personal freedoms). I became convinced that, in such a politicized context, embracing moral and political agendas grounded in equality, justice, and freedom is the ethical path to take as a practitioner. Hence, I migrated to feminist organizations and groups and shifted my psychology practice to be explicitly committed to feminist principles and values.

My feminist and activist political identities became more salient during and after the Egyptian revolution of 2011. Through my engagement as an activist and feminist practitioner providing support for women survivors of sexual violence, I developed an interest in investigating women's traumas and the psychological consequences thereof. I saw the rise in sexual violence against women after 2011 as a clear manifestation of the social, political, and cultural structures in which I and women in my country lived. Meanwhile, I believed that women's psychological responses to violence differ depending on various factors, such as women's own understanding of the meanings and representations of gender roles. More specifically, I became highly interested in the questions of exactly how and why women differ in their responses to sexual violence. Realizing that the tools I have as an activist and practitioner are not sufficient to find an answer, I decided to turn my interest into a doctoral research project that initially aimed to quantitatively investigate the relationships between femininity, rumination, exposure to sexual violence, depression, and PTSD among Egyptian women.

I was aware that my political background was indeed shaping the research questions. Yet, in this early phase of research, I was unable to bring the political underpinnings of my questions into the research project, or to unpack them. It was difficult at the time to find theoretical frameworks and methodological tools that are compatible with these questions, on the one hand, and that serve my increasingly critical position towards conventional medical approaches and the positivist tradition on the other. Shortly after engaging with the literature and the early insights from fieldwork, I was confronted with the complexity underlying my oversimplified research questions, and the limitations of the methods and theories I initially chose to answer these questions. I had to revisit my early research plans to find better grounds for my project. That was the point at which I needed to critically reflect on how I was trained as a researcher, the extent to which my training is in line with who I became, and the extent to which that training was useful for the research project I was embarking on.

I was becoming more conscious that my research questions themselves are already highly political, e.g., seeing masculinity and femininity research as a political question (see. Morawski, 1985); and women's interpersonal traumas as social and political matters that represent structured patterns of violence (see. Webster & Dunn, 2005). Hence, I came to the decision to capitalize on the starting point of my questions. Consequently, I decided to adopt a broader methodological approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative tools. Meanwhile, I turned to the feminist scholarship on trauma trying to ground my initial

assumptions and find solid foundations for my political reading of traumas, trauma consequences, and trauma interventions.

Moreover, working on this project at an experimental psychopathology lab embracing a different research tradition challenged me to better articulate and voice my ideological position. I needed to find the right language and tone to communicate my insights and viewpoints and their epistemological foundations within a wider research community. I had to ask myself fundamental questions on the nature and purpose of psychological knowledge and associated values. Further, I needed to reflect on my own political subjectivity and reveal its presence within the research context, and how it possibly influenced the communication with the research participants. Most importantly, I needed to identify and articulate how my political viewpoints might be blurring my vision and impacting my conclusions.

The research questions were thus formulated and later refined in light of my feminist reading of the context and my understanding of the phenomena of interest. Feminist literature became the theoretical framework on which I relied to analyze the data and to choose and adapt the trauma intervention (the tailored version of Narrative Exposure Therapy).

In addition to quantitative tools used to measure femininities, masculinities, rumination and symptoms of depression and PTSD, I relied on qualitative methods in several aspects of the project. I choose in-depth interviews, first due to my interest in getting deeper insights into how the Egyptian and Syrian participants read their own traumas, their responses thereto, and the context in which such traumas occurred. After the first interviews, I developed an interest in investigating how the trauma stories of these women were constructed. Guided by feminist and cultural methodologies, I decided to use the narrative approach, which became the cornerstone of the last two studies.

Under the narrative approach, research is seen as a collaborative process in which the subjectivities of the researcher and the participants, as well as features of the context, interact together and impact the constructed narratives (B. Cole, 2009). Further, the narrative approach recognizes the fact that the researcher's subjectivity, including her/his ideological positions, influences the interpretation of the narratives (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006).

In chapters 6 and 7, I tried to unpack how my feminist and activist identities possibly impacted the construction of the participants' narratives and were reflected in the themes identified in these narratives. I also emphasized that these identities may have contributed to reassuring participants that it would be safe to share their stories in the polarized and threatening political and social environment of the research. Based on these safe grounds, a shared political identity was possibly constructed between each participant and myself. On the one hand, this may have facilitated the narration process. On the other hand, it may have politicized the narratives, giving more prominence to the political reading of the context and participants' traumas. In my view, this political reading reinforced the meaning-making process, but it may have also contributed to post-intervention depressive symptoms, especially when taking into consideration the ongoing traumatizing context in Egypt, which does not hold much hope for a positive change soon.

Further, this last point should also be linked to the profiles of the women I worked with in the qualitative studies. As mentioned earlier, Egypt has been fostering a very polarized and tense environment in which the ideological position towards the Egyptian revolution and the post-coup regime is a defining question for most people. Prior to the study, the five Egyptian women I worked with were clearly positioning themselves in the pro-revolution/anti-regime camp. They had been engaged, to various extents, with social and cultural post-revolution questions, including the gender representations of their own traumas. Reaching these specific women was possible through my feminist and activist networks in Egypt, e.g., El Nadeem centre which hosted the study. This is yet another layer in which my feminist background probably influenced the research. As such, it is important to acknowledge that the identified gendered perceptions of women's traumas and the insights on how femininities were constructed and performed within the trauma context would have possibly been different had I worked with other women with different ideological positions.

I had a different positionality in the second context under study, i.e., that of displaced Syrian women in Lebanon (chapter 5), and my identities came into play in a different way. As an Egyptian psychologist, the fact that I am an outsider possibly facilitated the research. I described in chapter 5 the context of the five Syrian women I interviewed, who lived in displacement under extreme conditions of adversity. These women reported marked tension in the relationship between Syrians and the Lebanese host community, characterized by discrimination, racism, and violence. On the other hand, they also expressed feeling uncomfortable to fully integrate into the displaced Syrian community, which was significantly shattered due to the war. I demonstrated how the five women explicitly shared that they felt comfortable sharing their stories with me because I am an outsider who is not going to be present in their everyday life after the study, and because I am an Egyptian, rather than a Lebanese psychologist who belongs to the unwelcoming host community. Consequently, my feminist identity was less salient, however, my political position against the Syrian regime, and my recognition of the racism Syrian refugees face in Lebanon, were evidently clear conditions to gain the trust and cooperation of the participants.

Comparing my positionality in the two contexts I can identify many dissimilarities that possibly impacted the research outcomes of each context. The most significant among those dissimilarities are: (a) the big discrepancy in my level of familiarity with the two contexts prior to the study; (b) the assumptions I held before engaging with the field research; (c) the intersections of my different identities (political, feminist and Egyptian), and how these intersections potentially influenced interaction with the participants; (d) the level of identification I experienced with the participants in each of the two contexts; (e) the emotions and meanings I personally constructed during and after engaging with the field research which potentially affected my analysis of the collected narratives.

My exposure to the Syrian war before staring the research was mostly restricted to secondary recourses, e.g., media outlets and human rights reports. The narratives of the five Syrian women were my first in-depth experience in engaging with direct accounts of war and displacement in the Syrian context. In contrast, I was personally present and engaged in the Egyptian revolution, and I had my own stories concerning violence against women in relation

to the revolution and its aftermath. Like the five Egyptian participants of my study, I personally experienced the collective moments of hope for political and social change; the immense violence during and after the revolution; the realization that the revolution had failed; the extreme oppressive environment after the 2013 military coup; and all the emotions of fear, sorrow, and despair that emerged thereafter.

Against this backdrop, the two research processes needed different techniques of engagement, different ways of navigating my involvement in the research context, and certain strategies of emotional regulation. Meanwhile, the two contexts had a different impact on me. I ended the Syrian study with a deep appreciation of how the research experience has significantly enriched my understanding of the Syrian context, and led me to develop an ethical commitment and a bond towards it. On the other hand, engaging with the narratives of the five Egyptian women helped me construct my own meanings concerning the failed revolution. It helped me see how, despite failing to reach the desired political change, the revolution had already initiated a social change that was evident for me in the narratives of the five Egyptian women.

Reflecting on the different phases of the research project, there are several points of possible critique to be highlighted, and several lessons learned that can be pointed out.

As stated earlier, conceptualizing and operationalizing femininity and masculinity constructs and trying to unpack their underlying political and ideological foundations was a challenging step in this project. I now realize that limiting myself in the early phases of the research to only reviewing psychological literature on the two concepts did not help me reach a well-articulated perspective at the beginning of the study. It soon became apparent, however, that a more interdisciplinary literature review would be more conducive when studying gender phenomena. Moreover, exploring a wider scope of psychological literature investigating other constructs that are closely associated with femininity and masculinity, e.g., gender identity and gender stereotypes, was a fundamental step towards a deeper understanding of the complex and overlapping relationships among gender-related concepts in psychology scholarship. Further, a critical historical perspective on how these different concepts were developed, criticized, reconceptualized, or abandoned proved highly important to appropriately place a gender research project within the gender scholarship.

Similarly, I also needed to widen the scope of the literature review to accommodate broader, and more relevant, assumptions concerning women's traumas. Although I embrace a feminist approach in my psychological practice, I had restricted myself at the beginning of the doctoral project to the medical approach when shaping the research questions concerning trauma. This proved insufficient when I started my fieldwork with Syrian women. Ultimately, integrating methods that are less dominant in clinical psychology research, such as in-depth interviews, the narrative approach and qualitative analysis, as well as relying on feminist literature to interpret the results (B. Cole, 2009; Webster & Dunn, 2005), were pathways that helped me reach what I believe is a deeper and more grounded understanding of women's experiences of traumas. It is also my belief that this consequently helped me design and apply more relevant psychological interventions.

Moreover, although I take a critical stand towards the medical perspective to trauma, the representations of this medical perspective remained present in my research, most notably through employing PTSD and depression as main units of analysis in the intervention study. From my current position, I acknowledge the limitations and the possible downsides associated with relying on PTSD as a diagnostic category in psychological research (Kevers, Rober, Derluyn, & De Haene, 2016; Muldoon, Lowe, Jetten, Cruwys, & Haslam, 2021). Nevertheless, I also see the possible value of using the remission of PTSD and depression symptoms as a sign of improvement after a trauma intervention, along with other signs of recovery such as meaning-making. To conclude, I believe that a contextual and personalized lens that considers the individual's own reading of her/his suffering and recovery should go hand in hand with remission of trauma symptoms when judging the effectiveness of psychological interventions.

Further, although I am conscious of the value an intersectionality lens can bring, especially in relation to women's experiences of violence (E. Cole., 2009), and I have indeed employed this lens in the qualitative studies, I did not use this same lens when looking into the quantitative data. In retrospect, I believe that analyzing the data of the two quantitative studies in relation to the different social locations of the participants would have further deepened the understanding of femininity/masculinity constructions and would have helped better contextualize the associations between femininities and other variables of interest, such as women's exposure to sexual violence and symptoms of PTSD and depression.

A possible risk associated with using the narrative approach when investigating traumas is the fact that the storytelling technique may activate traumatic memories and trigger heavy emotions associated with these memories, including reliving victimization, fear, and helplessness (Bishop & Shepherd, 2011; De Hanene, Grietens, & Verschueren, 2010). In the three qualitative studies in which I used the narrative approach, I was keen to explain to the participants the possible risks of the technique during the informed consent process, and I made sure to provide various options for psychological support during and after participation in the study. In the Egyptian context, all five women who participated in the first narrative study decided to join the intervention study. Structured connections with them continued for three- and six-months follow-ups. It further continued, beyond the completion of the study in less regular and structured ways, such as check-in messages and calls that are still going with some of them to date. Conversely, in the Syrian context, the fact that I was present in the field for a shorter period, and I was not able to offer a structured trauma intervention following the narrative interviews, may have negatively affected the five Syrian women. Although I remained connected with the participants via texting and irregular calls for a period of time, the structured relationship ended after the interviews, which left no room for further in-depth engagements with post narration memories, thoughts, and emotions until reaching recovery.

Finally, I chose to follow a directive approach in the trauma intervention, guiding the cognitive reconstruction process through therapeutic dialogues that are based on the themes extracted from the participants' narratives. The feminist lens I embrace, as an activist and researcher, influenced the way in which the narratives were constructed and interpreted.

Hence, it impacted how the therapeutic dialogues were guided, as presented in chapters 6 and 7. I believe that the process of the directed cognitive reconstruction positively contributed to meaning-making, and helped the participants reach a sense of coherence, better perception of their resilience, and a higher sense of agency and control. Yet, the process also involved the risk of dulling my sensitivity to other elements and themes that may have emerged in the therapy sessions, which might have not been necessarily related to the primary identified themes. I was aware of this risk, and I tried to remain mindful to integrate other emerging themes, but I believe I may have missed important aspects of the participants' concerns in relation to their current living contexts, and that I did not engage enough with the participants' enduring adversity. This possibly contributed to their increased level of depression after the intervention and during the follow-ups.

3. Highlights of the Main Results

This section aims to present the key highlights that emerged from the dissertation results while drawing connections between these highlights and the principal issues in the literature.

3.1 Multiplicity of Gender Roles

As emphasized earlier, traditional psychological approaches to the conceptualization and measurement of femininity and masculinity were criticized by feminist scholars for assuming that there is only one acontextual deep-seated, single coherent form of femininity and of masculinity to which all individuals are expected to adhere (see Bem, 1993). Several recent approaches, within psychology and beyond, have highlighted the multiplicity of gender roles, whether as socio-cultural categories that contain gender stereotypes, or as adopted sets of personal gendered attributes that individuals internalize as part of their self-construal, implying the co-existence of several forms of femininities and masculinities (Budgeon, 2013; Connell, 1995; Saez, Casado, & Wade, 2010; Smiler, 2004, Paechter, 2018; Wade & Gelso, 1998). Using an intersectional lens, research efforts have investigated the varied constructions of femininities and masculinities in interaction with other social categories (e.g., class, race, sexual identity) (E. Cole & Zucker, 2007; Settles, 2006; Levant, Richmond, Cook, House and Aupont, 2007; Mahalingam & Leu, 2005). Meanwhile, other lines of research examined "subtypes of women and men" represented in differentiated sets of gender stereotypes making up several profiles of femininities and masculinities (Carpenter & Trentham, 2001; Devine & Baker, 1991; Vonk & Ashomore, 2003; Rudman & Glick, 2008).

The results of the factor analysis study (Chapter 3), which aimed at identifying the prototypical profiles of femininity and masculinity in Egypt and Syria, as socio-cultural constructs that imply gender stereotypes individuals are expected to embrace, were in line with the conceptualization of multiple co-existing gender roles. The analysis produced two factors of femininity and four factors of masculinity in each of the two investigated settings. These factors underlined the existence of coherent profiles that exist simultaneously in both the Egyptian and Syrian contexts, two for femininities and four for masculinities. Each profile was named based on the characteristics represented therein. For femininity, the two profiles

were named *Good Wife* and *Assertive Competent Woman*, and for masculinity, the four profiles were named *Family Man, Macho Man, Rebellious Man*, and *Soft and Tender Man.*

Based on the notion of a gender hierarchy that comprises hemogenic, and subordinate forms of femininity and masculinity, reflecting the degree to which each form of femininity or masculinity is supported by the dominant gender norms (Budgeon, 2013; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Paechter, 2018), the study investigated differences in desirability scores for each of the two femininities and the four masculinities for stereotypical womanhood and manhood, respectively. In both Syrian and Egyptian samples, significant differences were found, suggesting that *Good Wife* came as a more desirable prototype of femininity than *Assertive Competent Women. Family Man* was the most desirable as a masculine prototype, followed by *Macho M*an, *Soft and Tender man*, and finally *Rebellious Man.* This highlights how these profiles, though co-existing, markedly differ in the degree to which they are supported, encouraged, accepted, or rejected by mainstream socio-cultural norms. It can therefore be hypothesized that the social and psychological consequences of adopting any profile may vary with respect to the socio-cultural context in which individuals exist. Yet it is important to highlight the fact that the desirability of each profile was inferred by averaging the desirability scores of each item represented in the respective profile. Thus, although this indicates the extent to which the attributes forming a profile are socially desired for women or men, it does not account for the possible interaction between these attributes within that profile. This can be considered as a limitation of this project, and an area for future investigation

3.2 Contextualizing Gender Roles

In addition to highlighting the possible multiplicity of gender profiles, several feminist scholars and theorists have emphasized that gender constructs are context-dependent, as they deeply rely on cultural, social and economic factors, and may change in response to changes in these factors (Bem, 1993; Morawski, 1985; Sherif, 1982). Moreover, several theoretical accounts and research results recognized the ability of individuals to negotiate and possibly reshape gender roles through their everyday gendered behaviors in both private and public spheres (Amar, 2011a; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Denner & Dunbar, 2004; Eagly & Wood, 2011; Kandiyoti, 1988; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Meanwhile, several empirical studies showed that war, armed conflicts, and major political and economic changes contribute to significant changes in gender roles (Armengol, 2014; Goldstein, 2001; Santana, 2016). In the context of the Arab world, several recent qualitative studies underlined how the Arab uprisings and their aftermaths problematized and challenged dominant femininities and masculinities in the Egyptian and Syrian contexts, producing new gender politics through which the profiles of outspoken, assertive, engaged, independent and militant women became more prominent and visible (Amar, 2011a; Biagini, 2019; El Feki, Heilman & Barker, 2017; Gren, 2018; Kandiyoti, 1988; Mustafa, 2014; Suerbaum, 2018).

Notwithstanding that I was not able to derive quantitative data relevant to the construction of femininities and masculinities in Egypt and Syria before 2011, the interviews carried out as part of this research project evidently highlighted major perceived changes in gender roles in Egypt and Syria, and among Syrian displaced communities.

The interviewed Syrian women, presented in chapter 5, considered experiences of war and displacement to have significantly impacted both their own adopted femininities and the prototypical gender roles. In identifying concrete examples of such changes, they pointed to an increase in mobility, financial independence, presence on the job market, and sense of agency and strength. The narratives of the interviewees emphasized the role of contextual factors in shaping gender roles, as perceived changes were attributed to new conditions in Syria or asylum countries, such as men being less present due to mass killings or arrests, extreme financial hardships that pushed housewives to labor markets, and different gender politics in displacement countries. Some also highlighted growing confrontational and non-conformist attitudes among Syrian women. The interviewees stressed that the conflict and its aftermaths made many women to realize the extent to which gender norms were unfair and gender relations were unbalanced under the pre-2011 conditions.

Similarly, the interviewed Egyptian women, presented in chapter 6, attributed the major changes they perceived in normative gender roles and their own adopted femininities to the 2011 Egyptian revolution and its aftermaths. They expressed a consciousness that many women, including themselves, gained wider spaces to engage in social and political movements, which directly reflected in the decisions they made in their private lives, encouraging them to confront the patriarchal norms associated with their femininities and face the structural gender-based violence in their environment. They were also acutely aware of the significantly increased level of sexual violence, which some of them explained as a backlash against women's challenging of patriarchal norms and traditional gender forces.

The factor analysis study (Chapter 3) consistently identified the same two prototypes of femininities and four prototypes of masculinities in both the Egyptian and Syrian contexts. The hierarchy of these profiles based on the social desirability scores was also the same. This can be construed as an indicator of the reliability of the identified prototypes and might be attributed to common social and cultural factors, such as language, religious beliefs, shared history and heritage, and possibly analogous gender policies. Further, it was also suggested that both settings were going through parallel phases of relative fluidity in gender politics due to the major socio-political changes that led to the problematization of the patriarchal dominant forms of gender roles and opened up spaces for the more subordinated forms of femininities and masculinities to become more visible.

3.3 Different Consequences for Different Adopted Femininities

It has been well established that depression has a significantly higher prevalence among women (Kessler, McGonagle, Swartz, & Blazer, 1993; Weissman, et al., 1996). Several lines of research have presented theoretical and empirical models to explain this phenomenon by

unfolding the relationship between gender roles, exposure to adversity and stress, and subsequent responses, including depression. The findings have emphasized that (a) women's positions of power in patriarchal societies expose them to more strains, hardships, and gendered traumas, such as sexual and gender-based violence (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001; Stoppard, 1999; Webster & Dunn, 2005); (b) the ways in which women are socialized to react to stressors, including the mediating processes they learn, such as rumination, make them more prone to develop depression and other associated psychopathologies (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987). In one line of research, sexual violence, in particular, gained wide attention among feminist scholars as a gendered form of trauma that is tightly linked to the socio-cultural construction of femininities and masculinities. Accordingly, sexual violence was conceived as dependent on dominant gender schemas, such as women's need for men's protection (Griffiths, 2018; Webster and Dunn, 2005).

Against this background, the second paper (Chapter 4) was concerned with the way in which the adoption of either of the two identified femininity profiles would relate to exposure to sexual violence and consequently predict rumination, depression, and PTSD. The results demonstrated significant differences between the two profiles, as well as between the Egyptian and Syrian contexts.

In both contexts, adopting an *Assertive Competent Woman* profile negatively correlated with abstract rumination and depression, in line with several previous studies that found a negative correlation between adopting traits that are stereotypically associated with masculinity, such as agency and self-efficacy, and depression among women. According to this body of research, women's sense of agency and ability to control played a protective or alleviating role in the face of stressful events and adversity (Bassoff & Glass, 1982; Markstrom-Adams, 1989; Nezu, 1987; Lam & McBride-Chang, 2007).

Also in both contexts, the *Good Wife* profile negatively correlated with exposure to sexual violence. This was interpreted, in light of the feminist literature, as an indication that sexual violence can be a tool of punishment that society, or the State, can use against non-conformist women, who challenge the dominant patriarchal gender norms by their counter-stereotypic behavior (Burgress & Borgida, 1999; Conner, Glick, & Fiske, 2017). This perspective postulates sexual violence as a tool to maintain or restore the gender status quo, as represented in the dominance of the patriarchal structure (Conner, Glick, & Fiske, 2017; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012; Vandello, Bosson, & Cohen, Burnaford, & Weaver, 2008). Hence, an increase in sexual violence may be perceived as a backlash against pushing the boundaries of traditional femininities (Al-Ali, 2014; Kandiyoti, 2013).

It is noteworthy, however, that the *Good Wife* profile did not positively associate with either rumination or depression. This runs contrary to the way traditional femininity was described in previous literature, typically within western contexts, as strongly associated with affective disorders in women, particularly depression (Bem, 1974; Spence & Helmreich, 1978; Travis, 1988).

Even more notably, in the Egyptian sample, the *Good Wife* profile was negatively associated with depression and PTSD. This was in line with the main underlying assumption of the paper, i.e., that gender roles are contextual in nature, not only in the sense that gender roles are shaped within and by context-specific socio-cultural factors, but also that the consequences of adopted femininities and masculinities would vary in relation to these factors.

In the specific context of the Egyptian and Syrian cultures, the *Good Wife* profile is in a higher hierarchical position of social desirability in comparison to the profile of the *Assertive Competent Woman*. Consequently, women who adopt the *Good Wife* profile are not only less prone to being exposed to sexual violence, but are also expected to be socially rewarded, or to at least face less social pressure to conform—with such pressure being one of the main factors assumed to contribute to women's depression (Stoppard, 1999; Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001).

Other substantial differences between the two samples were also noted. Most significantly, adopting the *Assertive Competent Woman* profile was found to be related to more exposure to sexual violence solely in the Egyptian context. This supports both conclusions that (a) gender roles are of contextual nature; and (b) sexual violence may be used as a tool of social discipline against women who threaten the patriarchal structure of power, in this case by adopting the *Assertive Competent Woman* profile. The lack of this correlation in the Syrian context might be attributed to the fact that, due to the extreme conditions of war and displacement, the patriarchal forces in Syria were ruptured in a manner that undermined their ability to reestablish male domination through sexual violence. Contrarywise, the patriarchal forces in the Egyptian context, though threatened by women's increasing rebellious or non-conformist behavior, remained relatively intact.

These results together portray a complex and multilayered relationship between gender roles and their social and psychological consequences, and they constitute a strong argument against the formulation of global, generalized notions associating specific femininities with specific psychopathologies. Rather, a more appropriate approach should rely on understanding women's traumas and their responses to traumas, within their contexts and in relation to the underlying socio-cultural and political conditions.

3.4 Contextualizing and Politicizing Women's Suffering and Resistance

It has been suggested in the feminist literature that women's interpersonal traumas should be considered as structured socio-cultural phenomena that represent the patriarchal structures of power (Griffiths, 2018; Webster and Dunn; 2005). Along the same lines, one main foundation of this dissertation was that women's traumas and responses to traumas, including suffering and resistance, need to be contextualized and politicized. In referring to traumas and responses to traumas, a contextualization means articulation and understanding within a specific socio-cultural context; whereas politicization means approaching with a feminist

lens that incorporates the manifestations of the gender hierarchy of power and reflects the political and social representations of femininities and masculinities.

Moreover, the narratives of women survivors can offer an in-depth understanding of the context in which traumas occurred, the context-specific representations of femininities and masculinities, and the survivors' readings of both (B. Cole, 2009). Women's consciousness of the gendered nature of their traumas, and the gendered impact of these traumas, were identified as a main theme in the narratives of both Syrian and Egyptian survivors who were interviewed for the third and fourth studies (Chapters 5 and 6, respectively). Moreover, the interviewed survivors highlighted the recent changes in gender roles and gender politics that accompanied and followed the uprisings in Egypt and Syria, and they emphasized how these changes contributed to their traumas, on the one hand, and their ability to resist traumas in general, on the other.

In the Egyptian context, the focus was on sexual violence and gendered political violence as two forms of gendered traumas that are tightly connected to the socio-political changes following the 2011 revolution. The narratives of Egyptian survivors, as shown in chapter 6, reflected their consciousness of the fact that patriarchal gendered norms and underlying socio-political forces, e.g., laws, contributed to their victimization. Moreover, the narratives also showed an intersectional perspective highlighting the role of other dimensions of the survivors' identity, such as the socioeconomic status, in determining their position of power during and after the traumatic experience, restricting or reinforcing their ability to resist, and contributing to the aftermath of trauma.

The same emphasis on the gendered nature of sexual violence was also present in narratives on political traumas. Providing clear examples, such as threats of rape and a forced pregnancy test during detention, the survivors described how the political traumatic events they experienced were also shaped by traditional schemes concerning dominant femininity. The narratives of the interviewed women also highlighted the gendered nature of their resistance, during the traumatic event, or even beyond it in their everyday lives. Through this resistance, the survivors possibly aimed at challenging the boundaries of patriarchal gender roles, changing the traumatic contexts they live in, or eliminating the conditions that led to their victimization.

In the Syrian context, the focus was traumas that are directly associated with war and displacement experiences. The third paper (Chapter 5) investigated the narratives of five Syrian women displaced in Lebanon, all of which featured major elements of changed assumptions concerning gender roles, changes in gender roles, and changes in the survivors' own femininities.

The narratives of the five survivors underscored how large-scale traumatic experiences, such as war and displacement, can shatter old assumptions regarding femininities and masculinities. The survivors described how the new conditions led them to question, negatively judge, and possibly challenge the previously dominant gender politics. They also pointed out that they were pushed to perform new femininities due to the novel responsibilities they were forced to carry and the new contexts they were forced to adapt to.

Their evaluation of the changes in gender roles varied according to the level of adversity and hardship they faced in their current living conditions. Yet for all of them, a growing sense of agency, strength, and ability to control emerged as main themes that were allowing them to resist the current hardships, keep going despite the psychological consequences of their traumas and make sense of their previous traumatic experiences.

3.5 Contextualizing and Politicizing Trauma Interventions

One possible conclusion of the two studies of the narratives of Syrian and Egyptian trauma survivors (Chapters 5 and 6) was that directing trauma interventions in light of themes identified from survivor narratives may facilitate the meaning-making process concerning traumatic events, contribute to the survivor's sense of resilience, and help them better realize and appreciate their ability to resist. The intervention technique of choice was Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET).

NET is a recent trauma intervention that evolved from Testimony Therapy (Cienfuegos & Monelli, 1983). It combines, on the one hand, an exposure process aiming at reaching habituation, and, on the other hand, a narration process aiming at facilitating the cognitive restructuring of the memories, core meanings, and fundamental assumptions that were shattered by a traumatic event (Neuner, Schauer, & Elbert, 2014; Schauer, Neuner, & Elbert, 2011). NET is recommended and applied specifically in contexts of organized and structured violence, such as political and sexual violence and armed conflict.

However, questions were raised regarding the extent to which NET gives adequate consideration to the political and cultural meanings associated with organized violence, which are embedded in a specific context and influence individuals' reception of and response to trauma (Northwood & Orieny, 2014; Wright, Reisig, & Cullen, 2020). NET is built on the assumption that most of the cognitive restructuring process takes place between intervention sessions in the absence of the therapist. Consequently, the therapist is given a restricted role in the emotional and cognitive restructuring process, as they can only engage with the survivor's insights if those were shared during the sessions (Schauer, Neuner, & Elbert, 2011).

Based on the results of the earlier studies (chapter 5 and 6) and in light of the feminist literature on trauma therapy (Brownmiller, 1993; Koss & Harvey, 1991; Webster & Dunn, 2005), the argument was developed that leading guided therapeutic dialogues around the cultural, political and social foundations of women's traumas, as identified from survivor narratives during therapy sessions, may foster the cognitive restructuring process, and consequently contribute to meaning-making, and ultimately to recovery. The last paper of this thesis (Chapter 7) was designed to address this hypothesis, through a proof-of-concept study.

Overall, the participants positively evaluated the intervention. They indicated that the intervention helped them achieve a higher sense of resilience and self-coherence; reduce feelings of heaviness, shame, and self-blame; and gain more self-awareness and self-

appreciation. Moreover, reinforcing the gendered reading of traumas through the structured therapeutic dialogues during the sessions seems to have contributed to meaning-making and the construction of more positive self-perceptions. Concerning trauma-related symptoms, the intervention showed a positive indication of PTSD remission, but less satisfactory results regarding depression.

Despite being a non-randomized clinical study and the absence of control conditions, the study gives an indication of the possible benefits of integrating the consideration of contextual factors and incorporating a feminist reading of women's traumas and their aftermaths. These benefits were inferred mostly from the survivors' description of the way in which they received the intervention and their belief that the intervention helped them reach a sense of coherence and meaning by placing their traumatic events within their wider socio-cultural and political contexts, thereby finding a sense of continuity between their lives before and after the trauma. The intervention also fostered a sense of self-appreciation through reinforcing the recognition of resistance, not only during the traumatic event but also in everyday small acts, which helped the survivors to challenge, and, in some cases change, the structured conditions that led to their traumas.

Therefore, the intervention, in line with the core assumptions of feminist trauma literature, possibly helped the survivors better realize that the traumatic events they experienced were not random, private or isolated occurrences. Rather, they came to see those traumatic events as systematic abuses that rely on the structure of power associated with gender norms (Griffiths, 2018). As this structure of power is relatively changeable in response to acts of resistance by individuals and communities and along with changes in contextual conditions, the foundations of victimization are taken by the survivors to also be possibly improvable.

However, a main weakness in the intervention was failing to give enough attention to the survivors' current living conditions and their post-trauma hardships (e.g., tough economic conditions, fear of future victimization). This possibly minimized the intervention's effectiveness in treating depressive symptoms and was reflected in the survivors' evaluation of the intervention. This concern has vital importance in the context of persistent threats and structured ongoing traumatic events, where survivors are possibly still at risk of being revictimized.

4. General Reflections on the Results

Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, this research project integrated two major approaches in investigating gender phenomena (a) the person-oriented approach, under which gender is considered in terms of *intrapersonal* constructs and processes such as gender ideologies, individual evaluation of dominant gender norms, and adopted femininities and masculinities (i.e., internalized gendered attributes); and (b) the context-oriented approach, under which gender is viewed through *interpersonal* processes and social structures, such as prototypical femininity and masculinity constructs, the way in which these constructs are organized in a hierarchical structure based on their degree of social desirability, the way in

which they may change in reaction to changes in contextual conditions, and the way in which they may act as social regulatory mechanisms to ensure adherence to gender norms, imposing social sanctions as needed. I believe that the integrating of both approaches serves two purposes. First, this integration helps counterbalance the old tradition in psychology that solely focused on *intrapersonal* structures and processes, with no regard for their context, thereby implicitly blaming women for their disadvantages and pathologizing their psychological responses to sexism and discrimination. Second, this integrative approach sheds light on women's individual struggles to confront structured gender disadvantages and possibly change their founding conditions (Eagly, 2018).

Further, the interaction between internal and external constructs and processes of gender was a main line of interest in this thesis. An example of this interaction was investigating how social, economic, and political changes after the 2011 Arab uprisings may have led to changes in the social constructs of gender, which in turn led to changes in the adopted femininities of the study participants. Meanwhile, traumatic events and their consequences were also examined using the same gender lens, as a product of the interaction between the social structures of gender (e.g., social and political patriarchal forces) and women's adoption and performance of gender roles (e.g., challenging traditional norms of dominant femininity). A more in-depth examination of this interaction was made possible through reading women's narratives via an intersectional lens, in order to investigate how women's social positions contributed to their victimization, their perception of traumatic events, their resistance during a traumatic event, and the psychological consequences thereafter.

The role of the social context in shaping gender phenomena as internal and external structures, on the one hand, and in influencing the interaction between these internal and external structures on the other hand, was central throughout all five studies. Contrary to the traditional binary view of femininity/masculinity, the quantitative data underlined how several co-existing forms of femininities and masculinities can be the product of the same overarching context, possibly in interaction with changes in social and political factors (Chapter 3). The quantitative data also highlighted how responses to women's adoption of specific femininities may differ based on contextual factors (Chapter 4). In the Egyptian context where patriarchy was more intact compared to the Syrian context, sexual violence served as a tool for punishing women who adopt non-traditional femininities.

Moreover, women's narratives concerning their trauma reflected how central the context is, not just in producing the structured forms of violence to which they were subjected, but also in shaping their sense of victimization and resistance, and the consequences of their traumas. This is in line with the key emphasis in feminist psychology on examining women's experiences, including traumas, within their context, while employing a social-cultural lens. This clearly diverts from the acontextual approaches that are still relatively dominant within post-positivist epistemology in psychology (Crawford & Marecek, 1989; Eagly, 2018; Eagly & Riger, 2014).

Negotiating with dominant femininity was another main theme of this thesis. The quantitative results (Chapters 3 and 4) highlighted how, despite initial assumptions that Arab

prototypical femininities would be aligned with the traditional *Good Wife* profile, which conforms to dominating patriarchal gender norms, women within the two contexts were actually negotiating this traditional femininity and possibly producing the opposing, counter-stereotypic profile of the *Assertive Competent Woman*. Adopting this counter-stereotypic femininity, however, comes at a high price, i.e., social sanctions such as sexual violence. The participants were mostly aware of this possible cost, as their narratives pointed out the link between exposure to violence and challenging traditional gender norms (Chapters 5 and 6). Yet, these women kept challenging gender norms and pushing the boundaries of patriarchy further. This has been a major point of inquiry and discussion in feminist scholarship.

It is widely recognized that women's involvement in the labor force has increased remarkably, to various extents in different contemporary societies. This challenged the traditional binary division of labor with women as homemakers and men as breadwinners. However, as Eagly and Wood (2011) emphasized, no equivalent change took place in terms of other related aspects, such as men's significantly lower involvement in domestic work and care duties, and their significantly higher access to power. Moreover, this changed dynamic in the division of labor did not lead to equivalent changes in women's status and their positions in the gender hierarchy. Decision-making, autonomy over one's body, representation in high positions, sexism, and gender-based violence, among other domains, remain clear manifestations of persistent gender inequalities. Protesting such inequalities is an expected outcome, especially with the growing consciousness of how the dominant patriarchal gender system is directly contributing to women's disadvantages (Chapters 5 and 6). With this consciousness, women may evaluate the cost of not challenging the boundaries of traditional femininity to be equivalent to, or higher than, challenging them. This ongoing process in itself, that is protesting and confronting the patriarchal binary gender system, is believed to be contributing to a positive social change (Eagly and Wood, 2011; Morgenroth & Ryan, 2018).

5. Clinical Implications

The results of the intervention study suggested the potential usefulness of directing trauma interventions on the basis of the survivors' readings of their traumas, their responses to trauma, and the context in which trauma occurred. Meanwhile, relying on a feminist reading of women's traumas, through which such traumas are recognized as patterns of structured violence connected to the gender power structure, gears the therapeutic practice toward more socially grounded and culturally relevant interventions. Concretely, this may help survivors place their traumas within their wider socio-political contexts and acknowledge the significance of their resistance. This may ultimately foster the meaning-making process, which is a core determinant of trauma recovery.

The results of the intervention study also suggest that combining both practices, i.e., engaging with women's narratives and leveraging a feminist lens, can contribute to some therapeutic outcomes that go beyond the remission of trauma-related symptoms, helping

survivors better recognize and appreciate their resistance, reinforce their sense of strength and promote their sense of self-appreciation.

On the other hand, a main weakness reflected in the evolution of the trauma intervention was not giving enough consideration to women's current living conditions, which is believed to have contributed to the less satisfactory results concerning the remission of depressive symptoms after the intervention. One main recommendation for future interventions is to dedicate enough time and effort in the therapy sessions to work with the participants through their possible current adversity, to eventually be able to establish strong grounds on which they can handle everyday challenges, while being possibly able to link their past traumas, and their present hardships, to future aspirations.

Finally, this project has followed a person-centered therapy approach. Several feminist and cultural psychology voices have criticized individual approaches in treating trauma, calling for group and community-based interventions, especially in the context of collective violence. These voices emphasized how community-based approaches may help survivors in rebuilding their shattered communal and relational bonds and foster their recovery through engaging in collective meaning-making processes (see Kevers, Rober, & De Haene, 2017). In my view, a collective approach may indeed validate the survivor's emotions concerning her traumas when sharing these emotions with other women who went through similar experiences, while creating a sense of solidarity and support. Further, it may facilitate a sense of belonging to a collective of women, who share similar experiences, which is one of the main foundations for mobilization towards social change.

While I acknowledge the value of such collective approaches in the context of women's traumas, I believe that they might entail some drawbacks in certain contexts. In a context where violence against women is deeply rooted in cultural and social norms and supported by communal acts, collective approaches might risk disregarding or silencing the voices of some individual survivors, especially concerning their own reading of the social values that might have contributed to their victimization.

Consequently, instead of relying on only one of the two approaches, integrating community and person-centered approaches to trauma intervention could be of a great value in the context of narrative therapies to women's trauma. Such an integrative approach would support a sense of solidarity and collective meanings, while offering spaces for survivors to articulate the uniqueness of their suffering and resistance.

6. Limitations

In line with the contextual understanding of gender roles and women's traumas, this thesis did not aim to reach results that would apply to other populations in other contexts. While this project did not follow the traditional understanding of generalization in psychological research, e.g., numerical generalization through representative samples, the intention was to reach a situated, i.e., theoretical, generalization of the results. Through analyzing the internal relations and processes of meaning-making that shape a psychological phenomenon, a

situated generalization aims at contextualizing human experiences to reach a deep and grounded understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Schraube & Højholt, 2019).

Within this perspective, the project aimed at (a) exploring the construction of gender roles; (b) identifying patterns of relationships between gender roles constructs, women's exposure to trauma and trauma consequences; (c) investigating women's narratives regarding their traumas and the consequences thereof; and (d) developing, testing, and evaluating a tailored feminist version of NET.

I believe that the insights gained from the study can be built on for future theoretical exploration and empirical research, and the patterns and meanings that were identified can be further investigated in other settings to gain a deeper understanding of how contextual factors contribute to the psychological variables of interest. However, beyond this elementary point, this thesis has several limitations that may need to be highlighted.

6.1 Lack of Pre-2011 Data

One of the main interests of this thesis was to explore the possible impact of major political and social changes, in this case the 2011-Arab uprisings, on gender roles, women's exposure to trauma, and trauma consequences. The literature review found no comparable studies on femininities and masculinities before 2011 that use relevant conceptual and empirical frameworks. This was a major limitation for the study, being unable to draw solid conclusions about the exact changes that could be attributed to the uprisings.

Alternatively, the thesis relied on retrospective qualitative data from the narratives of interviewed Syrian and Egyptian women concerning women's situation and gender roles prior to 2011, and the possible effects of the uprisings and their aftermaths. Though short of offering a quantified baseline, this data gave an indication of women's perceptions of socio-cultural gender constructs and possible changes thereto, which is a key element of understanding how these gender constructs are formulated and adopted, and how they may function and change.

6.2 Sampling-related Limitations

The different samples of the quantitative studies included in this thesis cannot be considered representative of the Syrian and Egyptian cultures. To counteract this lack of representativeness, taking into consideration the level of complexity and diversity of the two cultures and the vital role of the demographic and cultural factors impacting other study variables, I sought to discuss the results of each study in relation to the main characteristics of the study samples, the potential biases, and the possible consequences thereof. Yet, a more intersectional analysis of the results in light of the participants' diverse social locations, would have further enriched the understanding of the construction of femininities and masculinities, and the identified patterns of correlation with other study variables.

Further, in the two quantitative studies, the number of participants was significantly lower in the Syrian samples compared to the Egyptian samples. This may be presumed to impact the quality of some statistics, but the overall consistency between the results of the two samples gives an indication of the reliability of the results.

In the qualitative and intervention studies, the very small number of participants could also be considered a limitation. Although five is an acceptable number of participants in qualitative studies, this relatively small number restricts the ability to consider other, possibly very important, variables that are related to the characteristics of the participants and their individual experiences. The small number of participants is even more problematic in the intervention study, as it does not allow drawing strong conclusions concerning the exact effectiveness of the intervention.

6.3 Intervention-related Limitations

In addition to the small number of participants, there are other noteworthy limitations concerning the intervention study. As it is a non-randomized trial, that did not have a control condition, judging the effectiveness of the intervention is unattainable. Moreover, without a comparative group of regular NET to which the tailored feminist version of NET can be compared, no precise determination can be made regarding the added value of the tailored version. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that the intervention study was a proof-of-concept that did not aim at determining the effectiveness of the intervention. Rather, the main objective was to test feasibility and investigate reception by the participants. As such, the study succeeded to indicate the possible added value and potential effectiveness of the tailored NET. These indications need to be investigated further through a controlled clinical trial.

7. Direction for Future Research

The first study of this dissertation (Chapter 3), which dealt with the construction of prototypical femininity and masculinity, was conducted on a third sample of French-speaking Europeans. This sample was subsequently excluded from the analysis, due to the fact that the number of men who responded to the questionnaire during the course of the study was insufficient.

Unlike the results of the Egyptian and Syrian samples, the preliminary analysis of data from the French-Speaking sample suggested three factors for femininity and three for masculinity. In addition to two factors of femininity which were in line with the *Good Wife* and *Successful Assertive Competent Woman* profiles identified in the Egyptian and Syrian sample, a third factor emerged with traits that mostly reflect emotional control. For masculinity, also two factors were in line with the *Family Man* and *Macho Man* profiles identified in the Egyptian and Syrian samples, while a third factor reflected a profile of a violent, out-of-control man.

The study could be complemented with more input from French-speaking European men, which may further enrich our understanding of the role of contextual factors in shaping prototypical femininities and masculinities. This complementary study may also serve as an important baseline for a cross-cultural research project that compares different cultural contexts, investigating how the gender hierarchy of multiple forms of femininities and masculinities may differ in relation to the cultural and socio-political features of each context.

In the same vein, a study that investigates how different femininity profiles are related to women's exposure to trauma and trauma consequences in the context of European cultures may also add to our knowledge concerning the relationship between the construction of gender roles and the possible consequences of adopting those gender roles (e.g., sexual violence as a possible form of discipline for women who behave in a non-stereotypical manner).

Within the Syrian and Egyptian contexts, an area for future investigation would be looking through an intersectionality lens into the relationships between the construction of gender profiles, diverse forms of the individual's internalization of such profiles, and the consequences of adopting different forms of femininities and masculinities. In the Syrian context specifically, one important research project could consist of analyzing these relationships in light of the intersections of gender and displacement factors (e.g., Syrians who were displaced in Lebanon, Europe, and internally), along with other related social categories, such as religion, education and class. Such research can further reveal the relationship between the context on the one hand, and the intersections between individuals' multilayered identities on the other.

As emphasized earlier, the intervention study cannot offer evidence on the effectiveness of the tailored version of NET, but only an indication of its value. A future study that replicates the same therapeutic model in a controlled randomized clinical trial would be required to validate the exact value of this feminist version of NET. Finally, as mentioned in the section on clinical implications, adding group techniques to the person-centered NET approach might maximize the value of the intervention and foster trauma recovery. A study to design this modality and test its effectiveness within the Egyptian and Syrian contexts will be on my future research agenda.

8. Concluding Remarks

Psychological research that relies on quantification, experimental design, and highly controlled conditions is still on the rise in most psychology programs in Western countries. As the more dominant tradition in research, these quantitative and experimental research efforts are generally more represented in scientific publications across different subdomains of psychology, and they attract the majority of research funding (B. Cole, 2009; Eagly, Eaton, Rose, Riger, & MuHugh, 2012).

Meanwhile, since the rise of the second wave feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s, feminist psychology scholars have been criticizing the conventional line of research in psychology for misrepresenting women's experiences (Eagly, Eaton, Rose, Riger &

MuHugh, 2012), and for supporting the established binary gender systems and the gender hierarchy (e.g., the feminist criticism of the gender/sex differences line of research) (Hyde, 2005). Feminist scholars have since been problematizing mainstream traditions of psychological research, questioning their epistemological and theoretical foundations and urging psychology researchers to question and revise the politics of the discipline, while proposing new epistemological and methodological approaches to investigate diverse psychological phenomena (Crawford & Marecek, 1989, Eagly & Riger, 2014; Riger, 1992).

A major discussion within the scholarship of feminist psychology is concerned with the values embedded in psychology research and practice. Disputing the traditional positivist empiricist claim to objectivity, Crawford & Marecek (1989) stressed that a value-free knowledge or practice is a myth, as we (researchers and practitioners) are always engaging with our inquiries from our very specific social, political, and intellectual positions, including our ideologies and our pre-assumptions about the subject of study. Further, they postulated that claiming objectivity in social science research is a political tool in and of itself, as it "legitimize[s] the expertise of social scientists and thus to buttress their power position in society" (p. 158). As such, the accounts produced by psychological research can be promoted as "scientific facts," instead of being understood as historical products that were constructed under particular interests and possible biases (Morawski, 1985). Opposing the claims to "factual" psychological knowledge, feminist scholars call for considering the context in which research is produced and critically analyzing the features and power politics of this context, while continuously engaging in reflexive practices that allow the researcher to recognize, acknowledge, and dismantle her/his own biases (Morawski, 1985; 2005).

Along with questions of objectivity comes the discussion regarding the social and ethical responsibility of psychology. Feminist psychology scholarship does not call for detaching psychological knowledge from social, moral, or political values, but rather to continuously question, and reflect on, the types of values that direct our research, and to change them, if needed, into values that promote justice and equality, rather than supporting hegemonic societal values which reinforce patriarchy and discrimination (Crawford & Marecek, 1989; Eagly & Riger, 2014; Morawski, 1985; Rutherford, 2018).

Recognizing and attempting to counter the dominant cultural and political biases in psychological research, through giving prominence to paradigms beyond the mainstream, may be the way to produce knowledge that is more grounded morally, socially, and culturally, in order to better engage with, represent, and defend the more vulnerable individuals and communities. Consequently, psychology may come to carry more social responsibility towards changing the root causes and conditions of discrimination and injustice.

Along these lines, Cho and Trent (2006) proposed the concept of "transformational validity" as an additional form of validity which qualitative research can seek to attain, along with "transactional" validity, which aims at representing the research participants' real viewpoints on social realities and psychological processes. They defined transformational validity as "a progressive, emancipatory process leading toward social change that is to be achieved by the research endeavor itself" (pp. 321–322). Koelsch (2013) relates

transformational validity to the notion of "pragmatic validity" (Kvale, 1995), which means judging the degree of validity of an interpretation based on the utility of this interpretation to participants, and especially the extent to which our interpretation may be motivating participants to act upon social injustice. In this sense, Koelsch argues that "[v]alid research will change rather than mirror truth" (2013, p. 169).

In this perspective, we do not see research participants as mere subjects we rely on in order to understand a specific psychological phenomenon, but also as actors who can mobilize to change unfair social realities. Hence, politicizing participant accounts and perceptions of structured violence, discrimination, and inequities can be seen as a valid purpose of psychological research.

Placing myself within the feminist psychology scholarship, I relied in this project on a political contextual understanding of women's experiences of gender-based violence on the one hand, and on women's responses to this violence, including victimization and resistance, on the other. Within the trauma intervention study, women's readings of their experiences of violence were politicized through therapeutic dialogues, encouraging participants to locate these experiences within the sociopolitical and cultural context, recognize their traumas as structured patterns of violence, and acknowledge and appreciate their resistance to this structured violence and its founding conditions. Although I believe that this political reading has facilitated meaning-making and fostered a more positive self-perception among participants, I realize that the study ended with several open questions that need further investigation: What are the social and psychological long-term advantages and costs of politicizing women's perception of their experiences of violence? How may this perception help women better deal with ongoing adversity and enduring threatening environments? What does mobilization mean in a context like Egypt and Syria, where political and social activism involves extreme risks and can be immensely costly, the cost including the possibility of exposure to new traumas? What are the ethical responsibilities associated with the potential mobilization of women trauma survivors in such risky contexts? These questions, among others discussed earlier, are to be investigated in future projects.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Item Factor Loading of the Two Factors of Femininity (Structure Matrix)

First Factor Femininity			Second Factor Femininity		
	EGY	SYR		EGY	SYR
Ambitious	.800	.762	Respectful	.769	.578
Open to new experiences	.796	.779	Polite	.749	.722
Self- assured	.791	.758	Has good reputation	.715	.556
has strong personality	.778	.830	Conservative	.691	.597
Open-minded	.773	.740	Religious	.690	.473
Cultivated	.768	.811	Tender/Soft	.669	.407
Independent	.736	.749	Dresses modestly	.668	.572
Seasoned	.730	.733	Efficient with household chores	.667	.577
Courageous	.730	.784	Obedient	.665	.567
Proud	.718	.580	Loves children	.664	.526
Smart	.717	.718	Maternal, paternal	.661	.639
Fair	.712	.729	Sacrificer	.656	.639
Creative	.705	.742	Kind	.644	.593
Hard-working	.699	.619	Faithful for partner	.643	.663
Noble	.692	.701	Satisfied/content	.631	.507
Can protect others	.667	.677	Economical	.631	.576
Adventurer	.662	.626	Endure suffering	.626	.357
Decisive	.657	.653	Shy	.617	.600
Capable of expressing her feeling	.640	.651	Fertile	.608	.418
Socially intelligent	.613	.515	Attentive to people's needs	.592	.421
Generous	.608	.713	Conforms to social traditions	.588	
Submissive	-.605	-.666	Has previous sexual experiences	-.585	
Rational	.590	.715	Patient	.579	.569
Understanding	.578	.485	Family-oriented	.579	.540
Able of facing challenges	.565	.719	Romantic	.570	.425
Funny	.560	.447	Skinny	.565	
Sociable	.555	.436	Organized	.559	.501
Interested in politics	.552	.577	Empathetic	.556	.621
Charming	.549	.488	Uses obscenities	-.555	-.444
Curious	.546	.718	Caring and supportive	.550	.494
Wise	.531	.613	Pretty	.542	.555
Responsible	.512	.594	Emotional	.524	.526
Sportive	.511	.448	Energetic	.522	.483
Career-oriented	.509	.529	Rebellious	-.521	
Strong	.504	.559	Coquette	.519	.405
Virile	.496		Cuddly	.497	.510
Express her sexual desire	.495	.474	Composed	.494	.603
Lough loudly	.492		Good listener	.485	
Reassuring	.473	.436	Violent	.471	-.361
Well-built	.471	.543	Smiling	.463	
Honest	.465	.553	Lough loudly	-.459	
popular	.463	.354	Trustworthy	.458	
Stingy	-.447	-.422	Impulsive	-.448	-.425
Rebellious		.500	Helpful	.442	
Conforms to social traditions		-.525	Sexy	.404	.365
Good listener		.434	Elegant	.400	
Has previous sexual experiences		.487			
Helpful		.457			
Smiling		.462			
Trustworthy		.592			

Note. EGY, Egyptian; SYR, Syrian; F, Femininity; M, Masculinity.

Item Factor Loading of the fourFactors of Masculinity (Structure Matrix)

M First Factor			M Second Factor			M Third Factor			M Fourth Factor		
	EGY	SRY		EGY	SRY		EGY	SYR		EGY	SYR
Able of facing challenges	.864	.708	Strong	.738	.607	Rebellious	.651	.631	Tender/Soft	.649	.563
Generous	.741	.703	Dominating	.710	.443	Polite	-.620		Romantic	.648	.668
Noble	.732	.649	Well-built	.704	.509	Uses obscenities	.594		Emotional	.630	.615
Trustworthy	.712	.728	Well-off	.665	.593	Has previous sexual experiences	.581	.520	Smiling	.605	.643
Hard-working	.702	.538	Jealous	.649	.568	Dresses modestly	-.558		Skinny	.605	.685
Courageous	.687	.698	Tall	.613	.504	Impulsive	.523	.553	Good listener	.596	
Fair	.68	.680	Has a stable career	.590	.459	Religious	-.510		Kind	.596	.560
Reassuring	.676	.617	Fertile	.576	.401	Has good reputation	-.504		Shy	.578	
Ambitious	.658	.587	Violent	.551		Express his sexual desire	.424	.557	Obedient	.577	.525
Self- assured	.656	.385	Career oriented	.548	.485	Laugh loudly	.416	.404	Empathetic	.550	.575
Caring and supportive	.639	.677	Conservative	.504	.61	Adventurer	.410	.389	Efficient with household chores	.545	.621
Energetic	.638	.698	Has a bad temper	.486	.496	Stubborn		.444	Organized	.543	
Attentive to people needs	.630	.557	Conforms to traditions	.485	.54	Violent		.574	Cuddly	.534	.631
Responsible	.629	.643	Stubborn	.459					Capable of expressing his feeling	.522	.384
Can protect others	.623	.555	Virile	.410	.346				Pretty	.519	.717
Patient	.608	.596	Handy	.404					Sacrifice	.511	.522
Open to new experiences	.603	.583	Religious		.472				Coquette	.506	.515
Understanding	.602	.594							Economical	.496	
Socially intelligent	.600	.618							Cares about fashion	.430	.535
Rational	.589								Sexy	.415	.602
Has strong personality	.579	.704							Elegant	.392	.644
Creative	.577	.529							Faithful for the partner		.551
Maternal/paternal	.577	.597							Loves children		.563
Open-minded	.576	.516							popular		.446
Respectful	.569	.725							Uses obscenities		-.466
Composed	.513	.595									
Seasoned	.503	.634									
Funny	.501	.347									
Endure suffering	.499										
Popular	.493										

M First Factor			M Second Factor		M Third Factor		M Fourth Factor	
	EGY	SRY	EGY	SRY	EGY	SYR	EGY	SYR
Stingy	-.47							
Decisive	.461	.442						
Family-oriented	.455	.413						
Loves children	.431							
Independent	.404	.387						
Cultivated		.558						
Curious		.450						
Economical		.542						
Good listener		.536						
Has good reputation		.478						
Honest		.525						
Organized		.635						
Polite		.611						

Note. EGY, Egyptian; SYR, Syrian; F, Femininity; M, Masculinity

Appendix B

Adopted Femininity Prototypes Scale

The questionnaire instructions are" Below is a list of characteristics which may be used to describe men or women in your society. Please indicate the extent to which these characteristics apply to you in your opinion (Fully, Very much, Moderately, A little, Not at all)."

	Fully (5)	Very much (4)	Moderately (3)	A little (2)	Not at all (1)
1. Tall					
2. Strong					
3. Elegant					
4. Sexy					
5. Slender					
6. Tender					
7. Pretty					
8. Dominating					
9. Shy					
10. Can protect others					
11. Adventurer					
12. Ambitious					
13. Kind-hearted					
14. Handy					
15. Cares about fashion					
16. Courageous					
17. Emotional					
18. Obedient					
19. Decisive					
20. Self-assured					
21 Interested in politics					
22. Loves children					
23. Gives priority to family					
24. Efficient with household chores					
25. Gives priority to work					
26. Organized					
27. Has strong personality					
28. Polite					
29. Romantic					
30. Dresses modestly					
31. Frugal					
32. Has good reputation					
33. Seasoned					
34. Open-minded					
35. Capable of facing challenges					
36. Well-off					
37. Noble					
38. Independent					
39. Has a stable career					

40. Has previous sexual experience Has previous sexual experience					
41. Empathetic					
42. Generous					
43. Uses dirty words					
44. Submissive					
45. Capable of expressing his/her feelings					
46. Smiling/ Jolly					
47. Altruistic					
48. Understanding					
49. Charismatic					
50. Resilient					
51. Funny					
52. Athletic					
53. Maternal					

Appendix C

Characteristics of each Femininity Profile

Assertive Competent Women	Good Wife
Strong	Elegant
Can protect others	Sexy
Adventurer	Gentle
Ambitious	Pretty
Courageous	Shy
Decisive	Kind-hearted
Self- assured	Emotional
Interested in politics	Obedient
Gives priority to work	Loves children
Has strong personality	Family orientated
Seasoned	Efficient with household chores
Open-minded	Organized
Capable of facing challenges	Polite
Noble	Romantic
Independent	Dresses modestly
Generous	Frugal
Submissive (R)	Has good reputation
Capable of expressing her feelings	Has previous sexual experience (R)
Understanding	Empathetic
Charming	Uses obscenities (R)
Funny	Altruistic
Athletic	Endure suffering
	Maternal, paternal

Appendix D

Sexual Violence Questionnaire

All your responses to this questionnaire will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Only the researcher will have access to them. You are not required to provide any personal details which would reveal your identity, unless you wish to be contacted to receive psychological support or consultation; or for other research-related purposes.

Below is a questionnaire for assessing sexual harassment/assault incidents which you may have experienced as an adult (above 16 years of age). There are several possible offenders and situations (types). Therefore, you will find each situation repeated several times to reflect different possible offenders, including:

- A stranger
- A person in a position of power (such as a boss, university professor, police officer, or any other kind of power relations)
- A colleague or a friend
- A family member
- A group of people
- A romantic partner (Present or former husband, fiancée, or romantic partner)

For each statement, please indicate how often you may have been exposed to the specific type of harassment/assault, by checking one of the following three options:

- (1) Never
- (2) Once - Twice
- (3) Several Times

At the end, you can add other types of sexual harassment/assault you may have experienced which are not included in this questionnaire. Please identify the offender and how often you may have been exposed to that specific type of harassment/assault.

(1) Someone used offensive/sexual language in my presence in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.

	Never	Once - twice	Several times
A stranger used offensive/sexual language in my presence in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			
Someone in a position of power used offensive/sexual language in my presence in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			
A colleague or a friend used offensive/sexual language in my presence in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			
A family member used offensive/sexual language in my presence in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			
A group of people used offensive/sexual language in my presence in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			
My romantic partner (present or former) used offensive/sexual language in my presence in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			

(2) Someone made sexually explicit gestures in my presence in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.

	Never	Once - twice	Several times
A stranger made sexually explicit gestures in my presence in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			
Someone in a position of power made sexually explicit gestures in my presence in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			
A colleague or a friend made sexually explicit gestures in my presence in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			
A family member made sexually explicit gestures in my presence in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			
A group of people made sexually explicit gestures in my presence in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			
My romantic partner (present or former) made sexually explicit gestures in my presence in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			

(3) Someone followed me in the street (or other public place) in a way which made me feel a threat of a sexual nature.

	Never	Once - twice	Several times
A stranger followed me in the street (or other public place) in a way which made me feel a threat of a sexual nature.			
Someone in a position of power followed me in the street (or other public place) in a way which made me feel a threat of a sexual nature.			
A colleague or a friend followed me in the street (or other public place) in a way which made me feel a threat of a sexual nature.			
A family member followed me in the street (or other public place) in a way which made me feel a threat of a sexual nature.			
A group of people followed me in the street (or other public place) in a way which made me feel a threat of a sexual nature.			
My romantic partner (present or former) followed me in the street (or other public place) in a way which made me feel a threat of a sexual nature.			

(4) Someone stared at my sexual body parts in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.

	Never	Once - twice	Several times
A stranger stared at my sexual body parts in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			
Someone in a position of power stared at my sexual body parts in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			
A colleague or a friend stared at my sexual body parts in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			
A family member stared at my sexual body parts in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			
A group of people stared at my sexual body parts in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			
My romantic partner (present or former) stared at my sexual body parts in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			

(5) Someone touched or grabbed my sexual body parts against my will.

	Never	Once - twice	Several times
A stranger touched or grabbed my sexual body parts against my will.			
Someone in a position of power touched or grabbed my sexual body parts against my will.			
A colleague or a friend touched or grabbed my sexual body parts against my will.			
A family member touched or grabbed my sexual body parts against my will.			
A group of people touched or grabbed my sexual body parts against my will.			
My romantic partner (present or former) touched or grabbed my sexual body parts against my will.			

(6) Someone exposed his sexual body parts to me against my will.

	Never	Once - twice	Several times
A stranger exposed his sexual body parts to me against my will.			
Someone in a position of power exposed his sexual body parts to me against my will.			
A colleague or a friend exposed his sexual body parts to me against my will.			
A family member exposed his sexual body parts to me against my will.			
A group of people exposed his sexual body parts to me against my will.			
My romantic partner (present or former) exposed his sexual body parts to me against my will.			

(7) Someone tried to force me into sex without my consent (using violence or threats of violence).

	Never	Once - twice	Several times
A stranger tried to force me into sex without my consent (using violence, or threats).			
Someone in a position of power tried to force me into sex without my consent (using violence, or threats).			
A colleague or a friend tried to force me into sex without my consent (using violence, or threats).			
A family member tried to force me into sex without my consent (using violence, or threats).			
A group of people tried to force me into sex without my consent (using violence, or threats).			
My romantic partner (present or former) tried to force me into sex without my consent (using violence, or threats).			

(8) Someone forced me into having sex without my consent (using violence, or threats of violence).

	Never	Once - twice	Several times
A stranger forced me into having sex without my consent (using violence, or threats).			
Someone in a position of power forced me into having sex without my consent (using violence, or threats).			
A colleague or a friend forced me into having sex without my consent (using violence, or threats).			
A family member forced me into having sex without my consent (using violence, or threats).			
A group of people forced me into having sex without my consent (using violence, or threats).			
My romantic partner (present or former) forced me into having sex without my consent (using violence, or threats).			

(9) Someone used threats or blackmail to have sexual contact with me.

	Never	Once - twice	Several times
A stranger used threats or blackmail to have sexual contact with me.			
Someone in a position of power used threats or blackmail to have sexual contact with me.			
A colleague or a friend used threats or blackmail to have sexual contact with me.			
A family member used threats or blackmail to have sexual contact with me.			
A group of people used threats or blackmail to have sexual contact with me.			
My romantic partner (present or former) used threats or blackmail to have sexual contact with me.			

(10) Someone sent me sexually-explicit content via mobile phone, email, or social media in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.

	Never	Once - twice	Several times
A stranger sent me sexually-explicit content via mobile phone, email, or social media in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			
Someone in a position of power sent me sexually-explicit content via mobile phone, email, or social media in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			
A colleague or a friend sent me sexually-explicit content via mobile phone, email, or social media in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			
A family member sent me sexually-explicit content via mobile phone, email, or social media in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			

A group of people sent me sexually-explicit content via mobile phone, email, or social media in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			
My romantic partner (present or former) sent me sexually-explicit content via mobile phone, email, or social media in a way which made me feel uncomfortable.			

(11) Someone took photos/video shots of me against my will/without my permission focusing on my sexual body parts.

	Never	Once - twice	Several times
A stranger took photos/video shots of me against my will/without my permission focusing on my sexual body parts.			
Someone in a position of power took photos/video shots of me against my will/without my permission focusing on my sexual body parts.			
A colleague or a friend took photos/video shots of me against my will/without my permission focusing on my sexual body parts.			
A family member took photos/video shots of me against my will/without my permission focusing on my sexual body parts.			
A group of people took photos/video shots of me against my will/without my permission focusing on my sexual body parts.			
My romantic partner (present or former) took photos/video shots of me against my will/without my permission focusing on my sexual body parts.			

(12) Someone posted intimate photos or videos of me on Facebook (or other social media) against my will/without my permission.

	Never	Once - twice	Several times
A stranger posted intimate photos or videos of me on Facebook (or other social media) against my will/without my permission.			
Someone in a position of power posted intimate photos or videos of me on Facebook (or other social media) against my will/without my permission.			
A colleague or a friend posted intimate photos or videos of me on Facebook (or other social media) against my will/without my permission.			
A family member posted intimate photos or videos of me on Facebook (or other social media) against my will/without my permission.			
A group of people posted intimate photos or videos of me on Facebook (or other social media) against my will/without my permission.			
My romantic partner (present or former) posted intimate photos or videos of me on Facebook (or other social media) against my will/without my permission.			

Please indicate any other types of sexual harassment/assault you may have experienced which are not included in the questions above. Please identify the offender and how often you may have been exposed to that specific type of harassment/assault.

Appendix E

Interview Schedule used with Egyptian Women's Trauma Survivors

1	**Background Information**
	Age, education, social status, current occupation
	If she works: Can you describe your job?
	How do you describe your socio-economic status?
	How do you describe your household situation?
	Can you tell me a little about your family?
2	**Coping with Stress/adversity**
	Can you tell me what you normally do to feel better when you feel down or stressed?
	How do you normally cope when you face difficult situations?
3	**Gender roles & Adopted Notions of Femininity**
	How can you describe the prototypical femininity (woman) /masculinity (man) according to the mainstream cultural norms?
	In your opinion, what are the main stereotypical desirable (undesirable) qualities women/ men should acquire according to the mainstream cultural norms?
	How do you feel/think about these prototypical expectations of men and women in society?
	To what extent you see yourself able to meet what society expects from you as a woman? Can you tell me why you think that?
	To what extent you are happy/satisfied with what society expects from you as a woman? Can you tell me why you feel that?
	Do you think the prototypical images about men and women's social roles changed in recent years?
	If yes:
	Can you tell me how they changed?
	In your opinion, why these changes happened?
	Can you tell me how do you feel about these changes?
	Do you think there are any recent changes that happened in your social role as a woman?
	If yes:
	Can you describe these changes?
	In your opinion, why do you think these changes happened?
	How do you feel about these changes?
4	**History of Sexual Violence**
	Can you tell me about the most memorable/significant experiences of sexual violence that happened to you after the age of 16? (When, where, who was the preparator, context)
	Can you describe how did you react to (each experience)?
	Can you tell me how did you feel directly after (each) experience?
	Can you tell me what were the main thoughts you had after (each) experience|?

	Can you describe how do you feel (think) now about (each) experience?
	Do you think this experience(s) changed the way you see yourself?
	If yes:
	Can you describe how? In which sense? Why?
	Do you believe these experiences still have an impact on you/ on your life?
	If yes:
	How you describe this impact?
	If no:
	How did you overcome the experience (s)?
5	**Other Traumatic Events**
	Are there other memorable difficult/traumatic events (i.e., these unexpected threatening events that might cause significant psychological impact) that you experienced?
	If yes:
	Same previous sets of questions
6	**Traumatic Experiences associated with 2011-revolution**
	Are there any memorable/significant traumatic events you experienced in relation to the 2011-revolution?
	If yes:
	Same previous set of questions
7	**Other Trauma-related Psychological Outcomes**
	Are there any other significant distressing psychological symptoms you have (heavy emotions, annoying thoughts, trouble in sleeping/appetite…) that can be related to these difficult experiences?
	If yes:
	How can you describe these emotions/ thoughts/ symptoms?
	Can you tell me how you handle these symptoms usually?
	What do you usually do to feel better?
8	**Sense of Agency**
	Can you tell me to what extent you feel you are in control over your life?
	What are the areas of life in which you feel you have control? What are the areas that you feel you are not able to control?
	Can you tell me when do you feel you are strong?
	Can describe a specific situation during which you felt strong?
	Can describe a specific situation during which you did not feel strong/able to control?
9	**Meaning-making**
	During these difficult situations what made you able to keep going?
	How do you make sense of these difficult experiences now?
10	**Is there anything else you want to mention/talk about?**