Negotiating Identity in the Kingdom

A Conversation with Five Young Saudi Arabian Women about Identity Development and Expression

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Abstract

“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,” Simone de Beauvoir once famously said presenting the hypothesis that the idea of a woman, the female identity, is constructed as a reflection of its context. The purpose of this paper is to discover one aspect of this construction by exploring the identity development and expression of five young women, in the context of Saudi Arabia, to theorize about how they construct their ego identity and sense of self in the context in which they exist.

Though in-depth conversations it is established how the women view themselves and their expression. This material is then reflected upon through the prism of defining identity and the identity status’ as explored by Eric Erikson and James Marcia as to create a further understanding of the women’s creation of self.

The conclusion is that young women in Saudi Arabia construct their identity through negotiation. Faced with blurred lines of personal, religious and national identity, negotiation is unavoidable in the complex structure in which the women’s expression and development takes place.

Key words: Saudi Arabia, Identity Development, Negotiating Expression, Women
Abbreviations and glossary

**Abaya**: Robe like garment worn by women to cover the whole body except the face, feet, and hands. In Saudi Arabia it is traditionally black.

**EIPQ**: Ego Identity Process Questionnaire

**Hijab**: A veil worn by women to cover the head and chest. In Saudi Arabia it is traditionally black.

**Ma'assalama**: Goodbye (literally: May safety be with you)

**Niqab**: Veil or cloth worn by women to cover the face. In Saudi Arabia it is traditionally black.

**Thobe**: Similar to a robe, a thobe is an ankle-length garment worn by men. In Saudi Arabia it is traditionally white and have long sleeves.

**Umma**: Arabic word meaning nation referring to the supra-national collective community of Muslims.
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1. Introduction

1.1. Foreword

One of the most fascinating moments of my life occurred twenty minutes before I, for the first time, arrived at King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The captain called out that we were about to land and within two minutes every woman on the plane was going through bags and purses and produced a hijab, niqab and abaya before returning to their seats. There I was, left uncovered, trying my best to cover my hair with an orange shawl I once bought in Egypt. The woman sitting beside me, previously dressed in jeans and a smart jacket, looked at me and I could see her smiling under her now black veil. “Ma’assalama,” she said after we had landed and headed our separate ways.

My first trip to Saudi Arabia was a step in the direction to deepen my understanding of international relations and politics. For each time I returned my fascination of the great Kingdom grew. So much lurked beneath the surface, in the hidden sand dunes and under the abaya. The contrasts within the country reaching far beyond just the difference between the black abaya and white thobe—the female and the male.

This interest, for the underground Kingdom and its contrasts, lead me to conduct this study. An interest for the discrepancy that seemed to exist between the private and the public, between words spoken and actions committed, between the individual and the collective.

During my time in Saudi Arabia a scandalous news story broke, young women had been sending photos of body parts via the messenger function on the BlackBerry and using anonymous Facebook accounts to post photos of body parts, feet, hands or simply close ups of skin-patches, online—all without showing their faces. Perhaps not so daring according to Western standards, where sunbathing pictures tend to trend during the summer months, but labeled as “a woman’s desire to liberate herself from social restriction and express herself,” (Al-Fawaz, 2012) by the female reporter who broke the story in the authoritarian
Islamic state where women in the public space at all times are covered by a religious veil and the code of gender segregation, which states that non-kin men and women should be kept separated, is strictly enforced.

Within its context, a scandal indeed, and a crack in the collectively upheld façade that lead me onto the idea of exploring identity and identity expression. An idea that shapes the overarching question of this study: is the previously mentioned discrepancy also evident within the individual? If so, why, and what might this then be an indicator of? The action itself is, of course, also important to see in the light of the female objectification and the reflections by Simone de Beauvoir (1989) on how gender identity is constructed by the discourses and structures that surround us.

1.2. Statement of Purpose

The many depths of this research mean that the subject is approached with a dynamic mind-set combining a social-constructionist idea with feminist theory, identity theory and social-interaction theory. The purpose of this paper is to present a perspective on how a handful of young Saudi Arabian women construct their identity and view their identity expression as to attempt to provide a forum for these women to express themselves freely and provide a non-western cultural context through which the concept of identity can be explored. This seems particularly important in our contemporary society where identity and cultural belonging is politicized, where free expression in many cases is limited and where the individual action of developing and expressing a unique identity is constrained by social structures.

This research is centered on the epistemology of valuing constructivism and based on the fundamental belief that the concept of identity is a continuous, dynamic process. This means that the relationship between the individual and society was central to the research-process. Individual cultural constructions, such as identity, are not created in a vacuum within the self but also shaped by outer, collective, conditions and the individual identity and expression is sometimes compromised in favor of the collective identity and expression. This is especially interesting in the authoritarian context that Saudi Arabia offers.
The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded by Abdul-Aziz bin Saud in 1932 and is an Islamic absolute monarchy. The country borders on being totalitarian and has several times been accused of attempting to control its population and has for a long period of time among been criticized for religious discrimination, for ignoring human rights and for upholding a social structure in which migrant workers and women are disadvantaged. The hypothesis of this paper is that the complex and unique social structure in which young Saudi Arabian women grow up and live in affect how they develop and express their identities.

By conducting an analysis of the young women’s experiences’, as revealed during interviews, and viewing the findings in the light of the theories on ego identity and identity development by Erik Erikson (1968) and James Marcia (1966, 1967) this paper aims to answer the following research question:

- How do these young Saudi Arabian women construct their ego identity and sense of self in the context in which they exist?

To theorize about this it is first established how five young Saudi Arabian women view themselves and their identity expression, as articulated during lengthy conversations. This material is then reflected upon through the prism of defining identity status as explored by Erikson and Marcia as to create a further understanding of how the self and the identity has been created.

1.3. Limitations

The limitations surrounding this research are vast and are mostly connected to the constraints that exist whilst conducting research in a society such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Among other things a strict separation policy, that forbids non-kin men and women to associate, is enforced throughout the country. This means that the selection of subjects is limited to women. It would be interesting to include young men within the perimeters of study, but conducting interviews would be difficult due to the aforementioned policy. The focus on youth is based on their importance in shaping the future of the country. As Mai Yaman write in her work “Changed Identities: The Challenge of the New Generation in Saudi Arabia” (2000, p. xx), “the centrality of 15–30-year olds to the future of Saudi Arabia is hard to underestimate; their numbers alone make them the crucial
political constituency of the next ten years.” Other context specific and practical limitations included how to find subjects and where to conduct interviews. Since the topic at hand might be considered sensitive subjects were not advertised for but found through informal channels.

Besides the contextual limitations that arise due to the fact that the case study took place in Saudi Arabia other limitations include how core concepts are interpreted and reflected upon. This includes limitations in relation to which theories the empirical data collected have been reflected through. The focus of this paper is identity development and expression in Saudi Arabia, which mean that there are still numerous identity related issues that would be interesting to focus on that are excluded based on the perimeters of this study. This includes a more in-depth study of the actual forms of expression that the young women talk about. A part of this study presented as a brief separate paper focus solely on how the young women viewed freedom of expression within their context. The findings: All of the young women were adamant when arguing that anything can be expressed on Twitter, except, of course, the things that cannot be expressed, like critique of the royal family or the prophet. It would also be interesting to in another study further investigate this online expression and the creation of the self as an online persona.

In conclusion in regards to limitation it is important to note that the findings of this paper talks about the specific context of Saudi Arabia and not an overarching Muslim context and that I, due to the very limited nature of this study, would like to emphasize that no claims of absolute causality is made with regard to this research. I also want to acknowledge my own adherence to Bhaktin’s presumption of unfinalizability—the impossibility of arriving at final conclusions (Bhaktin, 1984). This study and paper should not be seen as an attempt to explain Saudi Arabian identity but rather as an attempt to explore one perspective upon it.

1.4. Previous Research

One of the most researched areas in regards to identity development is Erikson’s (1963) concept of the ego identity as well as Marcia’s (1964) methods for assessing it, two perspectives which are both present within this paper.
Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson has served as an authority on the subject of identity since the early 1960’s and presents several ideas that are important to create a framework of understanding for the data collected. According to Erikson, identity equals ego identity—“a feeling of being at home in one’s body, a sense of ‘knowing where one is going’, and an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count” (Erikson, 1968, p. 165). Erikson argues that individuals construct identity as interplay between individual biology, psychology and social recognition and response. For this to develop optimally and become complete each individual, during a life span, needs to go through different development stages through which the ego can, among other things, undergo an identity-formation process and “synthesize and integrate important earlier identifications into a new form,” (Kroger, 2005, p. 207). This new form is what constitutes an individual’s ego identity. The notion of ego identity is important to view through Erikson’s perspective upon the psychosocial moratorium, a moment during the identity development in which young individuals are allowed to freely experiment with different adult roles to find the one that suits them better. As well as his ideas concerning identity crisis, a time when the individual reaches a critical turning point in life and when decisions, that drives development further and pushes her in a new directional course, are made.

In an attempt to provide a more extensive understanding of the research conducted by Erikson several theorists have approached the idea of the ego identity by attempting to further explain it and the relationship between two variables—exploration and commitment. Focusing on the idea that a subject’s sense of identity is mostly determined based on commitments and choices regarding the individual’s persona the developmental psychologist James Marcia (1966, 1967) questioned the sole notion of identity crisis and argued that identity achievement depends on both identity crisis and commitment. Marcia, unlike Erikson, believed that a subject developed an identity by exploring and then committing to certain attributes within a persona. According to his definition, crisis is the period when old values are being questioned and examined. The outcome of this then lead to a commitment made to a certain value or role: “Crisis refers to the adolescent’s period of engagement in choosing among meaningful alternatives; commitment refers to the degree of personal investment the individual exhibits” (Marcia, 1966, p. 551). To understand this psychological
identity development Marcia then developed the identity-status model that identifies four categories through which individuals in their late adolescence approach identity-defining roles and values. The idea being that a well-developed identity indicates a strong sense of self whereas a less well-developed identity indicates a less articulated sense of self. These four categories are based on the argument that an individual’s identity formation and structure is related to which extent the individual has managed to achieve their identity within certain areas or domains. This achievement is then measured by studying the level of commitment to and exploration of an identity.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>No Commitment:</th>
<th>Exploration:</th>
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<tr>
<td>No exploration:</td>
<td>Moratorium</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identity Diffusion</td>
<td>Commitment:</td>
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<td>Foreclosure</td>
<td>Identity Achieved</td>
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If an individual have explored and then committed to an identity s/he is categorized as Identity Achieved, if s/he as committed to an identity without exploration s/he falls under the category of Foreclosure. If s/he has not committed to an identity and has not explored identities s/he is categorized within Identity Diffusion and if s/he has undertaken the exploration but not committed to an identity she falls under the category called Moratorium (Marcia, 1966).

However, both Erikson’s and Marcia’s theories have been critiqued by more contemporary researchers who argue that Marcia’s identity-status approach fails to include all the dimensions of Erikson’s ego identity (Kroger, 2005, p. 209) and that “the identity statuses are ‘not sensitive enough’ to measure the identity formation process” (ibid. p. 215). Although several other theories regarding identity development and expression have been developed since Erikson and Marcia presented theirs, the theories as explored by them were chosen based on their humanism and openness.

Even though a lot of research exists concerning the topic of identity research focusing on the topic of identity in relation to the Middle East and Saudi Arabia in particular is scarce. Nonetheless, certain studies that bear relevance to this research and which can provide additional variables for analysis can be found.
In the article “Gender, Monarchy, and National Identity in Saudi Arabia” Eleanore A. Doumato reflect upon ideas concerning gender ideology and identity in Saudi Arabia. In the article she focuses on the failed campaign during which Saudi Arabian women tried to gain the privilege to drive within Riyadh during the driving demonstration on November 6th in 1990. In it she, among other things, reflects upon the image of the ideal Islamic woman. The ideal woman, according to Doumato, is within Saudi Arabian tradition a symbol that defines the Kingdom’s national identity: “The idealized woman is a wife and a mother. Her place is within the family, ‘the basic unit of society’, and men are her protectors. Women who remain at home are the educators of children and the reproducers of traditional values” (Doumato, 1992, p. 33). Doumato then reasons that the Saudi Arabian woman is constructed as an Islamic ideal as to underpin what she calls the myth of the national identity and the monarchy itself. This myth, of the Saudi Arabian national identity, is according to her, based on the idea of the existence of a patriarchal, tribal family “fused by religion, in which membership is in fact a coveted privilege bestowed by birthright” (Doumato, 1992, p. 41). The image of the ideal woman then perpetuates the image of a homogeneous Islamic community, which in turn leads to the patriarchal family being sustained. Because of this, the ideology that surrounds the ideal Islamic woman is “reiterated in royal edicts, policy statements and official regulations” (Doumato, 1992, p. 34) or as she expresses it, “social conventions and religiously based attitudes (...) [that] have been incorporated into public policy” (ibid.).

Doumato also argues that women, in the case of Saudi Arabia, are controlled only because they can be. Trying to impose the same control on men would hinder the development of the national, or the collective identity, since potential resistance or non-adherence could “shatter the illusion of nationhood fused by a common vision of Islamic community” (Doumato, 1992, p. 44).

In agreement with Doumato, Joseph Nevo in the article “Religion and National Identity in Saudi Arabia” (1998) writes that the idea of creating a Saudi Arabian national identity based on religion is an attempt to legitimize the ruling dynasty, the House of Saud. This is done, he claims, as a way to cope with the threats that the government faces. According to him the idea of a national identity have been promoted as both as an official and a practical policy based on loyalty to the ruling family and the strict observance of Islam (Nevo, 1998, p. 34). This is

At the same time however, Nevo claims that there is a looming conflict between the state and the religion since the religious leaders whose previous roles have been to care for the Islamic faith, with the creation of the state, became state agents that needed to consolidate the secular ideas of nation building (ibid. p. 39). It can hence be argued that there is a rift between the core ideals of religion as well as the core ideals of the nation state since the idea of the Arabic nationalism, or the nation state of Saudi Arabia, limits the concept of the comprehensive Muslim umma—the supra-national collective community of Muslims. The conflict between the two schools of thought it also expressed by Mohamad Atar’s (1988) thesis on the importance of textbooks when forming Saudi Arabian identity. Atar uses the Muslim Brotherhood as representative of Islam and illustrate that they, on one hand, “believe that identity is based on faith, regardless of ethnic of linguistic differences” and that “Islam is universally applicable as the basis of identity” (Atar, 1988, p. iv). The secular nationalist’s, on the other hand, argues that the most important component within their identity is their shared language and history (Atar, 1988, p. v). At the same time, the national identity is inevitably bound to the religious identity since Saudi Arabian law requires all nationals to be Muslim.

Fatima Mernissi also reflects upon the dynamics between tradition and identity in her book “Beyond the Veil” (1975) in which she explores gender dynamics within Muslim society. Even though she does not particularly focus on Saudi Arabia she theorizes that “the need for Muslims to claim so vehemently that they are traditional, and that their women miraculously escape social change and the erosion of time, has to be understood in term of their need for self-representation and must be classified not as a statement about daily behavioral practices, but rather as a psychological need to maintain a minimal sense of identity in a confusing and shifting reality” (Mernissi, 1987, p. viii)—as a way of preserving identity. This interplay between new and old is also present in Mai
Yaman’s work “Changed Identities: The Challenge of the New Generation in Saudi Arabia” (2000). In it the focus is on the issues that Saudi Arabian youth face and “their views, their hope and their fears” (Yaman, 2000, p. xxi). Yaman argues that: “the outstanding motif that united all the concerns and aspirations of the young people was the clash between continuity and change” (ibid.). According to her, the social transformation that Saudi Arabia has undergone during the last century has inevitably affected the country’s youth: “On one side they have the stabilizing and apparently constant influences of family and religion. In the rapid changing global setting these provide certainty in an increasingly uncertain world. But this certainty comes at a cost. Those interviewed expressed considerable frustration with what they see as the constraining and negative aspects of continuity. No one among those interviewed expressed a desire to be outside the extended family structure or Islam but a majority did want to be given a greater degree of autonomy to define the parameters of their own mortality” (ibid.). She hence detects a conflict between the past and present or old and new values. On the topic of youth and identity in the globalized society Yaman also theorize that the changing social, economic and political context of Saudi Arabia mean that the young generation is developing an own identity in a unique set of circumstances where they “continue to compare their reality with that of their parents and with the values their parents espouse for them” (ibid., p. 133) but against a backdrop of access to the global world wide web as well as the latest Western movies and music (ibid.).
2. Method

The empirical data presented in this paper was collected during a six-month stay in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia that took place in the spring of 2012. The approach to the fieldwork was qualitative and several research methods were combined to create the understanding necessary to answer the research question. The qualitative approach was in this case determined as preferable since the focus was on exploring the narratives of these five young women in their specific context. The approach was hence interpretive and sensitive to the social context (Mason, 2002) (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

The research process had both inductive and deductive features and throughout the process it was imperative to move back and forth between the two. The approach was ethnographic and qualitative, focusing on in-depth analysis and interpretation. The empirical research method is based on semi-structured interviews conducted with five subjects. The interviews were all conducted in English and the respondents had during conversations before the actual interview took place showed such a great command over the language that it was determined preferable to hold them in English instead of using an Arabic translator. It is however important to note that only speaking with women who had a full command of English indicates that all the women who were interviewed belong to a certain social setting. This paper however, does not claim to make any larger generalizations in relation to the woman as a subject in Saudi Arabia but to present and analyze what these particular five women present about their situation.

2.1. A Conversation with Five Women

The women featured in this study were besides falling within the age and gender perimeters of the study chosen based on their availability to partake in the study. It would have been preferable to speak with several more, however, due to the restrictions that exists within the country it was very difficult to find women who were currently living in the Kingdom and who were granted permission by their
families to meet and discuss the topics at hand. It is very important to mention that one of the women after the interview almost was detained by security forces who were wondering what she had been talking about and why. Due to this fact and the fact that women can’t roam the Kingdom freely, all of the interviews took place within a public space particularly designated for women.

Since some of the questions raised during the interviews could be considered harming to the integrity of the subject in regards to the authoritarian society that constitutes Saudi Arabia, anonymity was of utmost importance. This since the Saudi Arabian government is known to openly critique controversial thinking. To safeguard the women’s real identity they will from here on be known by the following names: Ashra, Ameera, Nadia, Dalya and Fatma.

It is important to note that the idea of the qualitative interview meant a dialogue and that the interview subjects were encouraged to see the session as a conversation (May, 2002, p. 236). They were therefore encouraged to ask questions back and develop theories that they presented. This was also an important strategy as to help them feel comfortable with the interviews taking place since they all partook in their own time and their own risk.

In total five in-depth interviews, or conversations, were held to capture the young women’s experience of the investigated phenomena (Pickering, 2008, p. 21-30). This included both a personal and collective experience of life and was derived from how they spoke about themselves and their reality (ibid. p. 26.). To elicit this narrative it was important during the interview process to, as much as possible, let them choose their own words through which the topics of the subjects were framed.

The conversations varied in length and span over several topics that to a certain extent were predetermined based on initial contact with the young women but also was allowed to grow organically during the conversation. These topics besides identity and expression and the phenomenon of posting revealing pictures, came to include online expression, relationships with friends and family, future aspirations and reflections upon what was seen as important in life as well as gender roles and stereotypes. All as to gather an impression of the subjects narrated experience of being a young woman in Saudi Arabia developing and expressing an identity.
The material collected was then read with a holistic approach, including both a literary and interpretative perspective as to extract both manifest and latent content in regards to how they spoke about themselves, their identity and how they felt that others perceived them.

2.2. The EIPQ: Ego Identity Process Questionnaire

The data derived from the narrative expressed by the five women were then read reflexively through the prism provided by the EIPQ, the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire. The EIPQ was used to assess the subject’s identity-status as to provide further variables for analysis and is a test that assesses an individual’s level of exploration and commitment. Based on this the identity was then conceptualized as either Achieved, Foreclosed, or in a state of Moratorium or Diffusion (Marcia, 1966). Marcia’s operationalization, the Identity Status Interview, of Erikson’s concept of the ego identity was originally intended to be used within the setting of the informal interview. However, in this paper the reinterpreted version by Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel and Geisinger (1995) was used since it was deemed the most suitable method within the context. This since it was structured in the form of a questionnaire that the respondents could answer on their own in the form of a self-report which in turn limited the researchers level of interpretation in relation to the data collected. The EIPQ as designed by Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel and Geisinger (1995) contained 32 questions that span over eight different areas: dating, family, friendship, occupation, politics, religion, sex roles and values. 20 of the questions were positively worded and 12 were negatively worded. The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement to each question on a 6-point scale that span from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” To better adhere to the discourse in Saudi Arabia non-invasive alterations to the original EIPQ were made. This included formulation regarding political parties and religious affiliation. In line with the method as presented by Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel and Geisinger (1995) positively-worded questions were scored ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” with 6 points ranging to 1 point whereas the scoring for negatively-worded questions were reversed. The scores were then added up to “obtain total scores for
exploration and commitment separately, each of which can range from 16 to 96” (Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel & Geisinger, 1995, p. 184). Following the method, the median scores, 59 for commitment and 60 for exploration, were then used to determine the identity status of each respondent. Those respondents that scored above the median in regards to both variables were categorized as achieved whereas those who scored under were categorized as diffused. If a respondent had scored above the median in relation to commitment but below in relation to exploration she fell into the category as foreclosed whereas she was categorized as in moratorium if the pattern was reversed.

Even though the EIPQ as well as the four stages of identity only offers one perspective through which identity can be understood it offers and interesting insight into understanding the identity development and expression of the young women as well as fascinating variables for further analysis.

2.3. Ethical Considerations

When in the process of conducting ethnographic work several ethical aspects were taken into consideration. As noted by Hammersley and Atkinson in Ethnography: Principles in Practice (2007) the idea of informed consent together with the notions of privacy, harm, exploitation and consequences for future research are some of the most important ethical issues to take into consideration in relation to the research-subject (p. 209). By throughout the research-process keeping a continued dialogue with the interviewees and providing them with adequate knowledge about in which direction the study was heading they were able to provide continuous free consent and decide freely as to whether or not to partake in the study. All the participants also gave their consent in relation to writing and publishing scholarly articles based on the conducted research.

During the fieldwork it was also important to acknowledge the fact that the issues dealt with are sensitive, therefore the subjects and situations were approached with the intent to become private without intruding on the subject’s privacy. To reassure that the subjects would not be exposed to harm or exploitation they were asked to continuously set boundaries that they were
comfortable with. In relation to safeguarding the interview-subjects’ personhood it was also decided that anonymity did not harm the reliability of their narrative.

Another important ethical consideration is to acknowledge my own role as a researcher within the research-assumption. My role as a researcher was overt and during the research process the idea of producing new shared knowledge together with the interview-subjects’ personhood it was also decided that anonymity did not harm the reliability of their narrative. Here it is also important to recognize the importance to continuously see the interviewees not as objects but as subjects with consciousness and agency who “produce accounts of themselves and their worlds” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 97).

Finally I wish to clarify that understanding how Saudi Arabian young women see their identity development and expression is not an attempt from a north-south or west-east perspective to single out and differentiate with the “other.” However, since I come from a culturally Western-based research perspective I am unable to fully move beyond some aspects of Western-centric thinking since it manifests itself in my understanding of the key concept and theories. My value and knowledge-based framework is undoubtedly affected by the prism through which I select and interpret information and will also inevitably be a part of the discourse used to frame and present this thesis. My own reporting on the issue brings with it ethical dilemmas in regards to constructing the non-western woman as a subject of ‘Otherness’. However, in my interpretive approach I will try to not construct the consciousness of the subject but instead open up to understand it and avoid muting the subject by imposing a culturally imperialist subject-constitution.

2.4. Material and Evaluation of Sources

The material presented in this paper consists of both primary data collected during the time spent in Saudi Arabia as well as secondary material gathered through literature studies. The primary data was collected as mentioned above. The secondary material was foremost applied as to construct the theoretical understanding necessary to answer the research question.

When evaluating the primary material collected through the interviews the dilemma in regards to the empirical field-study, that I needed to trust that the information provided by the subject were true, was theorized about in the
following way: since the questions raised first and foremost dealt with the subjects and the individuals perception of the self, of identity, identity-formation and identity expression, the hermeneutic approach moves away from the idea of objective and absolute truths. Based on this, the validity and reliability of the interviews with the young women, was evaluated based on the interpretation of their consistency and their credibility. Systematically returning to focal points in their expressed narrative and asking follow-up questions confirmed consistency. The subjective notion of credibility was based on their motivation for agreeing to be interviewed. Since no gains were to be made by them besides telling their story of what it is like being a young woman in Saudi Arabia it was concluded that they did not have any interest in forging a false personal narrative.

The secondary sources were critically evaluated based on authenticity and author credibility. To verify authenticity confirming but independent facts among different sources and researchers were found. To evaluate the author credibility the author’s research motives were critically explored and independence in relation to outspoken subjective interests or stakes in relation to this research was established (Teorell & Svensson, 2007, p. 104-106).
3. Understanding Identity Expression

To continue on and explore the research-question it is necessary to not only clearly define the boundaries of the conception of identity and expressing it but also through which perspective the phenomenon will be understood. The following segment aims to clarify some of the key concepts that will be theorized about in this thesis.

3.1. Creating the Self and the Individual Identity

3.1.1. Defining Identity as a Meaning Bearing Unit

What constitutes the “I” in Identity? Defining identity is more difficult than it might first appear. Scholarly reflection about the concept has a long history and the phenomenon has been studied through various academic disciplines. In the anthology “Skjorta eller själ? Kulturella identiteter i tid och rum” ethnologist Gunnar Alsmark presents the idea that finding a clear-cut definition is neither desirable nor possible. The researcher should, according to him, instead have a more operational, or contextual approach and define what s/he refers to within each individual research-process (Alsmark, 1997, p. 12). Identity is consequently something that can be understood from many perspectives.

The creation of the subject self is according to Alsmark intimately related to the core values of modernity, in the sense of the creation of an independent individual with her own freedom and rights. As Alsmark (1997, p. 13) quotes Hoffman-Axthelm (1992, p. 200) “In the name of identity, laws of the species were to be abolished; traditions and corporate chains cast aside.” At the same time several scholars argue that the Western society went through fundamental changes during the 19th and 20th century which impacted the single individual in terms of possibilities and options. As Alsmark (1997, p. 13) understands Alberto Melucci (1992) that individuals in today’s complex society has the possibility to act
independent of group belonging, situation and heritage. This is particularly interesting to keep in mind when viewing identity in terms of either personal or collective later on in the text and also in relation to some of the things that Hans Ingvar Roth notes in his research survey on the concepts of identity and pluralism. According to him it is important that a distinction often is made between self-chosen and assigned/ascribed identity. As he writes: “The ascribed identity comes from the outside and is imposed upon the subject in an almost accidental way, while the self-chosen identity has been created from “inside” and is based on a subject’s own needs and preferences” (Roth, 2003, pp. 25). The ascribed identity is according to him and others generated within the persons relationship to other people. He also presents the idea that ascribed identities, if perceived as negative, have preceded the creation of so called “anti-identities” which expresses the will to be liberated from the ascribed negative attributes (Roth, 2003, pp. 33).

According to social psychologists Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke (2000, p. 224) identity is formed through a process of self-categorization or identification. In their article “Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory” they link identity and social identity theory to provide a “more fully integrated view of the self” (ibid.) and claim that “the self is reflexive in that it can take itself as an object and can categorize, classify or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications” (ibid.). When integrating the two theories Stets and Burke argue that an individual creates an identity “in terms of membership in particular groups or roles” (2000, p. 226) and that individuals create a perspective upon themselves “in terms of meanings imparted by a structured society” (ibid.). The group identity captures how an individual sees itself as a part of a group whereas the role identity means adopting “self-meanings and expectations to accompany the role as it relates to other roles in the group, and then act to represent and preserve these meanings and expectations” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 227). The group identity is also upheld by the idea of self-verification, when individuals see themselves in the discourse of the terms through which their role is explained as the identity standard and then “behave[s] as to maintain consistency with the identity standard” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 228). This in turns leads into the dynamics between the individual or persona identity and the group or collective identity.
3.1.2. Individualism Versus Collectivism

As mentioned earlier identity is often understood as the set of meanings that people attach to themselves as members of a group. For this study it is important to differentiate between the group/collective identity and the personal/individual identity or what some scholars refer to as the “we’s” and “me’s” (Thoits & Virshup, 1997).

Within social identity theory the personal identity is defined as the “self as a unique entity, distinguished from other individuals” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 228). This personal identity is considered to have more integrity than the group identity and is defined as when the individual act in terms of his or her goals (ibid.). It is however an assumption of this thesis that personal goals and the personal identity can be negotiated by the group goals and the group identity. As Stets and Burke also write: “The level of identity that is activated (the personal or the social) depends on factors in the situation, such as social comparison or normative fit, which make a group identity operative and override the personal identity” (ibid.). In such cases the individual identity is held back by the identity of the collective, often to uphold the collective identity itself. As Fatima Mernissi writes, “individuals die of physical sickness, but societies die of loss of identity that is, disturbance in the guiding system of representations of oneself as fitting into a universe that is specifically ordered so as to make life meaningful” (1987, p. ix).

The idea of promoting the collective identity and hence limiting the individual identity is important to see in the light of different dimensions within individual identity and the dynamic between “what people actually do, the decisions they make, the aspirations they secretly entertain or display through their patterns of consumption, and the discourses they develop about themselves,” (Mernissi, 1987, p. viii). The discourses they develop about themselves are what is reconstructed in the public space in dialogue with that which is seen as the “other.” Whereas what they actually do—can be seen in the private expression.

The first dimension, what people actually do, “is about reality and its harsh time-bound laws, and how people adopt to rapid change; the second is about self-preservation and identity building,” (ibid.). Self-preservation and identity building can be both on a personal and collective level. “In Beyond the Veil” (1987) Mernissi goes on to argue that there within Muslim societies exist a “structural
dissymmetry that runs all through and conditions the entire fabric of social and individual life and creates this split between what one does and how one speaks about oneself” (ibid.).

Focusing on context, several researchers argue that an individual’s identity develops both as an individual and a social process (Adams & Marshall, 1996) and that there can be barriers that hinder this process, such as socio-cultural or economic boundaries (Yoder, 2000, pp. 99). The social structure and its importance is also explored by Pierre Bourdieu (1990)(1998). He understands culture as the primary medium through which the roles and values of the dominant groups are socially reproduced. The individual action of developing and expressing a unique identity is then constrained by social structures. A social structure in which culture and identity has been politicized and in agreement with Friedland’s (2009, p. 888) argument that Bourdieu, oppose to what some scholars have interpreted, “politicizes culture as opposed to culturalizing power.” To understand the dynamics that exist between the individual and the social structure Bourdieu explores the concept of habitus—the way in which power and culture is constantly re-constructed and validated through the relationship between the two: the agency and the structure (Bourdieu, 1990)(1998). Habitus is not something fixed but rather a dynamic and unconscious process that continuously reproduces the social structure through the action, values and expressions of the agents, the individuals, within the same structure. This means that the collective in the form of a structure is in a continuous dialogue with the individuals that shape it.

Bourdieu’s perspective upon the power of sex is also interesting within the context of this paper. The “social order” is according to him perpetuated as a “sexualized power structure” through which the masculine domination is ratified (ibid., p. 849). These power structures is then internalized by both men and women and reproduced within their social setting through their bodies, through “posture, carriage and feeling, their differentiated locations in physical and social space, in a skein of homologous metaphorical oppositions (hard/soft, out/in)” (Friedland, 2009, p. 895) positioning them in terms of “naturalized social constructions” (ibid.) and grounding the form of domination within the senses.

The collective identity of most Saudi Arabians in the Middle East incorporates three key elements: the Islamic (Wahhabist), Arabic and national. As Nevo (1998) puts it, “the concept that Saudi Arabia’s collective identity is a part of the umma is
frequently and repeatedly underlined by the regime’s spokesmen” (p. 35). This religious component of the national identity is continuously promoted with official and practical policy within the country (p. 34). This means that the “religion, (primarily the Wahabbi version of Sunni Islam) has played a prominent role not only in moulding the individual’s private and collective identities but also in consolidating his national values” (Nevo, 1998, p. 35). This collective identity therefore according to Nevo includes the strict religious faith as well as loyalty to the ruling family (ibid.).

In the Saudi Arabian context it is also important to acknowledge the discourse that the veiled female body carries. A discourse of religion, tradition and privacy that is, by the veiling of women and through the lack of women in public space, communicated to the public sphere and thus upheld as a social sex power structure. It is however important to note that the purpose of this paper not is to value veiling in a certain way and that veiling in this paper not is seen simply as a form of oppression or a sign of agency. As explored by Nancy J. Hirschmann in her article “Western Feminism, Eastern Veiling, and the Question of Free Agency” (1998), it is seen as both, “the veil is both a marker of autonomy, individuality, and identity, and a marker of inequality and sexist oppression” (Hirschmann, 1998, p. 352).

In conclusion, identity in the context of this paper should be understood as the young women’s articulated ego identity. How they express their sense of self, both as individuals and in relation to others, and thus create a perspective upon themselves within the structures that they inhabit.

3.1.3. Posting Photographs Anonymously Online

During the time I spent in Saudi Arabia a scandal broke. A journalist, Mariyam Jaber, had stumbled upon a new phenomenon of Saudi Arabian women displaying body parts, such as feet or patches of skin, online—without revealing their identity. When questioned about the phenomena, in an article published in the newspaper Arab news, she theorized that it “reveals a woman’s desire to be liberated herself from social restrictions and express herself, and Facebook or other networking sites are the easiest platforms to achieve this” (Fawaz, 2012). In the same article a university graduate, Amal Al-Saleh is quoted: “Most women on
social networking sites use fake names. By displaying parts of their body and sometimes glittering colors, young women must be achieving some sort of gratification or release of their emotion while anonymity guarantees them immunity from social censure or parental displeasure.” The trend is subsequently by them both understood as an act of gratification and liberation.

In relation to this it is interesting to note the difference between identity expression in the private versus the public space and what occurs in the phenomenon that is Facebook. Facebook provides an anonymous and thus private front to a public forum. The private expression can therefore be made public without losing individual privacy. Social media is as a medium both public and private at the same time. It might give the impression of being private but it is inevitably public since everyone can gain access. Here it is also interesting to mention the Hamza Kashgari¹ apostasy case that played out on Twitter. Kashgari published a very private opinion in relation to his religion in the public space and was be punished for it. Besides the complex relationship between what is private and what is not in the online expression it is also important to reflect upon the trend through a more complex and in some way pessimistic lens. Namely how the trend can be seen as a form of objectification.

Objectification is a central idea within contemporary feminist theory and the term provides a framework to understand what it is to be female in a socio-cultural context that sexually objectifies the female body (Szymanski et. al, 2011, p. 6). The theory is often seen to have originated from Immanuel Kant who argues that objectification equals treating a person as an object—as an instrument for ones purposes. By reducing an individual to a mere instrument the objectifier harms the objectified individual by diminishing her humanity and identity (Papadaki, 2010) and turning the objectified entity in to “something, not someone,” (Dworkin, 1997, pp. 14, 140-141) (Papadaki, 2010, p. 20). Humanity is

¹ In February 2012 the Saudi Arabian citizen Hamza Kashgari was arrested in Malaysia and extradited to Saudi Arabia to face charges of blasphemy after he in a series of three tweets directed to the Prophet Muhammad questioned his faith. The poet and journalist, born in 1989, was accused of insulting the Islamic prophet Muhammad and charged by the Saudi Arabian judicial authorities for blasphemy. Even though prominent human rights advocates and groups has pleaded for his release his faith, according to various news sources, is still undetermined and he remains within custody (Giglio, 2012).
in this case equaled with an individual’s capacity to make rational choices, to pursue one’s own ends and promote self-value.

In relation to the trend, the anonymous body becomes objectified with its disembodiment when the female entity is separated both from her body and her real-life identity as the identity, within these profiles, becomes detached from the physical self. And even though it remains unclear whether or not posting the pictures is connected with seeking sexual desire, the mere act itself is highly sexual and the disconnect between body parts and the body indicates that the trend can be seen as sexual objectification, “when a woman’s body or body parts are singled out and separated from her as a person and she is viewed primarily as a physical object of male sexual desire” (Szymanski et al, 2009, p. 8) (Bartky, 1990). It is further on one of the assumptions of this paper that women internalize an outside view that leads to self-objectification—when women treat themselves as objects (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) and even self-sexual objectification—when women treat themselves as sexual objects.
4. Ashra | Ameera | Nadia | Dalya | Fatma

The empirical results of this paper will be presented in two different segments through which the following is theorized about, firstly, how the young women express that they see themselves, secondly, what the EIPQ says about their identity-status and their sense of self.

4.1. The Conversations—Articulating Oneself

The conversations span over several topics that, to a certain extent, were predetermined based on initial contact with the young women but also were allowed to grow organically during the conversations. These topics besides identity and expression and the phenomenon of posting revealing pictures, came to include online expression, relationships with friends and family, future aspirations and reflections upon what was seen as important in life as well as gender roles and stereotypes.

4.1.1. Ashra

Ashra was 20 years old during the time of the interview and had lived in the United States until she was four. She defined her identity as “who I am, what I love and what I’m interested in, not where I come from.” Indicating that she saw her self as an inner established and not outer ascribed feature and that identity was derived from an emotional and psychological perspective. She described herself as sensitive, dreamy and optimistic and was convinced that her family, especially her father, and her friends would describe her in the same way. Ashra said that she mainly expressed herself through writing and through social media. On Twitter she expressed her feelings and openly shared “almost everything” and in general she felt that she could articulate herself freely both offline and online and that she could say what she thought and felt indicating that she had a strong conviction of self and that she experienced that she could express herself freely. This was particularly evident in her relationship with her father, a relationship she described
as close. The fact that he didn’t let her travel and study abroad was a topic that they would argue a lot about. Explaining these arguments Ashra said: “I can say what I feel, what I want to say.” Focusing both on an emotional and an expressional sense of freedom.

Even though she argued that no one in particular influenced the choices she made in life, such as her choice of major at university, she often asked her father to advice her. She described her parents and friends as the most important things in her life, and that the two groups were related. It was not important that her family approved her friends but she spoke to her family about them and if her family considered someone inappropriate she would then try to see that friend from their perspective. This was something that had happened several times in high school and when her parents had turned out to be right. Her parents hence in many ways seemed to be an authority whose opinions she valued, recommendations she followed and ideas she often found right.

When talking about right or wrong, Ashra expressed a strong will do to the right thing, saying: “Whether I’m a boy or a girl I have to do the right things.” A non-gender bound idea that sounded almost liked a hand down mantra about behaving in a right kind of way. Doing right, she explained, is doing something that doesn’t hurt her family or is considered wrong based on her religious values, “like, you know, traditionally in my religion we can’t go with boys or date boys.” Her moral perspective was thus first and foremost expressed as created through a form of respect and to safeguard the wellbeing of her family and secondly based on her religious perspective upon right and wrong.

Something she found wrong were women posting revealing photos online and when talking about the topic the following conversation took place:

1. “I have been reading about young girls posting photos of for example a naked arm or some skin online.
   Yeah... This is really a problem! For me, if you want to show a part of your body, you can just show your face. It’s better to just show your face, I think they’re afraid of something, I don’t know. Or they want to express themselves but they don’t know how, you know.
2. Is it a common phenomenon?
   Yeah, young girls, I think between 14 to 17, yeah.
3. Is there anyone you know who have done it?
   No, but I have, some of my sister friends. I think because they are afraid that...
4. What do you think they are afraid of?
I don’t know. That they can’t show themselves, that there might be someone who knows them. But if you want to show a part of your body, it is better to show your face, not a part of your body. Because what we cover is our bodies, not our face, you know, even though here we cover our face I think it’s more a traditional thing than a religious thing. I believe that I just need to cover my hair, wear a hijab you know. But I cover my face here because of the tradition, because when I travel abroad I don’t cover my face.

5. But you still cover your hair?
Yeah, cause’ I believe so, I’m not forced to you know.

6. Have you ever asked any of these girls why they do it?
No, cause’ I don’t know them.

7. Is this something that you and your friends talk about?
Well, we just talk about them, you know, we don’t like this, it’s not good.

8. Why don’t you like it?
Because they’re showing their body. Okay, I mean, I’m okay with if she shows her face and her body it’s okay, it’s her choice. But at least show your face, not just a part of your arm or part of your leg.”

Ashra voiced the belief that the phenomenon might be a misguided way for the young girls to express themselves calling it “a problem,” and saying: “Or they want to express themselves but they don’t know how.” An expression she does not approve of, calling it “not good.” She argues that it would have been better for the girls to show their faces and in a way expresses a form of resentment towards the young women. She clearly distances herself from the phenomenon, pointing to the fact that none of her friends have done it, only some of her sister’s. She emphasizes this distance by repeating that she doesn’t know anyone who has done it and that when her friends talk about it, they do so reaffirming that it is something that is “not good” to do. Indirectly, by continuously returning to the fact that the girls should have dared to show their faces instead of their bodies she also opposes the form of objectification and disembodiment that the action entails.

It is interesting to note how Ashra talk about how the girls might cover their faces out of fear of being recognized, something validating the actual level of scandal that this behavior mean within Saudi Arabia. She elaborates on this by drawing parallels to and reflecting upon the topic through her religious perspective. At the same time as she presents the religious perspective she moves from using the pronoun “I” to the pronoun “we” when emphasizing the collective need to cover indicating that it is something she feels transcends the individual.

Besides presenting Ashra’s perspective upon the phenomena the segment also shines a light on how she distinguishes between religion and tradition and
between her religious and her national identity. Her national identity includes covering her face and is something she does as to adhere to the tradition while in Saudi Arabia. However, when travelling she sheds the niqab in favor of only donning the hijab and her religious identity. This religious identity that she ascribes to, by among other things covering her hair no matter where she travels, is as she poignantly states something that she chooses, saying “I’m not forced to you know.” Affirming her perspective upon herself as a subject with agency and at the same time rebutting whatever stereotype that she had been framed within before that says differently.

In the future Ashra believed that she might go into an academic career and work for the university that she was currently attending. At the same time she expressed the possibility that she in the future might change her mind. Having a career was one of the things in relation to gender roles within Saudi Arabia that Ashra hoped she could challenge: “I hope they will provide some jobs so I can work. But there isn’t a lot of opportunities for jobs here for women, especially for women.” On the topic of change Ashra expressed a belief that things were changing in Saudi Arabia: “...we are more open, to new ideas and we are, you know, not afraid to express our feelings. I even had a teacher who said so, that ‘this generation is different, they are not afraid to express their feelings and do something about certain things.’” She validates her own claims by ascribing them to an authority figure in the form of a teacher, pointing to the idea that things are changing and she is not the only one saying so. She describes these changes by saying that the new generation is a generation with agency who welcome change and emphasizes that they are brave enough to express their feelings. For Saudi Arabia she thought that these changes meant that the country “…might change in some views, in education, religiously” and strongly believed that they were occurring thanks to media, stating: “You know, the media! (...) I think the media brought the cultures together in different ways.”

Even though Ashra expressed that the media had brought all cultures closer together she still felt that the image of the Saudi Arabian woman throughout the world was faulty and said the following: “I sometimes feel very irritated, there are some people who don’t know about us, and they just talk, and we don’t do what they think that we do. They always say that a woman is always in her home, that she doesn’t go out and that she doesn’t really have her freedom and…you know,
all those things. You just want to change their ideas.” She expresses a frustration and starts by contradicting the stereotypical image of the Saudi Arabian woman as a subject only within her own home arguing that she sees herself as a free and liberated woman, which then echoes on when she continues her reasoning when asked what she would like to tell people, saying: “We are not prisoners! And that we, I think that we, really do, do what we want to do.” Putting emphasis on how she feels that Saudi Arabian women are in control of their lives, doing what they want to do but at the same time conjuring a powerful image of breaking free from ideas of imprisonment.

4.1.2. Ameera

Ameera was 20 years old during the time of the interview and had never traveled outside of the Kingdom. She dreamt about finishing her studies and going abroad, hopefully meeting an American Muslim and move to the United States where she thought that things were different. Even though she couldn’t articulate in what way things were different in the United States she longed for the change of setting. Ameera described herself as outspoken and sensitive but had a hard time understanding the questions about how she expressed herself and her identity and answered that she did not know what other people thought. After having the questions explained further she said: “Maybe by my…you know, how would I say it…you know my political choices. What I agree with and whom I don’t agree with. I think from there I express myself. And that is how people see me, from my choices.” She thus argued that her everyday and political choices in life shaped both her expression but also other peoples impression of her. Focusing on how her choices defined her and not her outer attributes she voiced an existentialist idea in regards to being free to continuously choose whom to be.

Ameera expressed a particular interest in and love for politics. She had formed her political views by reading works by leaders from Arab countries like the former Egyptian president Gamal Adbel Nasser as well as local politicians. At the same time she said that her father would teach her about politics and that the two never disagreed when it came to politics. Indicating that she never had challenged his ideas or what he was teaching her. Her dream was to someday go into politics and work with the Palestinian issue, saying: “...I think they are.
Oppressed and you know, the settlement thing and the deal with the Israeli, I don’t know, I just want to give them their country back.” There are a lot of interesting points to be made in relation to Ameera’s dream of liberating Palestine and giving the “oppressed” people “their country back.” She expresses the privilege of being free enough to choose to go fight someone else’s battle and to help those she considers in need. At the same time the action, from a critical perspective, could be said to illustrate how unaware she is in relation to how the global society view Saudi Arabia. It could also be an insight that becoming liberated from the oppression at home is something Ameera cannot hope for and decides to wage her battles against oppression in other places.

Being outspoken manifested itself with her use of the social media tool Twitter and when tweeting about politics she expressed an awareness that she tweets about things that are somewhat sensitive but argues: “I tweet it because it’s my opinion, you know—I have to write it.” Something that indicates a strong sense of commitment to roles and values and a sense of obligation, “I have to,” voice these values. Something that leads into debating the idea of self-censoring, which Ameera denied, saying: “You know, I publish everything I feel is right, I don’t care what other people think. Like [the] government.” A bold statement, not only challenging other people but the authority itself in the form of government, that lead into whether or not she was scared that something would happen to her like with Hamza Kashgari to which she said, “sometimes.” The fear of repercussions however, did not stop her from doing it: “Because I think it’s right. What I am saying is true so I have to say it—no matter what.” Her ideas about freedom of expression articulated almost as an obligation despite whatever consequences she might face, an obligation that seemed to come from a strong moral conviction in relation to right and wrong.

1. “How do you decide what is right?
   You know, according to my religious teachings and Islamic teachings and according to what I think in my mind is true and what is not.

2. When you say, “what is in your mind,” what has influenced you besides your religious teachings?
   I don’t know, maybe the prophet, may peace be upon him. When I read about him and when I read about his beliefs, I know he is right.”

The questions establish that Ameera’s moral beliefs are firstly based on her religious and Islamic teachings and then secondly on her perception of the world.
This assumption is cemented when she again answers with “the prophet” even though she is asked what has influenced her besides her religious teachings, something that indicates an inability to look beyond a religious standpoint in this case. In relation it is interesting to note her perspective upon the case with Hamza Kashgari.

3. **“What do you think about the Hamza Kashgari case?”**  
   I don’t know. He was wrong from the beginning. He shouldn’t have insulted the prophet or any of the prophets. He shouldn’t have done it. So—I, I heard that he repented. If he repented, he should be forgiven you know, and we should forgive.

4. **What do you think about him being charged with a crime?**  
   Because actually in our constitutions it’s considered a crime, insulting any of the prophets, Jesus, Moses, Mohammed, peace be upon him, it’s considered here as a crime, and he knows that…

5. **Is there a conflict between the right to expression and the law not to say anything bad about Mohammed?**  
   (At first she does not understand the question and needs it explained)  
   It’s a crime, it’s considered a crime against our constitution if you insult any of our prophets—this is the rule from the beginning.”

When asked to express her feelings about the Kashgari case, she focuses on the religious reason to why he is, as she expresses it, wrong. “He shouldn’t have insulted the prophet or any of the prophets. He shouldn’t have done it.” She then continues with her religious perspective upon the case as she says that if he has “repented” then “he should be forgiven (…) and we should forgive” using religious terminology. Further on she does not use legislative terminology, referring to the act as criminal until it was mentioned in the question. When talking about the ‘crime’ she makes her standpoint very clear: “In our constitutions it’s considered a crime (…) and he knows that…” The statement however opens up for a sense of ambiguity. In reality she does not say what she thinks about the case, she just recites what the constitution says, “it’s considered a crime.” This is then put in relation with the solemn conclusion that “he knows that…” Ameera in that sense manifestly expresses that Kashgari was aware of the fact that he was committing a crime and latently that he should have known better.

The final question of the excerpt then has the possibility to really capture what she thinks about the case and was posed also taking into consideration Ameera’s expressed interest in politics. She, however, fails to understand the question first and after some explanation falls back on repeating the constitution: “It’s a crime,
it’s considered a crime against our constitution if you insult any of our prophets—this is the rule from the beginning.” A use of the word beginning that can be interpreted as both the religious beginning as well as the legislative beginning of the state of Saudi Arabia.

As the conversation then returned to politics and the current political situation in Saudi Arabia and the royal family Ameera expressed that she disagreed with some aspects of the ruling family’s policies in relation to social justice and equality. This critique was however nothing that she felt she could express freely saying: “You know, because many people got arrested just because they expressed their ideas you know, their opinions.” It is then better to stay quiet: “I just express it with my friends.” Still Ameera expressed that she believes that she is more daring with her opinion than most of her friends and that it is important for her to voice her opinion. Saying: “It’s because it’s my right to speak,” and “…because we are equal, everyone should express what they want, what they have in mind,” Ameera expressed the basic ideas of freedom of expression, “it’s my right to speak,” for her—for everyone: “We are equal, everyone should express what they want.” She then continued to explain how her friends encouraged her to not talk about values or politics since the wrong people might be listening and that her friends were scared. “[They fear] government and stuff like that (whisper). I think that it’s [the right to express her opinions] the simplest right that I have.” Something interesting in relation to how she described her relationship with her parents. She “absolutely” felt that she could say “anything” to her parents, but she could not question her religion or her values saying: “My religion, not really, no. But I read about my religion and don’t have to ask any person, you know. A question that I ask my parents, like, ‘why do you, ehm, disagree like with me going there’ and stuff like that. This is the kind of question.” She didn’t only say that she couldn’t question it, but that she had no need to question it.

When talking about the phenomenon of posting photos online Ameera said that she thought it was a common thing and included not only Facebook but also Black Berry Messenger. Even though none of her close friends had done it she had heard of women doing it and found it ridiculous: “I think it’s silly. Once you show the parts of your body yeah, why not show your face?” she asked and later on explored it further: “You know, that it’s silly, to show just part of your body. Like your are—like in fact you can’t show your face so instead of that you show
parts of your body because no one will know it’s yours.” Ameera manifestly expresses that she believes that women show parts of their body since they cannot show their face and latently voices it as a cowardly act, not daring to show your face. When talking about what would happen if the picture were to get out the response is clear: “Then it would be a big problem!”

Even though it would still be a big problem for those breaking the rules that are imposed upon Saudi Arabian society Ameera in general expressed that a lot of things had changed, especially in relation to women’s rights and possibilities for women, in Saudi Arabia saying: “It has change a lot. I think it’s because of Twitter. And because everyone, you know, yeah… it has changed.” It was however difficult for her to articulate what kind of changes she wanted to see:

6. “So what other changes would you like to see in Saudi Arabia?
The most hated question.

7. The most difficult question?
If you ask this question to other girls, they will answer you like, ‘I want to drive,’ ‘I want to…’ like.. answers like that. But the change that I want is equality for all, you know.

8. Do you think that it’s possible?
No, I don’t think that that is possible.”

She calls it a hated question, indicating that she does not see it as an easy question to answer. She then goes on to distance herself from other girls by predicting their unison and, according to her, stereotype answers and presents her own idea of a societal strive for ethical change instead of legislative change and non-gender based change. She does however pessimistically don’t think that the change she strives for is possible. She did however think and hope that Saudi Arabian women in the future would gain the rights that they should have and said the following in regards to why the change haven’t occurred earlier: “I don’t know. Maybe because Saudi Arabia is a very religious country and she holds religion with both hands. So, you know, not everything is acceptable.” That Saudi Arabia holds religion with both hands she explained as Saudi Arabia being a country in which the government and the people try their best to follow the Islamic teachings.

Even though she did not think equality would be a possibility within Saudi Arabian society she did think it was possible to change the image of the Saudi Arabian woman as she is portrayed globally.
“You know, the media views us, or the world actually see us as like oppressed, you know. And, we have no rights and stuff like that. Actually we have our rights, you know, we go and we travel. It’s not only like what the media reproduce. I want to tell the world that what the media has been telling them is totally wrong.

But you said earlier that you don’t have the same rights as men?

Yeah. We don’t have the same rights as men but the media view of like we are oppressed and we don’t have any rights and we just stay at home…and It’s just wrong.

What would you say instead?

Actually we do have our rights, and we go, and we travel. It’s completely the opposite.”

Ameera’s response is first and foremost a reaction to the stereotypical image as she sees it portrayed, as “oppressed” and without rights, which she considers “wrong.” She claims that women do have rights but fail to elaborate them further when she has the possibility to do so but manifestly points to their ability to travel and latently to their possibility to become critically aware of their surroundings and the global society. When answering the last question Ameera makes an attempt to rebut the stereotype by claiming that “It’s completely the opposite,” which creates a dichotomy between what she has voiced throughout the interview in regards to social injustice, inequality as well as possibilities for women and women’s rights.

4.1.3. Nadia

Nadia was 21 years old during the interview and had, just like, Ashra, spent her first four years living in the United States. She loved English and dreamt about becoming a professor at a Saudi Arabian university saying that she was inspired by some of her teachers and “how they work to help girls.” Nadia described herself as mature and said that in difference from when she was younger she had “started to think more about what I’m going to do and whether or not things are right or wrong and how they affect my future.” She hence articulated a clear notion of self-reflection and awareness of the changing self. This was also evident from a statement that later followed: “You grow older, you experience more things. I think it’s a good change, especially that it’s my last teenage years—it’s
very normal.” This change manifested itself, she thought, by figuring out her goals and her path in life.

What she considered right and wrong she determined based on a religious and national framework: “Of course according to my beliefs, my religion of course. And people here, how they value things.” The “of course” used twice when referring to her beliefs, her religion, expressing how obvious it was within the context. Later on during the interview when the conversation returned to how she decided what was right or wrong she answered: “I think it’s in our nature, you know, either it’s right or it’s wrong.” Expressing a sense of a universal philosophical nativism, that specific beliefs or preferences are existent at birth.

Nadia had never felt that she questioned what she believed was right or wrong and answered a directly posed questions about it with an affirmative no, providing no further explanation. She expressed that she had never felt the need to challenge or question her beliefs or values. At the same time she said that changing was a natural part of evolving: “You know, every year that passes you have new ideas and new beliefs.” Clearly presenting and committing to two very different perspectives that culminate in the interpreted hypothesis that new ideas and beliefs don’t revolve around her religious identity but around her personal identity, indicating that there was a separation between the two even though both made up her ego identity. And as Nadia expressed it when talking about what she feels is continuously changing: “My way of viewing things, things I like to do, people I like to be with.” Her perspective focused upon things outside her religious framework and outside of defining right and wrong, and instead upon what she later articulated as her expression, what she feels affectionate towards and which individuals she likes to surround herself with.

Nadia defined identity in the following words: “It’s like who you are, how you develop yourself. Not who you were yesterday but who you are today, you know. How you develop yourself and how people near affect you—everything. But it’s mostly who you are.” Nadia hence saw identity as an inclusive, dynamic process that meant a continuous evolvement that occurred in relation with other people. She then reasoned the following in regards to expressing identity: “It’s different from person to person, some by the music they listen to, clothes they wear, style in general. The people they go with.” A perspective focusing on the uniqueness of each individuals subjective expression and the physicality to it by providing
examples of signs of expression that easily can be read and interpreted by others, such as music or clothes, but also again on how identity expression is shaped in relation to outside factors, in this case friends or “people they go with” and the expression that occurs by belonging to a group. Latently Nadia convey the idea that this expression is voiced through the choices people make even though her articulation is about more trivial forms of expression.

1. “So how do you express yourself? How do you see me?”
2. I don’t think that I know you well enough to say that yet. (Laughter from both sides)
   I think that I’m a normal girl, who loves her life, her friends and family. I love travelling, I love doing things I feel comfortable with.
3. So what do you feel conformable with?
   As I said, partying with my friends, reading, listen to music, watch movies…everything that every natural girl likes. Yeah.”

It is interesting how Nadia latently expresses how identity expression is a dialogue and depend on other people’s interpretation of it and interaction with it. How someone sees her becomes a part of her expression. It is also interesting how she emphasizes a sense of belonging to the normative idea of being “a normal girl” or liking things “every natural girl likes.” Normal or natural in this case articulated as “partying with friends, reading, listening to music, watch movies.” Another interesting point is how Nadia presents both a physiological and psychological approach to her own expression, speaking both about the feeling, “love,” that she has towards her life, family, friends and traveling and that she hopes shines through, as well as her expression through doing things, or committing actions that evokes a feeling of comfort, or ease.

During the interview Nadia articulated that she most valued her family and then friends, that she often would turn to her mother for advice and that her family’s input was important when she made choices, she however pointed out that they could disagree. If they would disagree with for example which friends Nadia would choose she would try to reason with them through dialogue: “Of course I would ask why they think that way and show them my point, why I like her and then they would understand.” Nadia was thus confident that her parents would see things her way as long as they understood her point, saying: “They believe that I make the right choice, I think they have confidence in me too.” The
relationship with her parents was also interesting in relation to when Nadia was asked whether or not she had experienced a period during her upbringing when she had ‘rebelled’ against authorities. Her answer: “No I have the same beliefs as my parents do.” Latently she expressed that she had never ‘rebelled’ against them since she’s never questioned their beliefs, but rather accepted them and made them her own.

When talking about online expression Nadia said that she experienced that shy people tend to have different offline and online identities and that she thought it had to do with confidence saying: “Maybe some of them have low confidence and are unsecure.” Nadia did however herself argue that she was the same person everywhere and that she was very secure in who she was, something she also thought had to do with knowing where you came from and having a family to support you. She explored the idea of having support further by explaining: “Like this shy girl I told you about, her parents are divorced and she is living with her grandmother. So I’m thinking: ‘Maybe this is the reason, no one was there to help her,’ you know.” By voicing the idea of support and guidance, Nadia latently expressed the importance of belonging to a collective as to shape character.

On the topic of women posting pictures online Nadia said the following: “You know, like…I don’t know…like my family or friends are not like that. But there are strict families that don’t like their daughters going uncovered anywhere and maybe that is a way for these girls to express themselves.” Nadia hence expressed that she saw it as a reaction to the limitations that some young women face. She also distances herself from the phenomenon, both from young women who post pictures and from young women who belong to strict families and latently expresses that she believes that her family is more liberal than others.

4. “So why do you think there are some girls who post pictures of body parts without showing their face?
   I think maybe because they don’t want to be recognized.

5. But what I’m wondering is “why,” not that they don’t want to be recognized but why they still do it?
   I think that they can’t show their faces so they find other ways to express—that’s what I think about it.”

Nadia thus also saw it as a way of anonymous expression but unlike the other girls did not seem to be bothered by the act and did not seem to value the act in any particular way. The answer to the latter question indicates that she saw the
face as an important factor for expression and that she believed that women who could not show their face found other ways of expressing. At the same time she also saw the phenomenon in a greater context.

“When I was in my third year I used to have an English teacher, one day she brought her camera and showed us pictures, and they were all like us, so it doesn’t always have to be bad…”

6. No of course…
They showed hands and legs, in a fun way.

This is also interesting in relation to the fact that Nadia said that she was comfortable with showing both her face and her hair to men she didn’t know, saying: “I’m not as strict as them so I think it’s okay for me—for me it’s alright. My family is ok with that too.” She could however never see herself having a male friend who was not a future husband: “I’m not sure that I would be okay with it, it’s something strange here, not something that we are used to.” Both answers capture a sense of ambiguity with the expressions “I think” and “I’m not sure.” In the former she defines not covering based on her sense of “I” and self, indicating it is a decision framed within her personal identity and then given authority by acceptance of her family and in the latter referring to something beyond the “I” and instead focusing on the “here” and something “we are not used to” giving the collective identity priority and letting it frame her decision. Nadia then said that she did not cover when she traveled and was asked whether or not she identified mostly with covering or not covering to which she answered, “I don’t feel like it’s a way of seeing myself, covered or not covered, I’m still me. I think it’s all about the face. If you show your face it’s you.” Nadia thus returned to the importance of the face for expression and also provided an important input to how she constructed her identity beyond the attributes that the western world often ascribe to Muslim women: “Covered or not covered, I’m still me.” Her religious identity in relation to covering, in this case, was according to her only a minor feature through which she negotiates her expression. Which was also interesting in relation to the tradition in Saudi Arabia and the laws that society abided by. Nadia already drove sometimes and said that she thought it would only be a matter of time until women were given the right to do so. She also said that she felt in control of her own life: “There are a lot of talk about this, but no, it’s my life I can do whatever I like” and did not like the global image of Saudi Arabian women: “It really annoys me how they always think that we don’t have control of our lives.
They think that—all they know is that we are ‘black things.’ I think it’s annoying—we are not like that. We have our lives, we are just normal people, just like you. We want them to know who we really are.” “Black things,” referring to the traditional black garment, the abaya, worn by Saudi Arabian women. She did however not think that this was true for all Saudi Arabian young women, saying: “No. It’s personal—everyone? It depends on their own mind and their families.” Nadia hence latently expresses that it is both inner and outer factors that she believes determine to what extent young women in Saudi Arabia are in control of their lives.

Throughout the interview Nadia expressed an idea that the society was changing, among other things saying: “You know, people change the way they think, you know, the culture. Yeah, before they were more closed.” These changes she among other things attributed to globalization: “You know, media is one of the most important things, TV, who doesn’t watch TV these days? That’s probably the biggest thing—magazines, books, everything.” However she also expressed that not everyone liked the changes, saying: “You know, some people don’t like this. They are like feeling that they are losing their identity, that their culture is vanishing. But I don’t think that, I think it’s in a good way, people are changing but in a good way—they are still holding on to their beliefs.” She thus equals identity with culture and at the same time latently differentiates between culture and religion. She however expresses that it is possible to combine the religious identity with a more “liberal” contemporary society and national identity. But these people, she goes on to argue: “Are people who normally don’t travel, people who are afraid of connecting with anyone.” At the same time Nadia expressed that she thought that living in the United States, even if it was only for a short while, had left an impression on her and the way in which she thought. Life there she thought, was easier, and she wanted to travel there and live there for a while before growing old in Saudi Arabia.

4.1.4. Dalya

Dalya was 20 years old during the time of the interview and described herself as “not a very social person” and as someone without many friends. She defined identity as “the personality of the self” and said that she expressed her identity “by
being who I am.” This expression was however something that she needed to be conscious about, saying: “Sometimes in school and with parents…sometimes when you talk to someone who has got control over you, with for example teachers you have to think of what you are going to do and say—be careful—also my parents, I have to respect them.” Dalya expresses that her identity expression is mediated in relation with an authority, “someone who has got control over you,” as to act respectful towards that authority. Her use of the word “careful” suggesting that not negotiating ones expression might have consequences.

Dalya had still not figured out what she wanted to do in the future and had not spent much time thinking about it, she was at the moment only focusing on completing her current studies. She had herself decided on what direction to take with her studies but still expressed that “at some point they [my parents] tell me what to do” and continued her reasoning saying: “Sometimes I really need their advice and ask them, but you know, sometimes, especially here in Saudi Arabia, some families tell their kids, their sons and daughters, what to work with or study. Like, I have to pick the right place, not a very crowded place and not a mixed place with both men and women, my parents really want me to get into a place that’s only for women.” Using the word “telling” when making her standpoint indicates the absoluteness within a discussion and the inability to negotiate with authority figures in certain cases. What her parents thought was also something that she carried with her when thinking about a possible place to work: “My parents are actually not letting me choose freely because they tell me not to work in certain places. Such as where there are both men and women working. Some of my friends have parents who are totally free and they can do whatever they want, they can work wherever. Some...(ehm)...some of them just want them to be doctors or engineers or something. Parents always want that, but I do not think that is only here in Saudi Arabia, but all over the world. But in the end it’s something that parents cannot control.” The reasoning showcases Dalya’s awareness of her own situation and how she places herself within a context. She is aware that her parents are not letting her choose freely, but she doesn’t go on to place any particular value in it, it seems as she has accepted the fact. She does however contrast her own situation with the situation of other young women in Saudi Arabia, some can do whatever they want whereas some are guided into choosing a particular path. She then goes on to theorize that this is something she
does not believe only happens in Saudi Arabia, hence putting the phenomenon in a global context drawing parallels to “all over the world” and claiming that it is something inherent within the role of being a parent. In the end however, she concludes that “it’s something that parents cannot control,” not in Saudi Arabia, where her parents try, or globally. The reasoning illustrates how Dalya frames herself within both a national and a global context.

Even though her parents influenced a lot of the choices that she made in life and what study path she had chosen she did not think that her values or ideas in life reflected what her parents or her friends thought, saying: “No, not my parents. Only me.” The very affirmative answer is interesting especially since Dalya also expressed that she thought her values might change in the future. “First of all I will get older and grow up more, also life is going to change, everything is going to change. My family, everything is going to change.” Dalya believed that her values in life changed as life changed, however, as she argued, “not in a very opposite way.” Indicating that she felt she already had a strong notion of a developed self. Nonetheless Dalya said that she had “never thought of” what she valued most in life, indicating that she had never explored why and how she may had or hadn’t committed to a certain moral framework. Dalya said that she could, if there was a need for it, express doubts about her values and religion freely even though some of her friends were afraid of doing so. “If they for example argue with their dads and say something opposite they might be cut off. And the other side, if they discuss with a teacher or try to convince them of something the teacher might cut their marks.” The fear of personal loss thus hindered them from speaking up to and facing authority when needed. Dalya called people who did spoke up brave and explained her own actions:

“That is just how I am. If the teacher does something wrong, I will try and convince her: ‘No teacher, this is the right way.’ I do not have a problem discussing things for five minutes, the others might say: ‘[Dalya], come on, just leave it, get on with it,’ but for me it’s important. Especially when I’m sure the teacher is teaching us something wrong, then I just have to.”

The segment illustrates to what extent Dalya felt secure of her convictions and almost obligated to share what she thought was the “right way.”

Something Dalya thought was wrong was when there was a difference between who someone said they were and who they were. This was however
something she believed everyone did calling it not a problem “only here.” Again indicating how she throughout the interview saw herself and her situation not only in a local but also a global context. Dalya however admitted to also acting in a different way than how she said she was, saying: “Sometimes yes. But I’m trying hard not to do that because I know it’s wrong, but sometimes I cannot control it.” When asked why she thought it was wrong, she answered: “Because it’s a lie. And then it’s wrong.” When then asked why she sometimes lied, even if she thought it was wrong, she answered: “Sometimes you need to lie to protect yourself. From like your parents so they don’t get angry. I call them white lies—cause no one gets hurt.” The act was hence committed in an attempt to protect the self, which is interesting in relation to her previous mention of having to negotiate expression. The white lies are necessary to recreate the identity that will be accepted by the authority and, in regards to her example, her parents.

On the phenomenon of posting pictures of body parts online Dalya said that a lot of girls were doing it and spoke about it with almost a feeling of resentment and shame: “In the Blackberry maybe, especially, not my friends, thank god…if they did I would kill them. Some people I’m not close to post pictures of like half of their face or a leg. Sometimes on Twitter or Facebook I see that. But I think this year they are getting better. So please…post your whole face or not at all.” She immediately distances herself and her surroundings from the phenomenon and the fact that she then jokingly says that she “would kill” any friend that partook in the activity highlights how seriously she views the deed. She does not know why young women do it and asks herself rhetorically if it is for fun and then goes on to tell a story about how getting caught might have repercussions.

“A story happened at my university. A year ago, I girl I knew took photos and then one other girl used these pictures and wrote very bad comments about this girl, that ‘she is a bitch.’ And if you see this girls face, seriously, she is a baby face. No one could believe what was written. All of us were really upset because it happened at our university. But we didn’t know who it was who had done it. If she would have written her name she would have gotten killed. But we all complained and they closed the Facebook, and I don’t know what happened if they found the girl who did it or not or if they sent her to jail or not. But the other girl…who did nothing…all of her teachers, said, ‘no way,’ ‘she is really good,’ but her family took her off school. So she is staying at home now, for not doing anything actually.”
The story tells of several different narratives. An anonymous source posted pictures of another girl online. Dalya clearly expresses that if it would have been known who the perpetrator was then Dalya believed that s/he would have gotten in to serious trouble and might had gone to jail or been killed. She also says that the young woman whom was shown in the pictures ended up being withdrawn from school by her family. Both of the narratives indicating just how severe this action is, even though, as Dalya, says in the final sentence, the girl who was featured in the pictures didn’t do “anything actually.” The conclusion also indicates a clear rift between how appalling Dalya initially finds the act when it is disconnected from her and her surroundings but then how, in reality, she doesn’t find the act itself deserving to be punishable to the extent it is when it is someone she knows who she thinks of as “really good,” that is affected.

Another interesting paradox within Dalya’s narrative is in regards to freedom of expression. Being more liberated in relation to speech was one of the changes Dalya saw within Saudi Arabian society, saying: “People can speak more freely now and in the future even more so.” This was also something she felt about Twitter, a tool that she used to communicate with the world. During the interview Dalya expressed that she believed that she could tweet about anything and that she did not self-censor, a statement interesting to contrast with her opinions in regards to the case with Hamza Kashgari.

1. **What do you feel about Hamza Kashgari?**
   Oh yeah….I felt really upset, because I love prophet Muhammad! I really do! And I felt upset about this person saying this about him…and I can’t believe he did this.

2. **What do you feel about his arrest? Should you not be able to tweet whatever?**
   No, I think it’s right he was arrested—It’s good. He cannot tweet anything bad about Muhammad. There is a red light! He can tweet whatever he wants, but just not bad stuff about like God or the prophet or just people or any prophets. I mean, if someone wrote bad stuff of Jesus you would get really upset right? Yeah so the same for us here with Prophet Muhammad. So, he deserved it.

3. **So you can tweet anything as long as it’s not ‘bad’ for Muhammad or Allah?**
   Yeah. I have to respect the people. I mean, yeah, I’m Muslim so, although I’m not allowed to say bad things about Jesus he is a prophet too. For some people is their God. It’s not like I’m gonna’ say: ‘No, he’s not a prophet or not a God,’ I’m not gonna’ say that…I have to respect it. “
Dalya’s first reaction is to explain that she is upset since she loves prophet Muhammad. The first perspective through which she answers the question is on the personal level and connected to her religious beliefs. She feels upset because she was offended. At the same time she expresses a sense of shock or disbelief in relation to the event. She “can’t believe he did this.” She then goes on to argue that not only is the arrest of Kashgari right, “it’s good.” She does not explain what it is good for, but seen in the light of the following statements it can be interpreted as good for setting an example. After talking specifically about Kashgari she moves on to use the indefinite pronoun “someone” instead of him, indicating that these are the rules that everyone should know and abide by.

In the next sentence she states an interesting paradox: “He can tweet whatever he wants, but just not bad stuff about like God or the prophet.” And since he did that, tweeted bad stuff, he, according to Dalya “deserved it.” Dalya hence does not seem to view the arrest of Kashgari as a complex event but rather a necessity in relation to the religious practices. Interesting to point to is also Dalya’s mention of the term “respect.” One of the reasons what Kashgari did was wrong was because he disrespected the prophet and in a latently expressed way, disrespected the religion. When reflecting upon this Dalya also turns the table back from the general into the specific and relates it to herself, “I have to respect it,” in a sense also capturing her own god-fearing-ness.

When talking about stereotypes and the image of the Saudi Arabian woman that’s perpetuated around the world Dalya had the following to say:

“People think that we wear like ninja all the time, even in our bedroom. No! We only wear it in front of men, I only cover my face in front of men. They always ask: ‘How do they get married? Do they know how the girl look before?’ Sometimes, some people think that we all have oil, they’ve asked me: ‘How many oil pumps do you have?’ or they think that we all are Bedouins living in the desert. But we do have everything here.

Another the thing they say that, the Saudi female, ‘she is unequal,’ ‘she can’t drive,’ ‘she has no control.’ This is not true at all. Men do drive, we don’t drive, but, I get my own driver. Also, my dad or brother takes me wherever I want. I don’t have to drive to go wherever I want. I am in control of my life. Many people think Saudi Arabia is a very different place. They really do believe that we are not in control. And it’s not true.

4. Are there sometimes when you feel like you don’t have control?
I think it happens for all of us. Even the men. And sometimes I really do need a man to fight for me.”
Dalya starts by rebutting the idea of the always-veiled woman and the discourse through which Saudi Arabia is most often framed within, with a focus on oil or as being traditionally backwards. She then goes on to articulate how she sees herself and the Saudi Arabian woman as a subject with agency, with control. An argument that she continues by saying that she thinks that not being in control sometimes is a non-gender based issue and then concludes that she sometimes “need a man to fight for” her. Even though Dalya expresses that she is in control of her life she does not further elaborate in what way she feels that she is control.

4.1.5. Fatma

Fatma was 23 years old during the interview and had never traveled outside Saudi Arabia. She expressed that she had already planned her life and did not necessarily plan on being a mother but wanted to work with charity and live in Kenya. She described herself as shy adventurer and as someone who would step up to the challenge if necessary, saying: “Maybe it’s a weird combination but this is who I am.” When on the topic of identity Fatma said that “there is an old theory saying that the soul is divided into three different types,” not knowing the name of the theory she, when she explored it further, described that she was talking about Freud’s id, ego and super ego, explaining: “I must give every single one of them its own rights and every single one got a duty to do. If I manage it well, I will show who I am, all my identities. I believe in this.” It is interesting to note how Fatma talks about “all my identities” indicating that she believes that her ego identity is made up out of several different building blocks in the shape of different identities. Fatma said that she expressed herself through interaction, saying: “You see me, you talk to me,” but also through her friends, saying: “Because I think that what kinds of friends I have translates for topics in myself. ‘Tell me who your friends are and it will tell us who you are’. ” She hence saw the expression as something that was created both by the self and with the self in relation to others. She also continued her reasoning and mentioned her family, her room and through “the things I believed in” as well as “through the photos that I take with my camera.” Fatma thus saw her expression as a multilevel and complex occurrence with both emotion and physical features.
Fatma described expressing herself out in the open as being on a battle field, saying: “I feel like I am a worrier, because from day one they said: ‘Stop what you are doing.’” With they she referred to the government and society in general and explained how the police several times had contacted her due to her public engagement within culture and arts. Fatma thus often felt that her expression was hindered in public space, saying:

“They said: ‘You are a girl, from Riyadh. Especially Riyadh. Eh, because you are a girl from Riyadh, you should just cover, hide and do nothing to express yourself.’ It is a huge mistake. ‘And if you want to, do it without showing your face or your name.’ And what I have done is showing my face, I am showing my name. So I was like a huge bomb, like ‘oh my God, what are you doing?’ Like I said, they tried to stop me, so many times.”

From her narrative it can be inferred how she’s felt under pressure to “hide,” “cover” and not express herself. Also how she has been encouraged to express herself in anonymity with a perceived veiled modesty if her expression was necessary. Being proud of one’s expression and expressing it bravely was according to Fatma something that was met with skepticism and shock.

This meant that she did not feel that she could always express herself freely and that there were things preventing her from expressing who she really felt she was: “I don’t want to hurt myself, and sometimes when I express myself, people might try to hurt me. Emotionally, but more importantly, physically.” Distinguishing between the two indicating the severity of Fatma’s expression. It also meant that she was scared that something might happen: “If you try to express yourself for real here in Saudi, probably they, someone, are going to threaten you. They threatened me via email, face to face, via writing letters. Eh. So I decided to take everything slowly.”

Fatma’s expression was very much connected to her belief that she had a message for people to hear.

“First of all, find yourself. Lots of people don’t know who they are. Because if someone knows himself, he will know why, for what, he is here in this life, what he should do. And I believe if you know what you should do, you will do a huge favor to yourself and the society and to the religion. So find yourself is my first and last message. Second, there is a lot of violence here. Terrorists or domestic violence. There are lots of husbands punishing their wives. And it is ok in this society. I say no, we should stop this violence, especially violence towards children.”
The fact that society is un-accepting was one of the reasons that Fatma believed people would subscribe to a different form of identity expression for example online than offline. “First of all, because of the community and the society we live in, they don’t accept them [the girls] as they are. So it’s kind of a way to express themselves. That’s why.”

She did however still find the phenomenon of young women posting pictures of themselves troublesome saying: “It’s very wrong. In fact I am fighting it a lot. If you want to show yourself just show yourself. This is my opinion. For example my family, as I said I am from different people, it’s ok for me to put the photo of my face and add it.” Fatma, just like the other girls, seem to react to the hyper sexuality and objectification of the act also saying that it is better to show your face than your body. She did however think that the young women covered their faces to protect “the family reputation.” Fatma expressed that there was a lot of young women doing it and that they sometime showed off with it, searching for validation within the group of friends. When she had asked girls about it she found their answers for doing it “weird” explaining: “I said: ‘Forget about the family. What about Islam, if you are Muslim.’ They said: ‘I am Muslim, that has nothing to do with this. I am just having fun, it’s ok.’” What Fatma found weird, she further explained, was that she was often considered a “bad girl” since she would show her face and that the girls reasoned that “if you didn’t show your face, you are a good girl, it’s ok, it’s fine.” The reasoning highlighting the complex dynamics that exist between the idea of good and bad as well as the societies perception upon the phenomena and the veiled woman. In a way it clearly illustrates the rift the Saudi Arabian young woman exists within, having and wanting to express a sexual desire, being influenced by globalized body ideals and perspectives upon the female body, but at the same time subscribing to a religious and national identity in which non-veiling or exposure of the sexualized female body is unacceptable.

Even though Fatma had suffered repercussions based on her expressions and opinions she said that she always received support from her family and throughout the interview emphasized that she felt that she was different from most people in Saudi Arabia. Fatma expressed that her parents during her upbringing had raised her and taught her what was right and wrong but that “now it’s my time to decide if it’s right or if it’s wrong, and they are just going to support me.” When deciding
what was right or wrong Fatma expressed that she collected input and then decided on her on path, explaining: “Everyone should have his own philosophy in life. Just to follow others is not fit to me. Just, if everybody gets on Facebook... it’s not me, why should I get one? I have my own world in my mind, and I coordinate, it’s like my own book. I got this book from people I like to follow—my parents and other role models. Parents, ex presidents, girls...popular or famous people, or even my friends and people I’ve met. I put it all together, the things they teach me, and I draw my own way.” This was also the way she reasoned when talking about values. Fatma believed that she shared her parents’ values, saying: “They convinced me somehow, without telling me what to believe. They taught me through lessons and experiences.” The fact that she viewed the world based on her own premises was something she argued made her different from her friends: “We might be from the same country, my friends and I, but it is a problem to me that I have to explain myself to them so much for them to understand me. Many of them are asking me why I think that way. I say that I believe that everybody should think that way. And they should do what I am doing. You should get your own opinions, not the opinions you get from your mom, that she got from your grandma. Because the world is changing. Technology is always updated and our thoughts should also always be updated. But they all try to stop me with their religion, especially Islam. And I say; if you really understand Islam, it is encouraging this thing, thinking, developing. Islam never said stop developing yourself. It says keep going, as long as it is good for the religion. If it is good for religion it is good for society, for the person.”

The fact that her parents were unusual and according to Fatma had “different thoughts” in comparison to her friends’ parents also meant that she felt that she was freer in her life in Saudi Arabia than other young women: “As a matter of fact, many of my friends told me they are jealous. Their families are going to stop them from doing certain things (...) But they did tell me that I am different, and being this different, I am not telling them, ‘Show off, be different,’ no, I encourage them: Be yourself, don't be like everybody else.” This was also something Fatma expressed in relation to religion. Unlike the other young women Fatma had studied several different religions and was not convinced that Islam was the best religion for her “to meet God.” Something her parents supported saying, as quoted by Fatma: “This is your choice, we are not going to force to you meet god in another way.” She then elaborated by explaining: “I am going to pray in my own way. It is probably going to be funky. This is my own way.” This was
however nothing that she would ever tell her friends. Something that also falls in line with Fatma saying how she often needed to censor herself.

Fatma believed that “people, education and economy” should work together to achieve development within Saudi Arabian society and argued that the man was most often favored in front of a court when it came to women’s right issues. When talking about which changes she wanted to see in regards to women’s rights she said:

“First of all the domestic violence. When a husband is punishing his wife, you cannot stop him. Unfortunately there are bad wives as well. When the husband is punishing his wife, the wife will punish the kids for no reason. Domestic violence is a huge problem here. Also our rights at work. For example sexual issues, you have no rights. When your manager does something he is right. Even if everybody knows that it is his fault, no, it will be your fault. Beside this, we don’t have enough jobs for girls. Most of the jobs are for men. This is a big issue. You might be surprised, yes; we care about the driving, but not that much anymore. We care about being covered, but not as much anymore. There are other things that are way more important to us.”

Perhaps it is interesting to let Fatma’s last statement talk for itself, the issues that tend to be highlighted in a western discourse, like being covered or being able to drive are not as important as fighting domestic violence, establishing oneself at the working market and being protected at work.

4.2. The EIPQ—Evaluating the Identity Development

As established earlier, Marcia’s four stages of identity development provide an additional prism through which the results from the conversations with the five young women will be seen. The four stages all provide interesting variables for analysis in relation to the young women’s identity development and expression.

After answering the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire, the levels of exploration and commitment that Ashra, Ameera, Nadia, Dalya and Fatma expressed placed them in different categories in relation to their identity development. The median scores, 59 for commitment and 60 for exploration, were used to determine the identity status of each respondent. Those respondents that scored above the median in regards to both variables were categorized as achieved whereas those who scored under were categorized as diffused. If a respondent had
scored above the median in relation to commitment but below in relation to exploration she fell into the category as *foreclosed* whereas she was categorized as in *moratorium* if the pattern was reversed. None of the girls fell into the category of diffusion which meant that they all showed high levels of commitment (C), exploration (E) or both.

Nadia (C=76, E=57) and Dalya (C=59, E=58) both fell into the classification of *foreclosure*, indicating that they had willingly committed to values and goals without experiencing an identity crisis and hence conformed to others expectations in regards to their future without exploring all the options. As Marcia (1966) theorized “it is difficult to tell where his parents’ goals for him leave off and where his begin. He is becoming what others have prepared or intended him to become as a child. His beliefs (or lack of them) are virtually ‘the faith of his fathers living still’” (p. 552). They have hence committed to an identity that have been handed to them by others. Something that Nadia also expresses herself when articulating how she has never ‘rebelled’ against her parents or questioned their beliefs but rather accepted them and made them her own.

Ameera (C=48, E=65) and Fatma (C=57, E=78) were both classified as having an identity in *moratorium*, which meant that they were currently in crisis and exploring different choices as well as roles and values without committing to any yet. In the words of Marcia (1966, p. 552) “the moratorium subject is in the crisis period with commitments rather vague; he is distinguished from the identity-diffusion subject by the appearance of an active struggle to make commitments. (…) Although his parents’ wishes are still important to him, he is attempting a compromise among them, society's demands, and his own capabilities.” Ashra (C=75, E=60) was the only one who fell into the category of *identity achievement*, which meant that she had gone through an identity crisis and then committed to a self-chosen identity. “An identity-achievement subject (…) has seriously considered several occupational choices and has made a decision on his own terms, even though his ultimate choice may be a variation of parental wishes. With respect to ideology, he seems to have reevaluated past beliefs and achieved a resolution that leaves him free to act” (Marcia, 1966, pp. 551)

It is however important to note and reflect upon how some of the young women fall just within the parameters of a certain category. Dalya’s commitment score, for example, matches the median leaving her almost falling under the
category of *diffusion*, in which the subject has not explored any choices nor committed to any. Likewise Ashra, with the same exploration score as the median, barely makes it into the classification of *achieved*. If the mean value instead of the median value had been used to define the categories then the two would have ended up in the different classifications.

The result of the EIPQ is then that most of the young women can be said to have less well-developed sense of self according to Marcia’s four identity statuses. The lack of or low levels of explorations are particularly interesting to reflect upon in the social setting that Saudi Arabia offers. As an authoritarian and sometimes totalitarian society it can be said to hinder the young women to freely experiment with their identity roles. Something that for example Fatma emphasizes in relation to her feelings of her expression being censored. Nonetheless Fatma was one of the girls who showed very high levels of exploration. She had however as she said experienced a lot of threat against her persona and conducted most of her exploration in private and without sharing it with anyone except her family. The fact that two of the young women fell under the status of *foreclosure* was also interesting within the structure that Saudi Arabia offers since Marcia’s own findings indicated that the “status’ most outstanding characteristic was its endorsement of authoritarian values such as obedience, strong leadership, and respect for authority” (Marcia, 1966, p. 558). In relation to the authoritarian state it can be argued that people if they are unable to question the identity that they are handed by authority, as subjects are unable to go through the identity crisis which both Erikson and Marcia deem as imperative for an individual to create a strong feeling of self. At the same time committing to values handed down by authority also retain the pre-existing normative structures and renders them static. The exploration as undertaken by Fatma and also by Ameera and Ashra thus becomes important since it challenges the structure within which the young women exist.

It is however important to note that the fact that a subject have internalized values as expressed by an authority, not automatically renders them conservative or anti-developmental and that the subjects who fall within the classification not should be understood as less successful in the endeavors of life.
5. Negotiating Identities

“Who am I and how do I express it?” The purpose of this paper was to present a perspective on how a handful of young Saudi Arabian women construct their identity and view their identity expression. When talking about the notion of identity there was a consensus that the self was made up by the choices you made and that identity was a dynamic process in continuous evolvement that occurred in relation with other people.

Providing narratives about how they felt about themselves, the world in which they lived and how they related to it, the women articulated perspectives upon the self that included an emotional, experience and rights-based approach. They saw themselves as subjects with agency and expressed a sense of self with great capacity. They imagined a future in which they would be active and contributing members of society, shaping the new tomorrow. All of the women argued that the cultural context they lived in was changing due to globalization. Both traditional and new media had changed the way in which they communicated with not only each other but also the world. As Ashra put it “media brought the cultures together in different ways.”

The young women all defined their expression in different ways but in general all manifestly or latently articulated how expression is a choice and that the expression is a way of continuously shaping ones identity. At the same time their understanding of expression and how they relate to their own and others is, as evident throughout the interviews, very complex. This is particularly evident in relation to their perspective upon freedom of expression when they voice ideas of freedom of expression but at the same time contradict themselves and limit the right to freedom regarding certain topics, as with regards to the case of Hamza Kashgari. When talking about the case Ameera does not provide her own analytical perspective but only recites what the constitution says, “it’s considered a crime” and expresses how Kashgari was aware of that what he did was a crime and that he should have known better. At the same time however, she defends her own right to speak, and says that: “We are equal, everyone should express what they want, what they have in mind,” clearly expressing basic ideas of freedom of expression. Ameera’s expression was however, even though she did not argue it
her self, also limited. Even though she did disagree to some aspects of the ruling family’s policy regarding social justice and equality she would never express the critique openly, fearing retribution. She also argued that even if she could say anything to her parents she could not and had no need to question her religion or her values. Ashra however felt the complete opposite and focused on both emotional and expressional freedom and said that she could articulate herself freely. However, the importance of mediating ones expression in relation to authority was also expressed by Dalya who said that it was imperative to be conscious about her expression and to always be respectful. Nonetheless Dalya said that she could express doubts about her values and religion freely even though her friends did not since fear of personal loss hindered them from facing authority. At the same time Dalya expressed that it sometimes was necessary to lie to protect the self. These white lies then reproduce an identity that will be accepted by authority, the image that is being upheld as the collective identity.

This in turn is interesting to relate to what Doumato argued: That “the idealized woman is a wife and a mother. Her place is within the family, ‘the basic unit of society’, and men are her protectors. Women who remain at home are the educators of children and the reproducers of traditional values” (Doumato, 1992, p. 33). But also as expressed by the young women as stereotypical gender roles, where women are expected to want to raise a family and by the lack of women in public spaces. An idealized image that none of the girls except Fatma challenged openly even though they hoped to challenge gender stereotypes in relation to working. Fatma was also the one who expressed that she had felt the most limited and even discouraged in regards to her expression, fearing both physical and psychological retribution and receiving threats.

From Doumato’s text it can be inferred that when women’s values change so does the traditions, and changing traditions and the changing of the woman as a traditional symbol threatens the kingdoms national identity. If the image of the ideal woman perpetrates the image of a homogeneous Islamic community, which, according to Doumato leads to the patriarchal family being sustained, then the image of the archetype Islamic woman is according to her necessary to maintain the collective state identity.

Besides being, as Doumato (1992) claims, framed in a discourse surrounding the ideal woman within Islam as wife and mother and “the reproducer of
traditional values” (p. 33) the women also create their identity through the way in which they feel that they are viewed by the world, through a Western mediated perspective, framed within an assumption of “otherness,” a globally traditional perspective through which she is seen as an subject without agency, framed within a discourse of victimization, or as they themselves express it, without control or prisoners. Images the women feel are perpetuated through the media, as Ameera argues: “It’s not only like what the media reproduce.” This is in turn interesting in relation to the theory as presented by Roth (2003) how an ascribed identity if perceived as negative paves way for the creation of an “anti-identity.” Since the women do not like the way in which their identity is perceived and reproduced within the west it can be said that they throughout the interview work hard to rebut it. Which in turn is interesting to see in the light that they throughout the interview look for confirmation in regards to this anti-identity and strives to be seen as free, liberated women. Something that almost becomes an absurdity in the case of Ameera when she in the final stages of the conversation utters, “It’s completely the opposite,” in regards to the stereotypical image and suddenly contradicts what she has been voicing throughout the interview concerning social justice, equality as well as possibilities for women and women’s rights.

At the same time the young women, through different channels such as traditional or new media, perspectives upon the female body and music, still subscribe to several aspects of Western culture within their personal identity, something that is manifested throughout the conversations. This is for example made apparent by Dalya’s reasoning and how she throughout the interview juxtaposes herself with both her national and global peers. And how Nadia relates it to the actions of her English teacher and how the friends/bodies in the teachers pictures were not sexualized objects and were not discussed in anyway besides being “fun” and how the teacher and her friends in reality was just like Nadia and her friends.

The young women are thus faced with the blurred lines of their personal, religious and national identity and during the conversations they latently distinguished between them. This is for example apparent when Ashra talks about covering her face, something she does in Saudi Arabia, but not abroad, hence separating her national identity based on tradition from her religious identity. This distinct representation of national identity is something that she subscribes to
when in Saudi Arabia but something she, unlike her religious identity that she has chosen, skips abroad. A distinction is also indirectly made by Nadia when describing how she creates her moral framework, based on her religious and national frameworks saying: “My religion of course. And people here, how they value things.”

These different identities that make up the ego identity could then be seen as more or less static. Nadia for example argued that she was continuously changing in regards to things she liked to do or people to be with whereas she had never felt to need to challenge or question her beliefs or values. The personal part of Nadia’s ego identity is thus dynamic whereas the religious framework or identity remains static.

The relationship between the individual and the collective or the dynamic between the individual and the structure can be seen in light of Bourdieu’s theories of *habitus*. Specially if we are to argue that the individual identity is being held back by the collective identity, as in the case of Fatma, and that this collective identity in turn is held up by existing social structure, which the fact that several of the young women had not explored what kind of identity they wanted to subscribe to and had committed to the one handed down to them by an authority indicates. Perhaps then it is interesting to note that Nadia could be considered one of the more “liberal” of the young women. She did not mind showing both her hair and face to non-kin men and believed that it would be possible to transform Saudi Arabian society and still remain religious. Nonetheless she was classified as foreclosed as showed the lowest levels of exploration. With the EIPQ in mind, it can be inferred that Nadia was liberal because her parents were liberal. She had not challenged their perspectives, not questioned their authority or critically evaluated their values as to shape her own. This relates to the social structures within Saudi Arabian society where individuals are not encouraged to explore different roles and options critically.

The content of the *habitus*—the conditions of existence—is dependent on the objectification of social structure to the individual subjectivity and is hence a reflection of the structural conditions in which it emerged. The individual action of developing and expressing a unique identity is then constrained by social structure in which culture and identity has been politicized. The image of the ideal woman then cannot be challenged in a society where the national identity as a
structure is totalitarian and authoritarian. As Fatima Mernissi so eloquently puts it in “Beyond the Veil” (1987): "Individuals die of physical sickness, but societies die of loss of identity that is, disturbance in the guiding system of representations of oneself as fitting into a universe that is specifically ordered so as to make like meaningful” (p. ix). The individual ego identity is hence hindered to sustain the collective identity of the society. The Saudi Arabian and religious culture and its expression dominate in regards to the individual’s culture since culture is the primary medium through which dominant groups can socially reproduce their values. These values are continuously perpetuated within the group when the young women choose to, or not to, commit to the group. Fatma, for example, sees herself as an out-group member, calling herself different, not wanting to define herself as a hundred percent Arabian—whereas Nadia during the conversation focuses on the normality of her actions within the setting and hence creates her identity through manifesting the ideas of self-verification (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 228) clearly articulating and reproducing her own place within the group that she has committed to which confirms what she believes about herself. Which in turn is also interesting in relation to how she, during the conversation, expresses the importance of belonging to a collective to shape character and build confidence. Nonetheless, these roles are changing, which the phenomena of posting revealing pictures online can is an indicator off since the young women who do post revealing pictures online challenge their role identity and expected group identity. This since the act of anonymously posing picture of the sexualized body online, creates an identity that differs from the socially, religiously and culturally constructed and projected identity. Especially seen in the perspective as experienced by Fatma when girls would tell her: “I am Muslim, that has nothing to do with this. I am just having fun, it’s ok.”

Even though girls might have told Fatma that they are just “having fun” the phenomenon is seen as an extreme expression. Nadia saw it as a reaction to the limitation that some young women faces such as not being able to show your face and all of the other young women argued that it would have been better for the girls to show their faces than their bodies, as Fatma boldly states: “If you want to show yourself just show yourself.” She is however aware of the fact that the women do cover to protect their family’s reputation. All the girls clearly distance themselves and the people in their surroundings from the phenomenon. But
Dalya’s narrative in regards to a young woman whose pictures became public indicates the complexity of the case. On the one hand she does find the act appalling when it is disconnected from her and her surroundings. On the other hand she does not find the act itself deserving to be punished to the extent it is when it is someone she knows who has gotten in trouble who she considers as “really good.”

The expression is openly not accepted within the group but it is still occurring. The group members are thus beginning to change, however, the group itself has not yet begun to change which creates a rift between the outside identity of the group, the discourse in which it reproduce itself and how its members reproduce it in practice. The phenomenon can hence be seen as an indication towards the schism that exists between the discourse that surrounds the female Muslim identity in the publish sphere and the actual, diverse, ego identity of young Muslim women. It can also be seen, as argued by journalist Nadia Al-Fawaz (2012), as a way to liberate oneself from the imposed social restrictions and thus the collective identity.

Perhaps the phenomenon of young women posting revealing pictures online is best understood when juxtaposed with the concept of the identity status moratorium. Both Ameera and Fatma fell into the category, none of them expressed that they felt that they could express themselves freely and their crisis was not encouraged within the boundaries of their existence or social structure. The moratorium is a state of crisis and is where liberation and emancipation can occur. However, in the context of Saudi Arabia where the exploration and expression cannot occur out in the open or in the traditional public sphere the expression takes place anonymously. Anonymity then, offers an interesting paradox, namely the freedom to express and explore different expressions and roles. Online and anonymous the subject, or the user, can decide freely which identity to embody, portray and how to express it, something that opens up for the otherwise difficult exploration. At the same time though, the anonymity perpetuates the already existing structure and the public image of the young Saudi Arabian woman, which is interesting in relation to the semiotics of the abaya. By wearing an abaya the Saudi Arabian woman is un-identified in the public sphere, this un-identification is continued by remaining anonymous online. On the same note it is important to acknowledge that the online identity cannot move past the
constraints of the offline world. It can serve as an escape and does provide an opportunity to express but the expression can never be truly free since it requires anonymity out of fear for repercussions. Even online the individual expression is hence held back by the social, cultural and religious constraints that exist in reality.

So what does this mean in relation to the divergence between the expressed individual identity: this is what I do, and the expressed expected, structural identity reproduced by the collective identity: this is what I say I do. Bourdieu would argue that this discrepancy, between the particularities of life and the generality of how something is classified, is inevitable and constant (Friedland, 2009, p.889). There can never be a complete agreement between who I claim to be and who I actually am. What he also argues though is that this gap between habitus and the institutional structure is what makes critical social movement, change and creative agency possible. Perhaps this dynamic that forces people to explore new expressions can thus be seen as a force that drives change. The new way of expressing identity hence becomes a way of expressing a will for change of the collective identity and the structure—as the habitus changes so must the social structure surrounding it.

The women thus construct their ego identity as a form of negotiation through the prisms of religious and national belonging as well as individual expression. This negotiation can in turn indicate transformation. As the different identities merge through the synthesis of the “we” and “me” the conflict pushes for change.
6. Conclusion

The conclusion of this paper is that the five young Saudi Arabian women construct their ego identity through negotiation. Further on, the creation of a synthesis, between the collective identity and the personal identity, which both make up the ego identity, has the potential to transform the structure in which they exist. The young women’s negotiation is unavoidable in the complex society where their expression and development takes place. The discrepancy within society between the private and the public, between words spoken and actions committed and between the individual and the collective also exists within the individual and is a symptom of the changes that are occurring. It is interesting to mention what Ameera says about Saudi Arabia, that it is a country that “holds religion with both hands.” It will be interesting to see how the country can do that and still have something to grasp the globalization, that all the young women speak about, with. It is becoming impossible for the country to distance itself and its population from international influences. The young Saudi Arabia will not be content with the reality of their forefathers, but at the same time they do not want to abandon their tradition or religious values. Further research in regards to how this development will take place would be interesting, likewise a more in-depth study of how young Saudi Arabians living in Saudi Arabia view their future.

At the same time it is also important within the conclusion to further problematize the phenomenon of the young women posting revealing pictures online. Even if it is challenging their role identity and expected group identity, from a feminist perspective it is important to not haste and label it liberation. This since the idea of liberation through self-objectification online only solidifies the sexualization and objectification of women in the public sphere. It might be liberation from one sexually objectifying environment but at the same time cementing the perspectives upon the female body within another. This would of course also be an interesting topic to explore further within the context of Saudi Arabia and the veiled female body, the discourse that it carries and what role it has in creating an identity.
References


