

The “IT” Girls of Arabia: Cybercultured Bodies, Online Education,
and the Networked Lives of Women at a University in Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation analyzes transformation in early 21st century educational practice through the lens of information technology (IT) use at a private, women’s university in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Academic and extracurricular Internet use, which is enabled through ubiquitous mobile devices, students’ attitudes toward information and communication technology (ICT), and the nature and purpose of their activities in social network sites (SNS) will be discussed alongside critical analysis of peer-to-peer teaching and learning in relation to knowledge production and educational practice. Richly ethnographic discussion delves into emerging global education paradigms that are (re)configuring the experience of women’s higher education in Saudi Arabia and influencing women’s participation in public, economic, and political spheres from which they might have been previously excluded. This dissertation also seeks to engage bigger questions about young people’s intimate relationships with ICTs and the nuances of the networked spaces in which they experience life online as students and citizens coming of age as members of the digital generation.

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² Al-Noor is the pseudonym I use throughout this dissertation for the university where I conducted my research. All

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Leigh Llewellyn Graham
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated with my deepest gratitude to the young women who brought the meaning of *ta'deeb* to life for me. *Ta'deeb* is an Arabic word for education that evokes the social, performative, and adaptive essence of education. A student possessing *ta'deeb* understands *life as a performance*. She is an agent, artist, and engineer in terms of her education. She makes choices informed by cultural acumen, wisdom, and passion. The young women who opened their everyday lives to me as a researcher and welcomed me as a friend are the embodiment of *ta'deeb*. I learned a great deal about life from them.

Preface

Technologies that Kiss ‘n Tell

Popular perceptions of what Internet users do online in developing world contexts are often skewed by inaccurate assumptions that usage is based exclusively on economic or political motivations, rather than relationships, curiosities, or pleasure pursuits. Scholars looking at Information and Communication Technology (ICT) use and international development challenge the traditional conceptual divide between labor and leisure (Dijk & Hacker, 2003; Burrell, 2008; Arora, 2011). As an alternative, Arora (2011) envisions a new relationship in the digital age whereby labor and leisure are linked together as a modern “power couple.”

It was Malak’s 19th birthday and her friends brought cupcakes to celebrate. I was hanging out in the campus café, snuggled into an orange IKEA chair with my feet propped up on a lime green ottoman. I had my laptop across my thighs and my notebook and pen in my hands. I was looking around, jotting things down. Malak and her friends noticed me and invited me to join them. I put down my notebook and walked over, leaving my laptop and bag on my seat. I felt slightly uneasy abandoning my computer. I would never abandon my computer or purse in a public place back home in New York City, not even on my own university campus. Having been on al-Noor’s campus in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, for several weeks by then, however, I felt secure that nobody would steal my things while I was nearby and had it in my line of vision. I did, however,

bring my phone with me. The thought of leaving it behind never even occurred to me. I held it in my hand.

They formed a circle, in the middle of which was a low table covered with cupcakes, soda cans, phones, and laptops. Several women had phones in their hands as they gestured and talked—not using the phones, just holding them.

When one student passed me her iPhone and asked me to kiss it, I blushed but took the device from her hand in into mine. It came across as an offer of inclusion in that moment, and I didn't want to miss it, so I held her phone and said, "Do what with?" Kiss it?" "Yes, kiss it!" They all encouraged me and giggled. I was utterly perplexed, but I played along, as the following excerpt from my field notes elaborates:

Some of my students were playing this app "Kissing Game" on their iPhone and they had me play too. We were literally kissing the iPhone . . . The first girl got a rating of "school girl kiss." The phone said "you need practice." Second girl got "monkey lips." It told her she needed practice too. Then they pushed the phone to me and said "kiss it! Come on, please." I just gave it a quick kiss but it said "sizzling" and the screen blinked red, followed by the words "someone call the Fire Department—this kiss is hot." The girls were absolutely dying of laughter. I turned bright red, mortified. I said it must be because I am married so I get more practice. I think it is more likely that it runs on some kind of random loop until you eventually get all possible responses, but I can't say for sure. (Excerpt from fieldnotes, 2 November 2010)

Slightly embarrassed but thoroughly engaged, I asked for further explanation. The students told me that it was a game called, "The Kissing Test," an iPhone app available on iTunes. I was new to the concept and use of apps, so they told me how they work and which were the most popular.

A few of the young women showed me the faces of their iPhones and we browsed their apps together. Most had dozens of colorful squares covering a few pages, but others seemed to have hundreds, page after page after page. As I watched, a couple of the

women added the kissing app we had just played, which took them only a few minutes to download to their phones. The app names were unfamiliar to me, so I asked, “What does this mean? What does this one do?” and they patiently led me through the wonderland of apps. There were word games, math games, and puzzles, as well as a significant number of educational apps, mostly with a language focus, such as an English-Arabic dictionary. Most of the women had apps that allowed them to record something and play it back in funny voices, which was made possible by sound-modification software. They thought it was especially funny to hear my modified voice because I had an “American accent” to begin with, and had me say “happy birthday,” which they played back in high-pitched and slow-warped speeds. It was pretty funny, I admitted.

A student then shocked me by playing a longer clip of a recording that also sounded like my voice. It was indeed my voice, without any sound modification, though I hadn’t just said the words I was hearing. I listened with a furrowed brow, the confusion apparent on my face. “Is that me?” I asked. The student gave me a guarded smile and then they all burst into laughter. She explained that it was my lecture from class. She had recorded it. “Why?” I asked. She said she often recorded them and had them in a file on her computer and her phone; she usually erased them after she listened to them at home.

I was not sure how to feel. Initially, I felt embarrassed. My knee-jerk reaction was to feel possessive of my voice, my words, and my thoughts. The anthropologist in me silently admonished her for not getting my informed consent before recording me. After a moment, though, I processed the situation and was thrilled that this young woman cared enough and took the initiative to really listen to what I said in class. I congratulated

her: “Good for you.” This led to a confession that many students do not understand everything their professors say in class because teachers talk too quickly and have such varying English accents. Words sound different when different people say them, and students whose first language is not English struggle to understand.

I learned that the students sometimes sit in the café together after class, re-listening to a lecture on a mobile device. This option gave them a kind of permission to drift during class. If they recorded it, they knew they could hear it all again if they wanted, at a pace they could actually understand, so they did not pay full attention to the real-time lecture.

The same was true of the students’ dependence on PowerPoint slides. Some students came to lectures late, sometimes with only five minutes left to sign the attendance sheet, and then asked if the lecture would be posted on blackboard, the university’s online information system. If they could access the information online, at their convenience, and when they are in the mood, there was less incentive to sit in the classroom and listen to a professor who might be boring or difficult to understand. Working together to decode confusing words and voices, and helping each other figure out what the teacher was saying, was almost like a game to them. They sipped coffee or soda and listened to lectures, sometimes stretching or speeding up the teacher’s voice for fun, but they were making an effort that was not required of them. The upshot was that they use Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) during leisure time to retrieve what they missed in the classroom.

Conceptualizing leisure and labor as allies rather than adversaries in learning updates the construct and makes it available to digital anthropologists and online

ethnographers, such as myself, who are looking for a practical, conceptual framework to better understand young people's relationships with ICTs. Today, questions about what constitutes leisure instigate robust debate about health, ethics, work, the workday, and workspace

Through critical examination of their typical and nuanced online activity, an authentic narrative emerges of how the Internet sometimes contributes to self-awareness, personal development, and desired outcomes—and, at other times, leads to economic and political benefits that have a broader impact on their families and society. Through this ethnographic work, I present personal stories of university students' intimate relationships with ICTs that are silenced by the dominant media narrative of the Internet as a tool for protest in the Arab world.

When we de-exoticize the Western gaze on Internet usage in developing markets and non-democratic contexts, our eyes are open to see the rest of the world's peoples as innovators, players, participants, and agents online (Hansson & Mozelius, 2010). If we allow stories of everyday life to reshape and diversify our image of female university students in Saudi Arabia beyond the oppressed Muslim woman paradigm, as Abu-Lughod (2013), Adely (2012) and Mir (2014) suggest, we gain valuable insights into how women all over the world use technology to strategize and succeed. It is helpful to define leisure as more than a vestige of the Puritans' demonization of carnal pleasure, and to extend it beyond the late 18th century industrial-era mindset that framed it as a reward for ethical work (Arora, 2011, p. 2). By incorporating Arora's approach to leisure, and adopting a similar lens through which she presents Internet use in rural India, this dissertation shows how university women in Saudi Arabia are reimagining education and

activism by weaving the dramas, passions, and dreams of their everyday lives into a coming-of-age narrative in the digital world.

In this dissertation, I show young women attending a university in Saudi Arabia working and playing with prescribed ways of knowing and being as well as engaging in acts that disfigure social and cultural norms in order to express themselves. They are much like their generational counterparts around the world. Through new modes of educational engagement and knowledge production, they push physical and ideological boundaries in new directions that challenge existing paradigms of dominance, have the potential to shift incongruent power relations, and may eventually transform global political and economic systems.

Chapter 1

EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

“Education is life itself.”

-John Dewey

New Players on a New Field in an Old Game

This dissertation is about transformation in contemporary educational practice. In it, I argue that the Internet plays an indispensable role in educational transformation in the 21st century. I will make this argument by looking at how a group of students attending al-Noor University for Women in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, incorporate so-called new technologies into their educational experiences on campus and online.¹

Today, education remains a social and political process, a public and private act, and a social and individual experience. The kind of contemporary educational practice that is the focus of this dissertation is not confined to leather-bound books with paper pages, and brick-and-mortar classrooms or community centers. Today, education is happening online.

The Arabic language has three words for education: *ta'leem*, *tarbiya*, and *ta'deeb*. The closest synonym to formal education, *ta'leem*, comes from the root *'alima*, which

¹ All names of people and the university where I conducted research have been changed to maintain confidentiality. All excerpts from participants Facebook/Twitter post are original text without edits.

means to know or perceive, be aware of, or learn. It implies the acquisition of intellectual or scientific knowledge. *Tarbiya* comes from the root *raba* and means to increase, grow, or to rear. Finally, *ta'deeb*, from the root *adaba*, means to refine culturally or to be well mannered. It is associated with behavior rather than formal schooling and suggests one's ability to decode social situations and appropriately adjust to the context. To possess *ta'deeb* is to understand *life as a performance*, to know your audience and play your part well. *Ta'deeb* is a particularly relevant concept in online education as the Internet presents users to a global audience.

The performers discussed in this dissertation are a group of young women attending university in Saudi Arabia. Their audiences are not only the educators, friends, and family they see in their everyday lives with whom they listen to lectures, kiss on the cheeks, and hold hands. They engage with and perform for the countless individuals and communities they encounter on the Internet, with whom they learn and experience life in very real ways, though they may never know their real names, see them *in vivo*, or touch them in the flesh.

Dewey's philosophical assertion, "Education is life itself," underpins the theoretical framework of this dissertation; therefore, I approach the Internet as a space where life happens, so education lives and grows. Gregory Starrett (1998) has pointed out the multiple functions and influences of schools:

Like other institutions, religious and educational ones fill not only a social need but a social space. They take on a very real life of their own with interests, dynamics and potentials that are only incompletely determined by the intersection of the forces that brought them about. (p. 288)

Scholars concerned with the relationship of technology and education have argued in both directions as to the role the Internet plays in the shift from institution to individual as the locus of educational practice. I agree with Starrett, and in this dissertation, I will push his argument further to claim that the Internet fills a social need as well as a social space.

Universities are geographically, historically, and politically situated institutions that bring together myriad resources, ideologies, pedagogies, and personal experiences from which students mediate meaning, develop sensibilities, and begin to imagine themselves as agents in the social, cultural, economic, and political world. This is a rather thin description of the role of universities in students' education. A much thicker description will follow.

Proliferation of education space and new forms of educational practice are promoted in part through the diffusion of information and communication technologies (ICT), and embodied in members of the digital generation. Emerging anti-academic learning styles, peer-to-peer produced knowledge, decentralized authority, and valorization of open access to information characterizes contemporary educational transformation. Educators and scholars alike argue about the role of the Internet in shifting educational norms, from institutional power to individual prowess, as the locus of educational practice. I argue here that the Internet plays an essential role.

Since the late 1990s, scholarly literature in media studies and the anthropology of education have addressed generational cohorts by specific names, linking them to new technologies that are rapidly becoming their constant companions in all aspects of life, including friendship, family, love, leisure, education, and employment. The literature review in Chapter II will address this further.

From the outset, however, it is important to highlight the gap in scholarly writing about the use of digital technology among young women in the Middle East, in general, and among young women attending universities in the Middle East, in particular. There is a striking dearth of research that examines women's use of information and communication technologies and social network sites for educational purposes in non-Western contexts. In this dissertation, I aim to fill that gap and will present students at a women's university in Saudi Arabia as savvy Internet users, curious learners, and skilled agents in an evolving world.

The primary question I raise in this dissertation on contemporary educational transformation is how students at al-Noor use the Internet, which they access through use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), and participate in through Social Network Sites (SNS) in their educational experience as university students in Saudi Arabia. This question reinvents the timeworn question of transformation in educational practice across time and space in a new way, by asking innovative questions and applying novel techniques to examining the longstanding phenomenon of social interaction that leads to learning.

My primary unit of analysis is the relationship (or social interaction) between students and "the Internet." By placing students' social interaction with the Internet at the forefront and examining it as an authentic relationship in diverse circumstances and locations, I present a new view of education *through* technology, as opposed to education *and* technology. Researchers are able to observe and analyze social interaction between individuals and the Internet both online and offline (Miller & Slater, 2000; Ito et al., 2010; Arora, 2010; boyd 2014). I observed this relationship offline by following a group

of students on campus and observing and asking questions about their ubiquitous use of technological artifacts. The broad category of technological artifacts includes mobile devices such as the phones, tablets, and laptops. I followed the same group of students online by being co-present and observing (or, rather, “lurking” around) their real-time activity and participation in SNS, namely Facebook. In addition, I collected data from Twitter and personal blogs. Ultimately, this dissertation shows a group of tech savvy and highly cosmopolitan women from various countries, attending university in Saudi Arabia, at work and play in the global social mediascape.

Scholars of media ecology approach the Internet as both a communication context and an environment. I incorporate this approach to avoid the troublesome question of whether the Internet is a place, a space, or a tool. Janet Sternberg’s *Misbehavior in Cyberspace* (2012) was the first book I read that offered a familiar sense of the journey a researcher undertakes when she begins to move between offline and online contexts. She approached “communication contexts as environment” and learned to pay attention to “conditions of attendance in communication environments, conditions such as co-presence in time and space (or the lack thereof)” (1963, p. xvii). Sternberg’s work, which is inspired by Goffman’s *Behavior in Public Places* (1963) and Meyrowitz’s *No Sense of Place* (1985), highlights the shifting balance within a culture’s communication environment that occurs when new media appears on the scene. In alignment with this thinking, I examine how the introduction of the Internet on a college campus alters the university culture and influences student behavior.

Anthropology of media scholars argue that the Internet is neither “monolithic” nor a “placeless ‘cyberplace’” (Miller & Slater, 2000). It is an assemblage of tools, peoples,

and environments. In their seminal work, *The Internet* (2000), Miller and Slater describe the Internet as “numerous new technologies, used by diverse people, in diverse real-world location” (2000, p. 1). Working with Miller and Slater’s concept of Internet, in all its complexity and possibility, we can understand that the Internet is an uneasily defined and mobile cyberspace where each user is a cartographer and curator of her cyberself. The Internet is a networked, digital terrain that we continually populate with our words and ideas, rather than with physically reproduced and reproducing bodies. It is not quite “virgin territory,” though. Social differences associated with our bodily selves and drawn along racial, gendered, religious, and national lines are both challenged and reified online. The Internet is a gateway to the cyborg.

Donna Haraway said, “I’d rather be a cyborg than a goddess.” Her words harness the powerful image of women in relation to freedom, technological innovation, and human evolution. Indeed, while the goddess is honored and adored for her firm virtue and fixed beauty, the cyborg is a shape-shifter and a dislocator. She plays with physical limits and pushes ideological boundaries beyond recognition until they reach the precipice of our human imaginations. The cyborg’s glory and potential immortality is located in her ability to bridge fractures and adapt to evolving environmental conditions. She breaks and rebuilds the law. She is misaligned and messy—even a little scary because she distorts the contours of cultural values and normative practice. By going online and disfiguring the traditional female role, students at al-Noor University and universities elsewhere in the world are adapting to and embodying the spirit of the digital age. In the tradition of critical feminist theorists (Butler, 1990, Haraway, 1991; de Beauvoir, 1952; Mohanty, 1986), this dissertation challenges grand narratives that form

“woman” as a unitary category by challenging false explanations that offer a sense of universality when students’ selves are actually contingent on their specific contexts, personal histories, and subjectivities. Just as Haraway’s cyborg obliterates borders, leaving the bonds of nation, ethnicity, and gender like rubble in her wake, the university women in this study transcend national boundaries offline, because they hail from several different countries, as well as online, where they selectively associate themselves with ethnic, nationalist, and religious groups for personal, perhaps even strategic, purposes. The diversity of their selective association processes is so broad and complex that no pattern is discernable from the limited research conducted for this dissertation. It is, however, clear that the university women in my study are unlike the Trinidadian Internet users in Miller and Slater’s study, among whom “the most striking characteristic” is the manner in which the proliferation of one’s online personal identity is “subsumed within the sense of being Trinidadian” (2000, p. 105). In stark contrast to Miller and Slater’s observations, the online personal identities of the university women in my study are in no way (that I observed or heard of) subsumed within a sense of being Saudi. Questions related to how online activity and identity are global phenomena that cross borders are the crux of anthropological inquiry as to commonalities and differences in human lived experience around the world today. This dissertation provides a glimpse into the multiple and complex ways that a group of women at a university in Saudi Arabia make sense of what it means to be educated and engaged in the world today.

The young women in this study are attending university and coming of age with digital technology in Saudi Arabia, much as young people are doing in other parts of the world. In this dissertation, I do not attempt to cover the broad range of issues related to

life in Saudi Arabia nor do I attempt to present a generalizable Saudi educational experience. The dissertation is a place-based ethnography conducted at a moment in time, which provides relevant context and ethnographic data on participants' educational experiences as university students in Saudi Arabia. We cannot generalize about Saudi Arabia or women in Saudi Arabia from this study. The women who are the subjects of this study are, for the most part, practicing Muslims who live and go to school in Saudi Arabia; however, they represent a diverse group of individuals from several cultures, countries, and continents. They also represent a range of religiosity through their different religious behaviors and individual expressions of religious identity. Participants are not all Saudi citizens, nor are they all Arabs. I present further personal details about selection of research participants and group sampling in Chapter 3.

Through extensive engagement with ICT and SNS, everyday Internet users, including students at al-Noor, become voyagers, inventresses, and innovators with multiple opportunities to experience new places, (re)create new lived experiences, and (co)produce new knowledge. Thus, they go beyond the paradigm of education and technology and create a new category—a 21st century student who embodies education through technology.

Not Quite Virgin Territory

The Internet is more than two decades old, and it continues to be a rapidly evolving social, economic, political, and cultural communication environment where people live, learn, work, play, and love. Though it has outgrown its infancy, it remains

both revered and feared for its “novelty.” Indeed, it is new and consistently renewing in the unprecedented forms and frequency of communication it facilitates, but it has been around for more than half a century, and debates about its emancipatory promise versus its incarcerating potential are nothing new. It is still touted as novel in mainstream media, perhaps indicating a need for increased awareness of the history of technology and the need for media literacy, although these issues are outside the realm of this dissertation.

Naivety about the origins and extend of Internet use is widespread and has been a source of embarrassment for average citizens walking down the street, as well as classroom teachers and public figures. High profile government leaders who are not tech savvy and up-to-date on the digital generation’s easy flow between online and offline environments have recently come under fire. On the other hand, politicians who know how to harness the power of new media and reach voting members of the digital generation win elections, as has been suggested in the case of Barack Obama. Education is not the only public institution that struggles to get its footing where the Internet is concerned. Governments make both elegant strides and missteps. There are successes and failure in both sectors. In July 2013, in a joint press conference with U.S. President Obama, German Chancellor Angela Merkel referred to the Internet as “Neuland”—literally, an “uncharted territory”—in response to a question about early reports of the U.S. National Security Agency’s PRISM scandal. Specifically, Merkel said the Internet is “new or uncharted territory for all of us.” Her statement immediately became the target of online ridicule and spawned a widespread Internet meme. The hashtag, #Neuland, began

trending on Twitter within minutes of her statement. Humorous pictures and gifs poking fun at Merkel began circulating thereafter. In some, Merkel appeared as a luddite or “Internet granny,” with expressions of cluelessness and wonder on her face. Others depicted her as a futuristic imperialist in a sleek silver body suit, with a German flag in her hand, ready to stake her claim on the new world.²

The upshot of this incident was that daily Internet users, particularly those who identify as members of the digital generation, do not consider themselves pioneers in a strange new world. The Internet is part of young people’s lives today. Those who grow up with it as part of their everyday lives embrace it with skill, comfort, and curiosity—which is not to say that they do not also experience trepidation or fear *on* the Internet or *of* the Internet. Merkel’s comment and the swift, spirited response it elicited from different online sites all over the world, demonstrate a lack of policy-level awareness of the nature and extent of young people’s Internet use. Policy makers in foreign relations, education development, and economics need to better understand the intimacy that young people share with ICTs, not only the ways that the Internet enables communication and commerce, but also the similarities and differences in ways that young people around the world work, play, love, and learn online.

ICT’s transformative effect on contemporary educational practice has not been unpredictable. Educational innovations from the abacus in the 4th century B.C.E., to the iPad in the 21st century, have influenced teaching and learning in communities around the

² Comments included here on the Merkel incident are taken from a blog post I wrote. For further details, see: <https://blogs.law.harvard.edu/internetmonitor/2013/07/17/neuland-or-nowhere-land-reflecting-on-evanescence-immortality-and-internet-memes/>

world throughout human history. Novelty is relative, however, and when a new gadget arrives on the scene it has the power to allure and enthrall as well as to alarm. So-called “new” technologies are integrated increasingly into the daily practice of life, of which learning is an essential component. We struggle to balance technology’s potential to enhance enjoyment and bring positive transformation with our fears that it will distract and divide us or eventually dominate us. Collective relationships with tools of communication that are also tools of production situate various groups throughout human history on an artificially imposed developmental spectrum that ranges from primitive to advanced or modern.

Narrow and fixed developmental paradigms set forth by modernization theorists and the push toward neoliberalism in education are being broadened and blurred today with the explosion of new technologies. Previous skewed paradigms are countered through persuasive alternatives emerging from the experiences and imaginations of marginalized groups including women—especially women in non-Western contexts. This dissertation offers examples of the many new narratives that persuasively criticize previous paradigms. Yet alternative paradigms are not heard often enough. Attempting to understand development and modernity must go beyond simply pitting the technophiles against the technophobes. Education and technology are both processes and products embodying a multiplicity of values and goals. Debates on education and technology as independent or relational phenomena are becoming increasingly polarized and often play out in the policy arena between politicians, organized interest groups, and privileged stakeholders such as corporations, without perspectives from users about motivation, access, and everyday experience with ICTs.

Acknowledging Knowledge and Navigating Novelty

Diversity is the heart of the flourishing global tech industry and its users are the flesh and bones that bring it to life. This makes ethnography an apt methodology for locating and revealing the nuances of people's experiences with education and technology.

With increasing access and skills, university students are engaging in use and (mis)use of ICTs that disrupt and challenge predictable trends in higher education. (Mis)use can be a gateway to creativity and innovation. However, there is a dearth of academic research, particularly ethnography, that delves deeply into the relationship between individuals who use or misuse technology, and positive economic or social outcomes. There is a global crisis in higher education that is compounded by a lack of understanding as to how, when, and why students use ITCs to teach and learn. More information on the nature and outcomes of students' relationships with techno-artifacts, online learning practices, and a deeper understanding of young people's networked lives is needed to make sense of the trajectory of the global higher education landscape.

Connectivity, sharing, and co-creating are key components of the Internet, which was designed to connect people to other people, ideas, and information online and offline. The offline consequences of online connectivity depend on specific social, political, economic, and cultural conditions. Human societies are interacting with new technologies at an unprecedented—and, some say—at an exponential rate. Feelings of enchantment and foreboding simultaneously characterize users' attitudes and experiences all over the world, but big data or research on feelings and attitudes does not tell us about

the local or global consequences of ICT and SNS in specific societies. Consequences depend on how, why, and by whom new technologies are used. There is also a considerable degree of variation among user groups at different stages of life and in different contexts.

Techno-optimists believe human ingenuity is translatable to binary code and can be imprinted on molecular-scale substrates. To them, technology is “us,” an extension of our humanity [Shlain, 2011]. High-speed communication, information technology, nanotech, biotech, and digital power are all materializations of human intelligence. Young people are among the most optimistic technology users (Turkle, 1995, 2005, 2011; Gershon, 2012; boyd, 2014). There are even claims that youth around the globe are defined by the technologies they use: “Conventional wisdom about young people’s use of digital technology often equates generational identity with technological identity” (Ito et al., 2010).

Research Approach

As stated above, this dissertation is about transformation in contemporary educational practice. It is an ethnographic portrait of educational practice over a certain period in time, specifically the last year of the first decade of the 21st Century (2010) and the first year of the second decade of the 21st Century (2011).

I approach this moment in history as a significant threshold and a moment when enigmatic technologies previously accessible to niche markets, such as governments, military and medical research labs, were finding their ways into mainstream commercial markets and the lives of average technology users. Computers and Internet accessing

mobile devices were being incorporated into people's everyday lives as "new technologies." People's relationship with tools dates back to prehistory, as do acts of education. Education is today, as it has forever been, a social and political process involving people and tools.

The primary problematic of this dissertation reinvents and reinvigorates timeworn questions about transformation of educational practices across time and space in a new way, by asking innovative questions and applying novel techniques to the examination of the longstanding phenomenon of human interaction in teaching and learning environments. Furthermore, I extend traditional queries about educational practice to online environments and ask how the Internet, as a space where education happens, is shaping students' social, economic, and political lives offline. Analysis of the relationship that students have with the Internet serves as a lens through which we may observe shifting boundaries and realignments in the global higher education landscape. I present a new view of education through technology at a women's university in Saudi Arabia that locates educated, curious, and tech-savvy Muslim women at work and play in the global social mediascape.

The relationship that I analyze throughout this dissertation was observable offline through student behavior in classrooms and in leisure spaces on campus, including their ubiquitous use of techno-artifacts, which connected students to each other and granted them access to the Internet. The category of techno-artifacts is one that continues to expand as new technologies come on the scene. In this dissertation, the term includes mobile devices such as the phones, tablets, and laptops. The relationship between students and the Internet is also observable online through students' real-time activity and

their participation in SNS, namely Facebook, Twitter, and personal blogs. A two-pronged research question I subsequently ask is how students' technological curiosities and choices recast the traditional role of the university in society and reshape educational practice as we know it. While we cannot predict what the global higher-education learningscape will look like generations from now, historical accounts of students' and universities' adaptations to change can be useful to educators and policy makers in the future. I argue that the introduction of the Internet signifies a key moment in contemporary educational transformation that impacts the internationalization of higher education and knowledge production. It also reorients universities in relation to neoliberal educational reform paradigms that reshape the university as a commodity in the name of international economic competitiveness (Shumar, 1997, Steiner-Khamsi, 2004).

The Internet is an uneasily defined cyberspace where each user is a cartographer and curator of her cyberself. Social differences associated with our bodily selves and drawn along racial, gendered, religious, and national lines are both challenged and reified online. The Internet is a gateway to the cyborg. Donna Haraway (1991) said, "I'd rather be a cyborg than a goddess." Her words harness the powerful image of women in relation to freedom, technological innovation, and human evolution. Indeed, while the goddess is honored and adored for her firm virtue and fixed beauty, the cyborg is a shape-shifter and a dislocator. She plays with physical limits and pushes ideological boundaries beyond recognition until they reach the precipice of our human imaginations. The cyborg's glory and potential immortality is located in her ability to bridge fractures and adapt to

evolving environmental conditions. She breaks and rebuilds the law. She is misaligned and messy—even a little scary because she distorts the contours of cultural values and normative practice. By going online and disfiguring the traditional female role, students in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere are adapting to and embodying the spirit of the digital age. In the tradition of critical feminist theorists (Butler, 1990, Haraway, 1991; deBouvoir, 1952; Mohanty, 1986), this dissertation challenges grand narratives that form “woman” as a unitary category. I question explanations that offer a sense of universality, when students’ selves are actually contingent on their specific contexts, personal histories, and subjectivities.

Dissertation Roadmap

I have argued in this introductory chapter that technology’s transformative impact on education and society is not a new phenomenon. The range of connection and collaboration that young people around the world experience in relation to their membership in specific learning communities seems to reflect the extent of technology’s saturation in the community. Saudi Arabia is no exception and is, in some ways, a forerunner.

Chapter 2 provides a review of literature on theories of education and social development. It situates my data in a larger body of anthropological work on education as a social and political act and a tool for global development, including contexts in the Middle East. Ethnographies of education examine the relationship of schools and society in general, and provide useful background to my research on education and the Internet.

The literature review presents definitions of education as a spontaneous human experience, a social enterprise, and a field of academic study. I take special care to consider how the historical legacy of public education in European and American contexts relates to education in the Arab World. To this end, I briefly review education and development paradigms and theorists that are considered seminal in the field of education, as well as formal and informal educational practices in parts of the Arab World since the early 20th century. I emphasize the power of ethnographic data in policy dialogue and scholarly literature from critical theorists and feminist scholars who address a number of issues on women's social, economic, and political lives. While educational practice and processes of transformation are the foci of my study, critical feminist discourse provides a segue to my analysis of some of the challenges that scholars and activists from different ideological and theoretical orientations face in reconciling diverse concepts of modernity, respecting unfamiliar expressions of power, and accepting different interpretations of women's rights. These are issues that play out in the everyday lives of al-Noor students.

Chapter 3 provides specific context about the physical field site, including the state of the Internet and ICT use in Saudi Arabia. Jeddah is the location of the university, and it is a city with its own historical and cultural identity within the broader Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is important to establish that the university is located at a cultural and historical crossroads, because the ethos of the university reflects the diversity and sense of dynamism that Jeddah embodies as a gateway city. I also outline the specific history of girls' and women's educational development in Jeddah. Ultimately, I situate al-Noor within this context. This chapter sets the stage for the following chapter, which offers a

detailed discussion of the research participants and their everyday lives at the university.

Chapter 4 begins with an extended vignette that places me in the field and offers a glimpse of daily life on campus. In this chapter, I describe my methodology in more detail, specific details about participants, and the university demographics. I elaborate on the university in terms of its location in the city and what it looks and feels like and feels like to be behind its tall white walls. Building on what I have already argued, I approach the contemporary university as an ever-evolving institution that transcends physical boundaries and ideological constraints, and bring the Internet deeply into al-Noor's institutional complex. Therefore, I develop a sense of the university as an online space as well as a traditional campus, *per se*.

Chapter 5 examines a phenomenon of “clubbing” and introduces what I call the “curriculum of desire.” Through discussion of students’ creation and involvement of extracurricular clubs, I explore social restrictions on physical mobility and tensions on campus that lead students online. Specifically, this chapter will highlight clubs as extensions of the university online and tease out motivations and outcomes of the offline and online learning dynamic. The classroom or lecture hall that was once the heart of the university no longer commands the central educative function. The growing popularity of blended learning, flipped learning, and distance learning indicate students around the world are looking for ways out of the physical classroom and finding what they need in extracurricular clubs, or what James Gee calls “affinity groups.” They often zone out in class and generally seek liberation from lectures and textbooks through online forms of experiential learning that get them out of the physical classroom and offer them power to make choices about when and how to learn. Clubs are filling curricular gaps and meeting

students' unmet desires to learn—and I follow this data-rich chapter with two case studies.

Chapter 6 is a case study of the Psychology Club. I elaborate on the practice of “clubbing,” through discussion of the student-initiated Psychology Club. Changing its name a few times in less than a year, the club reflects the sense of constant identity construction that is palpable on campus. Students are constantly identifying gaps in their education and strategizing to fill them. Perhaps the most vocal and visible club at the university, this club is in many ways a model that other clubs seek to emulate. Members of the Psychology Club are the “cool girls, fun girls.” There is a decidedly playful tone to the strong feminist voice in which they refer to themselves and how they choose to present themselves to the public (on campus and online). They are a close-knit group that is always planning something new.

The club is unusual in that it does not serve to connect students to an existing job market. Instead, it is creating on-campus and online space for a new job market in the hope that it will somehow fit into Saudi Arabia's offline economic sector. In the meantime, they are setting up shop, so to speak, on campus and online. Psychology jobs do not readily exist in Saudi Arabia. Despite real needs within the local population, there is resistance to the study and practice of psychology. Therefore, such jobs are few and far between for graduates. The self-named “psychology chicks” want to change this. They seek to address women's health in a broad sense and to remove the stigma of mental illness in Saudi society and promote physical and psychological wellness.

Chapter 7 is my second case study. I examine the activities of the Business Club and how students use the Internet to circumvent the customary ban on women's activity

in the formal economic sector, enabling them to start businesses. This chapter offers details about the Young Female Entrepreneurs' Showcase, which is the club's annual campus-based event. I discuss speakers' main points and how advising students during a vibrant Q&A session became a sort of real-time dialogue between the students and actual practitioners in the business world. Using examples from the Young Entrepreneurs' Showcase and other events on campus and online, I also discuss the role of family relationships in students' developing sense of self, especially how fathers and brothers influence women's decisions and opportunities for future success. I argue that the term "businesswomen," which is ubiquitous on campus and in the local community, needs to be qualified and better understood as a subtle social reproduction of male-dominated cultural and economic structures.

I conclude this dissertation with Chapter 8, in which I outline directions for continued research in the future. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the current state of the Internet in Saudi Arabia and neighboring countries. I claim that, in spite of strict government censorship, the Internet is a vital and critical form and forum for public education in Saudi Arabia. I present the example of female clerics joining the Shura Council as an example of the Internet's importance in Saudi Arabia, in terms of public debate about women's participation in public space; and conclude by positioning myself as a researcher poised to continue examining women's use of the Internet as a place of education as well as a means of social, political, and legal change.

My objective in this dissertation is to present new knowledge about the everyday lives of women attending university in Saudi Arabia. I do so through ethnographic examples that tell a story of educational transformation in the 21st century. Education

was a key feature in the development of Saudi Arabia long before the Internet came on the scene, and the Kingdom has a legacy of public education that brings together local and global ideas about modernization and international partnership. The arguments and case studies provided herein support this understanding. To this end, I am ever mindful of overarching questions of human-machine relations, which frame my broader scholarly interests but are not the central focus of this dissertation. My aim here is to facilitate critical thinking and debate about online and offline education, including issues of authenticity, access, and addiction. Ultimately, the data that I present here, as a composite story of everyday life at a women's university in Saudi Arabia, aims to be an intimate, intellectually disturbing, and convincing portrayal of a group of students as key agents in the transformation of educational practice in the 21st century.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

As I argued in the previous chapter, the education-technology matrix is not a novel phenomenon. However, it is helpful to look at the heart of this legacy is the relationship of education and the state, or, stated differently, to look at the legacy of educational transformation to put the current state of education in perspective and understand how we came to be where we are today. A differentially, the role of public education in nation building.

The nation state has long been a midwife of citizen education, and schools have long been vital social institutions for producing future generations of workers, thinkers, and leaders. Today, the Internet is taking education to new levels and in new directions at unprecedented speed. It is challenging definitions of gendered citizenship, testing the stability of existing hierarchies of knowledge, and pushing the boundaries of the nation state.

Over time and across global contexts, however, education happens within non-governmental networks and modalities, including the family and media, designed to produce citizens. This is the case in Western democracies, non-Western capitalist contexts, and modern nation states defined as monarchies, such as Saudi Arabia. By questioning the meaning and function of social space, whether physical, discursive, or virtual, anthropologists have come to understand how individuals within various social

spaces exercise power and gender roles (Altorki, 1986). Butler's (1990) theory of "performativity" is particularly useful when discussing gender and education. She argues that gender is a "social performance" rather than a natural condition. Education may be understood as a performance as well (Goffman, 1959, 1979). For example, the Arabic word *ta'deeb*, from the root *aduba*, means to be refined culturally or well mannered. *Ta'deeb* is associated with behavior and the ability to decode social situations and adjust to contexts accordingly. To possess *ta'deeb* is to understand life as a performance, to understand society as an audience, and to play your part well. For the purpose of this dissertation, I have situated students' everyday choices on campus and online as "social performance" within the framework of female students and citizens in Saudi Arabia (LeRenard, 2013).

While al-Noor may not see itself as *ta'deeb*, I propose that it actually is. For example, its students play (up) the part of university student and leverage the power that comes with the institutional affiliation in numerous ways, including gaining legitimate access to ICT and the Internet.

Defining Learners by Technologies

Since the late 1990s scholarly literature has addressed the generational cohort discussed here by specific names, linking them to new technologies that are rapidly becoming their constant companions in all aspects of life, including friendship and love, as well as education and employment. Much of the academic literature on youth using digital technology for leisure and educational purposes has focused on Western

populations (Shumar, 2003; Turkle, 1984, 1995, 2007, 20011; Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Ito et al., 2010; Cohen, 2012); whereas, a great deal of the research on young people outside Western contexts has focused on ICT and SNS as tools of political subversion, economic emancipation, or other forms of transgression (Rafael, 2003, Miller and Slater, 2000, Della Ratta, 2013, LeRenard, 2013).

The swell of rhetoric and hype about youth and technology has produced a wave of trendy appellations such as the “digital generation” and “wired generation,” as well as: Generation txt (Rafael, 2003; Nielsen & Webb, 2011); iGeneration (Rosen, 2010); the Facebook, Twitter, and Google Generation (McDonald, 2010; Ride-out, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010); Net Generation (Tapscott, 1998, 2009); digital natives (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008); Generation 2.0 (Rigby, 2008); and E- Generation (Krause, 2007). However, the overarching themes of this literature leave a gap in our understanding of the intimate relationship that young people have with digital technology in everyday life, as curious learners and skilled agents in an evolving world. This dissertation aims to fill that gap.

The existing literature on youth and media associates the characteristics of this generation with their technology use, and defines them accordingly, which helps us to understanding who and what the digital generation is. However, as an ever-developing body of scholarly literature, the focus and bias toward Western perspectives that appears in youth and media studies—and particularly in development paradigms, points out a gap in our understanding of the relationship between young people and digital technology in diverse locations.

Le Renard (2013) presents a significant ethnographic contribution that addresses this gap in her work on Saudi women’s “transgressions of rules regarding dress and

public conduct” (2013, p.109). She develops an argument for the formation of a “new social group” emerging in Saudi Arabia where bodies, technologies, and environments converge. In doing so, she highlights women’s use of mobile phones to challenge male-dominated, religious, and cultural power structures and to increase women’s mobility and visibility in public spaces.

Ethnographic Sites: Looking at Schools and Beyond

Through decades of research, educational theorists and anthropologists have established that novelty and learning go hand-in-hand [Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Turkle, 1984; Varenne, 1995; Popkeywitz and Fendler, 1999; Phillips and Soltis, 2004; Shumar and Sarmiento, 2008]. One must learn to use a new technology in certain ways for certain purposes. Currently, there is enthusiastic discussion amongst national education policy makers about the promise of developing and implementing new technologies for educational purposes in school settings. This is the case in Saudi Arabia. While these discussions are important and necessary, they often do not account for particular local practices, including constraints and opportunities that students bring with them into school settings. Jeddah, like any city anywhere, has its own range of constraints and opportunities. It is a vibrant urban center similar to urban centers around the world, but its position as a busy port within a wealthy Arab country—a country that dominates the global oil industry, where Wahhabi Islam is the state religion—makes being a woman and going to school in Jeddah a particular experience. The challenge of conveying the nuances of such an experience in terms of students’

educational practice falls more appropriately to the ethnographer than the policy maker, though the work of one may inform the other.

Lila Abu-Lughod (2000) argues that we need “ethnography of the particular.” This type of ethnographic approach fosters cognitive empathy in the writer, who hopes to weave balanced threads of Aristotelian logos, ethos, and pathos into her retelling of experiences in the lives of other people and of communities other than her own. “Stories of everyday life reveal something important about the relationship that is often called structure and agency” (Abu-Lughod, 2000, p. 262). In order “to recreate the immediacy of being in the field” (p. 262), ethnography of the particular eschews dense theoretical discourse in favor of authentic language and detailed accounts of real moments.

Ethnographic writing has components that appeal to the reader’s imagination and emotions. It hopes to tap into readers’ relationships to human experience and highlight the ways that humans struggle (and suffer) in actualizing ourselves as agents in relation to structures that attempt to define us and institutions that exist to direct our social behavior, by focusing on what challenges our deepest subjectivities and compromises our highest aspirations as individuals who live in collectivities constrained by particular circumstances.

In accordance with these guidelines, current ethnographies of schools are needed to provide lively and textured perspectives on the broader social impact of students’ relationships with technology. As part of the foundation of the anthropology of education, school-based ethnographies shed light on connections and disconnections between education policy and practice. Paul Willis’ (1977) seminal work, *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids get Working Class Jobs*, Jan Nesper’s (1997)

ethnography of an urban elementary school, *Tangled Up in School: Politics, Space, Bodies, and Signs in the Educational Process*, and Wes Shumar's (1997) rich ethnographic account of transformation in American universities, *College for Sale: A Critique of the Commodification of Higher Education*, are excellent examples. Fida Adely's study of a Jordanian school for girls, *Gendered paradoxes: Educating Jordanian Women in Nation, faith and progress* (2012), is a particularly relevant text in terms of illuminating the value of school-based ethnographic work. The main audience for this dissertation consists of international university educators and administrators, students of social media studies, and academics interested in critical studies of education, gender, and development; however, anyone who has been to school and used the Internet may relate. Furthermore, considering the crisscrossing, overlapping, and parallel relations among such categories helps us to redefine what they mean in terms of contemporary lived experience. Specifically, understanding the relationship of "women," "technologies," and "education" sheds light on the experiences of the particular group of young women who are the focus of this ethnography—an ethnography that challenges the reader to open her mind to broadening categories such as "women," "technologies," and "education."

The following review draws on works on the anthropology of education and ethnography to engage critical questions of how gender and sexuality are taught and learned in societies in the region, and how women's economic and political subordination becomes normative. I look at the function of women's education in Saudi Arabia, which for the most part means looking at the form and content of schooling experiences, in the hope of better understanding women's position in Saudi society. The literature on online

education and distance learning is robust but is beyond the scope of this particular study. Literature on international development and ICT use, though not discussed here, will likely influence extensions of this study in the future.

Where and When Education Happens

Much of the literature reviewed in this chapter examines the place of education in the social division of labor and emphasizes schooling in relation to the state. Education happens where and when sapient animals (including but not limited to humans) and tools come together. Education occurs when knowledge-seeking minds meet with the means and ways of knowledge production. It takes many forms and happens in many locations. People and ideas collide and collaborate and create knowledge in the home, classrooms, various leisure spaces, and in online forums (Varenne, 1992, 1998, 2008; Bartlett, 2009; Arora, 2009; Shumar, 2002, 2003). In the early 20th century, seminal education theorists such as Dewey ([1916] 1966) and Cremin, whose (1961, 1978) work argues centrally for the merits of democracy, posit that public schooling is a society's greatest hope for building a peaceful and productive nation. This is admittedly a broad statement, but I make it to emphasize the political undercurrent in all educational activity.

Socio-political issues have been connected to education from prehistory to the present. Politics may be understood as the craft of connecting and convincing with the goal of getting what one wants. Human beings are social animals, and from our earliest known origins, we have struggled to communicate and seek security through connections based on trust gained by shared knowledge. In this sense, the Internet presents us with

new possibilities. Echoing themes in Varenne's work (2008), Apple suggests, in *Education and Power* (1995), a critique of the "uses" of schooling as well as the "effects" of schooling. How Apple and Varenne distinguish between the "uses" and "effects" of schooling is a matter of particular relevance to the Internet. I argue that students teach each other to (mis)use technology with positive learning effects.

Lave suggests that everyday practice is a more powerful means of socialization than pedagogy performed with the goal of teaching (1988). This position clearly articulates that there is a distinction between schooling and learning in everyday life. It also points to the social aspect of education, which is the point at which schooling and broader theories of learning converge. Learning is a social process that happens every day, in and out of schools. An individual's ritualized social interaction is a key element of her education, whether in a school, home, or workplace (Durkheim, 1956; Goffman, 1959; Garfinkel, 1967, 2002; Lave, 1988). Therefore, the practice of learning through daily experience is distinct from, though not necessarily in contradiction to, with, pedagogical instruction in formal settings, such as schools. If ritual practice is what analogizes schooling and learning in everyday life, perhaps questions of situated-ness distinguish them.

Ritual practice suggests that continuity of habit and routine constitute experience and thereby produce knowledge. While few would disagree with the assertion that formal schooling is steeped in ritual, the role of the individual and space for human agency in schools is less straightforward. Giddens (1972) has a broad approach to human agency and argues that structures are maintained through a dynamic process of repeated acts of human agents. His theory of "structuration" aims to diffuse the structure-agent

binary in favor of an approach that considers the dialectic relationship though continuity and displacement. While this argument might be difficult to fit into the case of a strictly regimented kindergarten classroom, for example, it would apply to the case of a four-year-old sitting in church and being moved by the spirit of inquiry to ask the boy in front of her a question (Varenne, 2007). Here we see the need for distinction between schooling and learning if we are to appreciate the breadth of human agency and the endless educative possibilities in everyday life.

Education and Society: The Why of It

The hearth of the ancient world, the classroom, and the Internet are examples of places where learning happens, where human beings learn to be social, where we create culture, and where we do our politicking. Questions about what education is, however, must ask more than just where and when. We must engage questions about how and why.

Critical studies of education, from functionalism to the critical traditions, designate the school as a key institution in the process of social, cultural, economic, and political reproduction. Functionalists argue that schools are strongholds of equal opportunity where merit dictates one's success or failure, whereas Marxists and neo-Marxists designate schools as sites of social conflict and a stage for the constant struggle that characterizes modern society plays out. Durkheim (1982) differentiated between social facts and individual facts—a differentiation that is relevant to the distinction between schooling and learning in everyday life. After all, it is commonly held that

schools are designed, in purpose and method, to reproduce social facts, but also to critique and challenge the dominant class' version of social facts. This is indeed the case at al-Noor, as this dissertation will show. Durkheim's approach to education emphasizes the role of ritual in producing solidarity, which is also evident in students' daily lives at al-Noor.

Although Goffman (1959, 1982) does not share the same affinity for ritual that Durkheim does, and there is considerable difference in their views on structure and agency as well as continuity and departure, I argue their theories compliment each other in the study of everyday life at al-Noor. Goffman claims that conflict creates solidarity and posits that interaction around conflict is itself constitutive. He posits the individual as "situational" rather than "situated," meaning that she is constituted in the situation. Goffman departs further from Durkheimian tradition by suggesting that it is sometimes advantageous to treat the reality of face-to-face contact as *sui generis*, meaning that the moment belongs to the moment itself and is [in] itself generative. In a sense, each moment has a life of its own. This approach opened the floodgates to new possibilities of knowledge production and learning through grounded theory and ethnographic research.

Ethnomethods have led ethnographers to look at micro-level social interactions rather than macro-level systems. Therefore, ethnographers understand learning in terms of the mechanics of communication and social and cultural production, as well as reproduction. The principles and practice of ethnomethodology have been applied to important work in anthropology and education over the past 25 years. Bateson, McDermott, and Varenne (1998), for example, have looked at learning (and failing) in schools rather than "schooling." In Garfinkel's classic work, *Studies in*

Ethnomethodology (2002), we see traces of Durkheim's position that society is the primary modality of constructing objects. Varenne (2007) points out this echo and concludes "what we *do* is potentially everyone else's business" [original emphasis].

Similar to ethnomethodologists, practice theorists, in particular, have been inspired by the constitutive potential of social interactions that constitute daily life in all contexts. Theorists of human agency, such as Giddens (1979) and Lave (1988), emphasize the "relational interdependency of agent, and world, activity meaning, cognition, learning, and knowing" (Lave, 1991). Critical studies of anthropology and education in the vein of practice theory have provided rich material for debates about the similarities and distinctions between schooling and learning in everyday life, which fall under broader questions of learning as a social process. In this respect, Lave's contribution to the study of learning and society are seminal. Since her early work on apprenticeship, Lave has suggested that learning is not purely psychological but is also a social process that cannot be separated from the people and activities that "reveal it." In *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (1991), she offers the theory of "legitimate peripheral participation" that provides a framework for the confluence of theories of situated activity and theories of production and reproduction.

Social and cultural reproduction theories engage the relationship between schooling and capitalism, and attempt to problematize educational institutions' roles in socio-cultural reproduction of the division of labor. As a collective, these works focus on two key effects of schooling: 1) the reproduction of class, and 2) the reproduction of gender.

Acknowledging the social and political roles of formal education, and also approaching the individual pursuit of knowledge as a fundamentally human behavior that happens in the context of lived experiences, enables anthropologists to formulate critical questions about the institutions and processes through which people produce, consume, and transmit knowledge in specific spaces at particular moments in time. In this sense, an understanding of the function of schools in society, particularly the university, becomes especially important to pursue. Dewey (1916) declared, “Education is life itself.” From his perspective, schools are one space among many where students encounter educative conditions and systems. Dewey’s approach shows education as a vast and permeating experience, and this definition can be refined further by Cremin’s (1980) concept of education as a “deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, or sensibilities, and any learning that results from the effort, direct or indirect, intended or unintended.”

In this dissertation, I rely on Garfinkel’s (2002) ethnomethods for a working definition of education. It is the ethnomethodologist’s preoccupation with the seemingly arbitrary instances of social interaction that equip her with eyes to see and ears to hear education when it happens. I also turn to Varenne (2007), who poses questions about the “when-ness” of education that confronted me in earnest as I undertook hybrid ethnography as my primary research method, momentarily losing my footing in time and space in the online world. I felt positively inundated by educational moments happening in, between, and among participants, whether they were sitting next to me or online in other countries and time zones. Varenne suggests that education is wherever we look or listen, when we are looking or listening. His suggestion opens the floodgates of

possibility and repeats John Stewart Mill ([1859] 2002), who famously espoused that pretty much everything between everyone is always education. Rather than reducing education to the status of nothing special by pointing out its ubiquity, both Varenne and Mill establish it as a fundamental human phenomenon.

Cultural anthropologists and anthropologists of education ask important questions about the relationship between schooling and human action based on nearly a century of ethnographic practice that has looked closely at links between educative conditions and systems in schools and the practice of everyday life. By educative conditions and systems in schools, I mean curriculum and pedagogy, as well as culture. Cultural theories, particularly those concerned with cultural production, draw attention to the range of social moments and spaces in which power unfolds and the material and symbolic cultural products that follow. Questions that have shaped anthropological inquiry into cultural production include: What is education? Who is an educated person?

In schools, we find some of the most advanced technologies of power at work in the reproduction of social inequalities based on race, class, and gender (Bernstein, 1971), as well as the production of docile bodies trained to be ideal workers in the capitalist system (Foucault, 1978; Althusser, 1984). However, education is not confined to schools. As technology creates new spaces for human activity, definitions of what constitutes the social world and educational experience must be rethought. It is a recurring theme throughout this study that anthropologists of education are ideally positioned to examine whether and how online encounters constitute human interaction and educational moments. Today's virtual communities represent the evolution of the imagined community that has been located as the foundation of the modern nation state (Anderson,

1983; Eickelman & Anderson, 2003). In the past two decades, “socio-technical” approaches to technology and education have produced views of technology as part of an “assemblage of technologies” within a network of primary institutions affiliated with knowledge production involving governments, economics, and universities (Rooney, 1997). This analytic framework is inspired by Foucault’s (1988) four types of technology: 1) technologies of production, 2) technologies of power, 3) technologies of sign systems, and 4) technologies of self. This framework, which posits that society, culture, and technologies are interrelated and inseparable, has been applied to educational and anthropological scholarship on the Arab world (Bunt 2002, 2003; Mazawi 1999, 2006).

Reproduction and the Cultural Self

What about human agency? In an important collection of essays, *Cultural Production of the Educated Person* (1996), Holland points out that anthropologists who look at educational conditions and systems in schools and other social spaces might also be able to shed light on how human agency operates under power structures and constraints. In *The Field of Cultural Production* (1983), Bourdieu emphasizes that the educative process produces individuals who embody and transmit the constraints of the conditions and systems in schools. The “scholarly culture,” which is internalized in Bourdieu’s *habitus* of the scholar or Holland’s “educated person,” mirrors the patterns of inclusion and exclusion one finds specifically in schools, particularly institutions of higher education. Bourdieu suggests an educated person is comfortable or “at home”

within scholarly culture, but this is an assertion that we should re-approach in relation to the digital generation, as scholarly culture is both expanding and contracting online. Scholarly culture is not bound by the walls of the school, whether those walls are cinderblock or ivy-covered. Arguably, scholarly culture was never bound in such ways, but today's participation of young people in knowledge production via the Internet has further opened up scholarly culture. The example that Bourdieu gives, though it specifically refers to the perception of art, is a good one. He notes that the distinction of being educated draws the individual into a mode of "ethnocentrism" or "class-centrism," in which their perception is considered natural. Through the educative process, the educated person that Bourdieu identifies has acquired the codes necessary to decipher the meaning of art. Whereas other perceived meanings do exist, the "educated person" is unable or unwilling to acknowledge or legitimate alternative meanings, as they are outside scholarly culture. Moreover, a less-sophisticated, less-educated person will feel like a fish out of water when she encounters scholarly culture. Bourdieu (1983) imagines the less-educated as "ethnologists in a foreign society who arrive at a ritual to which they have no key." Essentially, he argues that they experience "disorientation" from a sort of "cultural blindness." While Bourdieu's insights help us understand the production of educated persons in general, students at al-Noor actually pose a challenge to his argument. They are the agents *and* the architects of the scholarly culture they embody.

Bartlett's (2008) response to Bourdieu's view is helpful here. She posits that the disorientation of cultural blindness may be offset by production of new lenses, meaning legitimizing local interpretations of education and the organic cultivation of an "educated persona." Her deeply ethnographic and participatory work with learners in a Brazilian

literacy program revealed multiple meanings of education among working-class women in Brazil. Evidence of education's multiple meanings is articulated through the women's participation in a literacy program and also enacted in the practice of literacy. Though the crux of Bartlett's study is an argument against a theory of human capital, she reveals important moments of cultural production, especially in the participants' idea of "educacao," the local word for a mix of book knowledge and social skills that are gained only in part through schooling.

Bartlett highlights the productive capacity of individuals to conceptualize themselves as educated—and to be treated by others, such as employers, as educated persons—based on perceptions of education in schools and also in daily social interaction. Bartlett's work teases out the "how" of education in ways that encourage investigation of education as being both learned in and applied beyond classrooms. This focus on self-identification as educated is quite apt in relation to students at al-Noor.

From a different but complementary theoretical angle, Bernstein's contribution to reproduction theory is instructive. In *Class, Codes, and Control* (1977), he argues that schools reproduce the social order through repeated acts of classification, to the point that students will construct classed and gendered identities on their own. The three categories he emphasizes are class, age, and sex. These divisions are reinforced through students' encounters with "boundaries" between categories and the ways that teacher to student interaction is "framed." Bourdieu and Passeron introduce the related concept of symbolic capital in their watershed study, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (1976), exposing the hegemonic culture of exclusion and low expectations that lead some students to eventually limit or withdraw themselves from competition. Symbolic violence

is a critical theory in terms of the reproduction of race, class, and gender, which are socially constructed. Students at al-Noor have managed to sidestep a certain measure of symbolic violence through the mobility they encounter online, as opposed to the restrictions on their physical mobility in the offline world. Mobility in Saudi Arabia is a matter of class and gender.

Like many critical studies in education in the 1970s, Bowles and Gintis' paramount work, *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1976), focuses mainly on the reproduction of class, but also draws connections that have implications for the reproduction of gender. Specifically, the authors point out male-headed hierarchical structures in families, schools, and the labor market. The male-headed household, in which power and prestige is allocated by age/grade, is mirrored in the male-dominated corporate job ladder structure. Though Bowles and Gintis are writing about a Western context, their insights are apt for contemporary Saudi society, and reflect the economic context in which al-Noor students are going to school.

Bowles and Gintis' work is important to mention as it shows how segments of the economy require the existence of laborers with certain personalities and social skills, and how schools' segregation of students by class, race, and sex produces non-minority men as ideal workers for the primary labor market, and produce minorities and women as workers who fill the ranks of the secondary market. Institutional constraints tied to outdated models of university education are pushing students beyond campus walls to look for new educational spaces such as the Internet. These are critical issues to consider as Saudi Arabia expands its economic market beyond dependence on the oil industry.

New categories of workers or “social groups” are emerging as new markets arrive on the social and economic scenes.

Here, the recent work of Amelie Le Renard (2013) on Saudi women’s (mis)use of mobile phones and manipulation of dress code in public spaces, which was mentioned earlier, and the foundational work of Madeleine Arnot (1998, 2002, 2008) are quite useful sources. Arnot’s work distinguishes between biological reproduction of the workforce, which takes place in the home, and social reproduction of the workforce, which occurs by extending this frame into the labor market. She stresses that neither structure is natural—they are culturally constructed and imposed through social institutions (family and schools) by the bourgeoisie hegemony. Her work complements that of other critical feminist thinkers, such as Butler and Haraway, and applies specifically to educational contexts. Arnot emphasizes that women consent, in both subtle and overt ways, to a definition of femininity that keeps them in the home to raise and educate children first—and then, only secondarily, engage in wage-earning activity outside the home. Men consent to the definition of masculinity that has them leaving the home and working for wages. The point is that gender roles are consensual rather than natural. They are constructed categories and roles that people learn and enact. The norms that lead to gender-based divisions of labor are first encountered by children in the home and are then reproduced in school and other social institutions by differential treatment and expectations tailored for boys and girls based on bodies rather than minds. Students at al-Noor are challenging these norms.

Educating, Gendering, and Identity Making

Socio-political reproduction has been linked to women's education across time and space. Women's education in the Middle East is neither exemplary nor exceptional in this regard. The education of women has been utilized by the state as a strategy for national development, in the sense that formal state education reproduces gender norms and power structures. This discussion of educational literature is positioned within an understanding that capitalist modes of production underpin the global knowledge economy. In relation to the relevance of this review to women's education in Saudi Arabia, we must recognize the gendered hierarchies and ideologies that play out in women's limited access to public space, as well as their exclusion from economic and political participation, which are (ironically) the aims of civic education. This is a contradiction that deserves critical examination. Not since Saudi public education began to flourish in the 1930s have the government and royal family been so invested in the nature and function of education in society. In the past decade, the kingdom has committed substantial financial resources and drawn public attention to educational development, especially at the tertiary level, and especially for women. Saudi Arabia's local educational development is happening in tandem with the region's increased participation in the global knowledge economy and education reforms around the world.

A good deal of anthropological and sociological literature on gender and education has emerged from content studies based in the US and UK since the late 1960s. Madeleine Arnot, mentioned in the previous section, is a leading figure in the sociology of women's education and has written extensively on educational theory and feminist

politics. Her critiques of women's roles in capitalist societies are especially interesting: She posits the existence of a deliberate and sustained effort on the part of the bourgeoisie to have women consent to a definition of femininity in which they conceptualize themselves first as mothers and wives before contemplating their (potential) role as a wage-earner outside of the home. Basing her argument on school texts and children's books, she contends that there is a basic pattern that represents women in ways that can "only be construed as the ideological wing of patriarchy." This pattern has three elements.

First, women experience what she calls invisibility, or "symbolic annihilation," within the history of Western civilization. There are occasional heroines who help in important ways—such as Betsy Ross sewing the flag—but the collective presence of women or women as citizen leaders is virtually nonexistent. Second, when women do appear in books, they are depicted in jobs that are within the secondary economy. An analysis of popular Western children's storybooks revealed depictions of men in 37 different professions, while women were depicted only as mother, grandmother, princess, queen, witch, maid, teacher, and shop assistant. Third, there is an overriding emphasis on women's domesticity. Arnot describes how the message that the home is the realm of women is repeated to the point of what she calls "ideological bombardment." She points to the media's role in perpetuating this portrayal of women in advertisements for the two most "feminine" locations in the home: the kitchen and bathroom.

Mr. Clean may be an American icon of kitchen floors and is quite an image of masculinity, with his bald head and bulging biceps, but his picture is simply on the bottle

in a commercial in which a woman mops, and a woman's voice accompanies her, saying, "Mr. Clean gets the job done." The pattern outlined above can be traced to television dramas, as well as commercials. In the US, young children spend more time watching television than attending school (Arnot, 2002). Her work is significant, because it points out the gendered images that flood American homes and educate girls and women about their place in society. This modality of education through consumer products and cultural icons resonates in households around the world and includes the homes in which al-Noor students grow up.

Holland and Eisenhart (1991) deal with similar issues that are directly related to schools in *Educated in Romance: Women, Achievement, and College Culture*. Their rich and lively ethnography follows a mixed-race group of women at two American colleges as they navigate the cultural systems and social practices of everyday life. The authors present a startling image of what is really happening among college women and address important issues of gender, but also push traditional feminist questions in new directions, such as the relationship of patriarchy to class and race. They take a hard look at the fact that many female students in universities move through the system without engaging in the "academic culture" in ways that are transformative. Grades are barely as influential in these students' lives as is the "grading of sexual attractiveness" that takes place among peer groups. Interestingly, the study was funded in part by a national grant to determine why the country had small numbers of female citizens entering the fields of math and science. Though there might not appear to be a shortage of women entering traditionally male-dominated careers, the study is significant in that it reveals the complexity of women's academic experiences in university. Holland and Eisenhart skillfully pull back

the layers of appearances and reveal the conflicts that women deal with as they navigate various balances between their intellectual, romantic, and social roles. Women who participated in the study often made choices that put them in a position to depend upon men, whether this was through their career choice or in romantic relationships.

Classroom time was overshadowed by the significance of social interactions in many women's lives, particularly the pressure to find a husband. School culture alone does not shape student choices. The home is a critical space where a woman first encounters gender differences that inform her identity in relation to friends, school, and country. School is a social place where students' relationships with peers, teachers (and ICTs) continuously shape developing sensibilities, and, as students' online experiences at al-Noor illustrate, school is not just the classroom.

As gender equality issues clearly underpin "citizenship education," it is important to emphasize the tacit nature of national educational systems and their function in the reproduction of inequalities. This is especially important in conceptualizing the ways in which "citizenship education" draws on themes of gender and social justice in the global context, including in Saudi Arabia and other countries where gender equality is front and center in educational discourse.

In *Lessons from Kilimanjaro: Schooling Community and Gender*, Stambach (2000) looks at the ways that schooling has transformed girls' lives in rural and urban Tanzania. So-called "city sisters" leave their rural homes to seek employment after getting an "education," and encounter social and cultural difficulties when returning home. Older generations exhibit resentment or feelings of concern that they will be judged as "uneducated." In a society that values age as an indication of wisdom and

grants elders a measure of social status, the emergence of young, educated women poses challenges to older women who have not attended school. This creates tension between generations of women and also generates opportunities for non-formal knowledge-sharing between younger and older women who understand that education happens inside and outside the classroom, and who are open to learning from one another. Stambach's work is relevant to al-Noor, as many of the students' mothers attended college before the Internet and learn how to use ICTs from their daughters. While peer-to-peer knowledge production is not a central issue in Stambach work, her work is helpful in showing how ethnography can be helpful in understanding how communities struggle with educational transformation from one generation to the next. The case of al-Noor students fits nicely with Stambach's overarching questions about contemporary educational transformation, specifically as it relates to women and the tensions that members of the digital generation face because they are, in some ways, more educated than their elders.

To better understand the connections between gender identity and the local and global communities to which women belong, it is helpful to consider women at work and play in different contexts. This includes formal education settings and informal settings that speak tacitly to Dewey's well-known declaration, "Education is life itself." In the following examples, women make use of discourse as an educational tool. Discourse is as intellectual activity and a form of social interaction—and, as with all social interaction, power is central (Foucault, 1979) and the politics of representation are at work and play (Said, 1979).

In *Women and Words in Saudi Arabia: The Politics of Literary Discourse* (1994), Arebi points out that the history of the Arabian peninsula reflects a unique connection

between poetics and politics that is symbolically organized around a culture of words. Drawing on Geertzian theory about the role of Arabic in Arab Muslim societies, Arebi highlights the “direct coercive force” of verbal fluency. Rooted in Foucault’s theory of “power/knowledge,” Arebi discusses the power and ideology embedded in words and silence. She goes on to provide an extensive examination of how Saudi women have created a significant space for themselves in the previously male-dominated field of literature; and addresses systems of political and social exclusion, such as state-sponsored censorship and the patriarchal social order that designates published literature as a facet of the public sphere where women do not belong. Women’s exclusion is evident in literary terminology, such as “publication.” Ultimately, Arebi’s work is a compilation of stories about women writers in Saudi Arabia and their personal experiences, as much as it is an examination of “discourses of power.” My own research shows that women at al-Noor also use poetry, blogs, tweets, posts, and satire as modes of self-expression and casual communication, as well as means to make statements about economic, political, and legal matters that concern and sometimes trouble them. Building on Abu-Lughod’s work *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (1986), I show how al-Noor students use ICTs and the Internet to share their sentiments. In *Gendered Paradoxes* (2012), Adely asks important questions about Jordanian high school girls’ educational experiences, including their engagement with music as a verbal genre that facilitates their critical thinking about issues of “nation, faith and gender.” Her work asks, “Is Music Haram?” This is a reference to the supposed prohibition of music in certain interpretations of Islam, but Adely is really addressing the space for reflection and negotiation that musical discourse opens to young women. The act of singing

Jordanian folksongs in national ceremonies is indeed an act of “education,” as it can be directly linked to development of the girls’ subjectivities (in the feminist sense), referring to a sense of selfhood that is defined through language, power relations, and embodied experiences. The high-school girls in her ethnography chose to be part of a school group that performs folksongs and dances at public ceremonies. Music and song are the discursive activities that allow them to enter this traditionally male-dominated public space. Adely discusses the girls’ different justifications for their choice, as well as their opinions about whether certain actions or thoughts compromise social standing as a good Muslim girl. It is particularly interesting to note that Jordanian society largely assumes that boys don’t like music, so women dominate the study and practice of music, and enter the spotlight as bearers of national identity at official state performances. Ultimately, Adely’s study contributes to growing literature that examines links between forms of discourse in mass education and women’s sense of nationhood. The story of *N∞RTIN*, which I tell in chapter VI, demonstrates the strong ties between music, critical thinking, and identity making.

Abu-Lughod’s critique of culture is useful for feminist studies, especially Middle East feminist scholarship, which has been especially prolific since the 1990s. Over the past 20 years, critical theorists and feminist scholars of the Middle East have produced a sophisticated and broad body of literature that often challenges Orientalist images of women in the Arab World. Moving away from essentialist studies of “women and Islam,” authors such as Abu-Lughod (1993, 2013), Adely (2012), Ahmed (1992), Mahmood (2004), Kandiyoti (1988), and Najmabadi (2005, 2013) have harnessed the power of interdisciplinary scholarly discourse and intertextuality to weave a body of

literature that asks meaningful questions about gender, politics, and nationhood, as well as women's everyday lives.

Educational Transformation in the Arab World

Discussion of education and reproduction in the Arab World should bear in mind the long history of learning and educational practice that dates to before the 7th century that marked the emergence of Islam as a major force for education and development. The region known as the Middle East or Arab world is not a naturally bound entity. It is historically, geographically, politically, economically, linguistically, religiously and culturally diverse. The countries comprising the region bear different colonial and postcolonial experiences, and it is imperative to distinguish one country from the next. So as not to misunderstand the association between education and cultural reproduction in the Arab world as a result of unique characteristics of Arab culture or Islam, it is necessary to bear in mind the general reproductive function of educational systems discussed in the previous section. Critical studies of education have argued for a direct relationship between schools and cultural reproduction in societies, across time and space. The Arab world is no exception.

Having said that, we will continue to discuss how education systems in various countries and contexts within the Arab world function as key sites of social and cultural reproduction. First, I will address the confluence of new and old education systems. Then I will discuss religious and cultural reproduction—especially the strong link

between governments and schools and the simultaneous rise of nationalism, mass public higher education, and Islamic reform movements since the early 20th century.

How schools in the Middle East reproduce (or produce) both ideal Muslims and ideal citizens is particularly significant, because these two ideal types are often conceptualized as being one and the same, though they are not. In *Putting Islam to Work: Education, Politics and Religious Transformation in Egypt* (1998), Starrett argues that the rise of mass education and mass media have transformed the Muslim world. He discusses what he calls the “Islamic trend,” which is couched within the developing discourse on Islamic movements in the Middle East in the 1980’s, and draws special attention to the scaling up of education throughout the Arab world, pointing out a consistent movement away from intimate learning circles to mass government education. Tracing the roots of current trends in Egyptian education from the original *kuttub* (Quranic schools) to British co-optation of the *kuttub*, he points out how the introduction of British education practices actually laid the foundation for the current “Islamic trend.” British schools were designed to create ideal citizens through systems of indoctrination and discipline that have been adapted to craft ideal Muslims. Starrett points out how the curricula and textbooks that present Islam as a system of values and everyday social and personal practices are incorporated into the education process, and the central issue of his mixed-methods ethnographic work is the functionalization of Islam through mass social institutions. Ultimately, he sheds important light on how the implementation of pedagogical approaches and power relations associated with Western-style education have manifested within the new conceptualization of Egyptian identity rooted in Islamic values and practice that challenges secular political objectives. He argues that it is

education—as an enterprise on regional, national, and local levels—that has reshaped Islam.

Today, universal education is widely available in the Arab world and is offered to all citizens by the government at little or no cost. Availability does not necessarily guarantee quality, however, and many schools struggle with limited materials and lack of trained teachers. Despite certain shortages in their educational resources, education is a policy priority and a burgeoning industry in the region, particularly in the Gulf Cooperative Countries (GCC) (Mazawi, 2006). As the social and cultural contours of life in the region are decidedly Islamic, mass education, which was popularized in the early 20th century, has played its part in shaping several generations.

Changes in education systems in the region represent the selectiveness with which so-called “Western” ideas and models have been appropriated in the blending of new and existing ways of knowing and doing. This blending process is the product of the region’s encounter with imperialism (Said, 1979). For example, the notion of education as a modernizing process figured prominently in both colonial and anti-colonial nationalist projects. Education as an answer to “problems of backwardness” is a more situated notion than the simple explanation of implanting Western values suggests. The issue has been addressed specifically in relation to women’s education (Mohanty, 1986), who suggested that a stratum of educated elite look down on the unschooled in the own communities. An elitist educated class nurtures a homegrown kind of Orientalism with their production of the “other” based on class and educational disparity rather than geographical differences. This is especially evident in the way that women of a younger, educated generation treat their unschooled mothers (Abu-Lughod, 2009).

It may be argued that higher education is the most crucial stage in the process of education and cultural reproduction because of the level of internalization and critical learning that occurs there. Through “ways of knowing” inculcated through higher education institutions, Eickelman (1992) looks at the links between mass higher education, particularly in Oman, Egypt, and Morocco, and religious activism in *Mass Higher Education and the Religious Imagination in Contemporary Arab Societies*. He teases out the relationship between national higher education initiatives and political, religious, and national identity, which represents an important contribution because he draws attention to the agentic and internal processes by which students come to know Islam. He is concerned with the “objectification” process that prompts questions about religiosity and expression of Muslim identity. His central theme is that while students function within the constraining forces of reproduction in schools, they “never just reproduce it but create.” Schools in the Arab world are not unlike other schools around the world that have engaged their capacity to reproduce religious values and cultural practices. This occurs in three ways. First, they scaled up and incorporated mass education movements. Then they linked those mass education movements to nationalist movements. Finally, they linked nationalist movements to religious reform movements.

This process has been applied in the Arab world and in the West. The result is a strong network of social institutions (state, church, mosque, school, family) that are collectively engaged in producing knowledge about what it means to be a good citizen. The primary point I want to address here is that the approach to reflexive learning and higher education throughout the Arab world since the early 20th century is the product of selective appropriation of new and old ideas and systems. This is happening at al-Noor in

the international educational policy and curriculum it borrows, as well as in the ways that institution organizes itself administratively, which mimics departmental or “faculty” structures based on Western universities. Of course, Said, in his seminal work, *Orientalism* (1979), presents a brilliant critique of the academy as a center of cultural reproduction, particularly emphasizing the power and authority that literature wields as a cultural product. Extending Said’s critique of culture in the direction of gender, Abu-Lughod argues against literature, research, and scholarly work on women in the Arab world that is crafted through exoticized and sympathetic lenses. Rather, she shows the merit of producing historicized, politicized, and localized works, namely ethnography, that consider women’s roles and the power plays and conflicts that shape everyday life.

Conclusion

Today, the Internet is an integral part of many people’s everyday lives. It is an ever-evolving platform for self-expression and a locus of social and political life, as well as a site of cultural production and point of cultural interface. Furthermore, ICTs are part of teaching and learning and must be part of conversations about contemporary educational transformation. My study draws upon the significant body of scholarly work that exists on theories of learning and educational experience over time and space. Collectively, these works attempt to tell a story about how, when, why, and where people learn—and my research here aims to develop an additional piece of this story by addressing the gap in scholarly literature on online education and Internet use among

young women attending university in Saudi Arabia, who are engaging in a wide range of roles in the global mediascape.

Critical studies in education and cultural reproduction argue that schools categorize and classify students according to ideological and economic determinants. Thus, students at al-Noor “learn” to act as classed and gendered citizens in everyday life, which is shaped by the capitalist modes of production and male dominance that underpin the global knowledge economy. The studies I presented in this review are formative, not summative. The works mentioned cannot constitute a comprehensive list of relevant scholarly work. Rather, I hope that they collectively serve to illuminate subsequent discussions of educational transformation in the lives of al-Noor students.

The studies reviewed here are drawn mainly from Western Europe and the US, with notable exceptions from feminist scholars of the Middle East. They speak to relationships between education and socio-cultural practice that are not particular to Western capitalist contexts. From the networked lives and educational experiences of women at al-Noor, I will show that the moment in educational transformation highlighted by this dissertation is a global phenomenon.

Le Renard (2013) has produced the most current and relevant work in relation to this dissertation, because it offers an argument for the formation of a “new social group” emerging in Saudi Arabia at the confluence of bodies, technologies, and environments. Together with nuanced arguments developed by Goffman, Garfinkel, Varenne, and McDermott, which cast education as a carefully crafted performance as well as the messy business of life that happens inside and outside classrooms, I use Le Renard’s

work to support my own argument for the transformative effects of new educational practices.

In the shifting spaces and increasingly compressed moments of everyday life, participation in the global economy of knowledge has become possible for excluded populations and marginalized groups around the world. Through use of ICTs and participation in SNS on the Internet, students at al-Noor are speaking up and breaking out of constraints previously placed on their time and mobility, whether their technology of choice is a song, a poem, a tweet, or a Facebook post.

Chapter 3

LOCATING LEARNING AT THE CROSSROADS

My advice to every Saudi woman is first to learn her religion. We have here the most sacred places of Islam, the house of God and of the Prophet, and we should protect them. Also, every girl should get an education, because education enlightens human beings who should know how to use their brains.

- Al-Noor's founder, Queen Myriam (1999)

Change Makers and Storytellers

Established in the 1950s by one of King Faisal's wives, who was known as an active and outspoken advocate for women's participation in Saudi Arabia's progress and prosperity, al-Noor is part of Jeddah's history and landscape, as well as its mythology. At the time, most girls were not educated, aside from reading the Qur'an. Queen Myriam, as she was affectionately known colloquially (though not officially), realized that as long as half of the Saudi population was excluded from full social participation, the kingdom would not flourish to its potential.

There is a local legend that the city bears the name Jeddah because the tomb of Eve, known among believers in the three Abrahamic faiths as the first woman, is located near or within the borders of the modern city. Archaeological excavation of the tomb has not been fully conducted. The legend ends sadly—not because Eve dies (versions from the three sacred texts concur she has fully human so she lived and died). Rather, it is

perhaps sad that the Saudi government had her tomb destroyed. The local legend goes that they did this so the tomb would not become a pilgrimage site and tempt pious Muslims into idol worship. That said, Eve is a beloved and highly revered mother-figure in Islam. Muslims in Saudi Arabia whom I met, spoke openly and respectfully of her significance in their religious history.

I heard the legend of Jeddah's name from Mona, a Saudi woman in her late 60s and my colleague at the university. We were talking in her office and she drew me close with her curled finger before she spoke. I leaned in and she recounted the legend with a twinkle in her eye, as though she was telling me a secret. I remember it as one of the first moments when I felt trusted. I was thrilled with the little gesture of inclusion so early on, and jotted down in my notes that "I just learned why Jeddah is named Jeddah." I recorded it as if it were an uncontested fact, and only later learned that it was not a fact; it was just a story. However, Mona was entrusting me with information that is not known to everyone.

Excavating Our Selves

On a daily basis, I observed students in jeans and designer shoes cross campus with jet-black and jewel-studded *abayas*. Some buttoned them up, but others left them open and flowing in the wind. *Hijabs*—some black and others colorful—casually slipped from their heads to their shoulders and draped like stoles around their necks. Those who chose to keep their headscarves fixed firmly on their heads often used them as a means to secure their phones to their ears, hands-free. It was not unusual to see a student walking

around or sitting at a table with one ear bud in her ear, or tucked under her scarf, while the other ear bud dangled freely around her face. This way, she could listen to her music, and if someone approached her, she could still hear what the person was saying. She could also offer someone a listen if they asked what she was listening to—simply by offering the dangling ear bud to the other woman, who slipped it into her own ear and shared the same music for a moment.

I took a listen several times and experienced a range of musical genres from pop (Coldplay) to Blues (Billy Holiday and Eartha Kitt) to rock (Rolling Stones) and heavy metal (Metallica). The strategy of wearing one earbud implies students' desire to be in their own private worlds while they remain connected to the environment and people around them. They are alone without being disconnected. This is an important feature of being online as well. Students adapt their private use of technology to balance personal pleasure with connection to the world around them.

Most of them have already passed the age their mothers were when they mothers gave birth to them, and they have their own ideas of what it means to be an educated woman and a member of an earning community and global society. For university students the world over, everyday life on campus is a mixture of the poetic and the mundane. When a student enters campus through the university's physical or online gateway, she experiences a real spatial transition, leaving the world outside the gates and positioning herself within an environment that is defined by its mission to promote education, empowerment, and innovation. She remains herself, but enters an institution. During an earlier fieldwork experience in Sudan, I heard a 20-year-old student call her campus a "free zone." She explained, "When you walk through the gates, all the things

you've been taught are erased from your mind and you can replace them with what you want . . . you can wear what you want and think what you want" (Graham, 2008). This is what I observed at al-Noor, as well. The most glaring difference between what I observed at a women's university in Sudan in 2008 and what was happening in Saudi Arabia in 2010 is the ubiquitous presence of technology—specifically students' interaction with a variety of machines. The students at al-Noor rush to class with phones in hand, cradling laptops to their chests like children. They muse about futures as influential businesswomen, yoga instructors, and pilots.

As an anthropologist conducting fieldwork on a women's university campus in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, I was located at an important nexus of social and cultural exchange in the Arab world. Jeddah is the second largest Saudi city—superseded only by the capital, Riyadh. My first few days in the kingdom, I asked people what Jeddah meant and received different answers. Jeddah, or *Jiddah*, is an Arabic word meaning “ancestor of women.” I was also told it means “grandmother” and is a colloquialism for “pretty girl.” When I Googled “meaning of Jeddah,” the definitions concurred with what I'd been told, and added that it might also refer to a “jet-black stone.”

While dining with a visiting friend and his associates at a restaurant downtown, conversation turned to women's rights. I mentioned that Jeddah seemed like an apt place for Saudi women to start an indigenous feminist movement: it was Eve's namesake, the first girls' school had opened there, and other significant firsts for women were happening there. Two of the three men present were Saudi and had lived in Jeddah for most of the lives, save their university years abroad. None had heard the legend of Jeddah's name before. One man, a Saudi pilot and entrepreneur in his mid-60s, laughed

heartily at my naivety. He acknowledged the linguistic coincidence but denied the tale's authenticity, and stopped just short of telling me I'd been taken for a fool. The other two, both in their early 30s and partners in a Saudi-American educational venture, were intrigued by the idea and willing to consider it, but conceded that there was no way to prove it. As I sat at the table flushed with embarrassment, it occurred to me that the legend's validity did not matter.

The legend of Jeddah's name functions as a kind of discursive baton passed from one woman to the next. Whether it is truth or tall tale is beside the point. The stories we know inform our subjectivities. Our realities are born, kept alive, and passed through the beliefs we hold and the things we do and say. The story of the namesake and the belief that Eve's tomb might exist somewhere beneath the Saudi sands exemplify how Mona makes use of these legends to transmit ideas about women's shared power and identity. In Jeddah, as in many places and a variety of means, such as myth and storytelling, the idea of women as being powerful and prolific has been transmitted from generation to generation. In terms of the archaeological record, we do not know what lies beneath the Jeddah sands, but one Saudi woman perpetuates the myth and continues to claim a special bond to Eve. Mona extended this bond to me. She also compared Queen Myriam to Eve as enduring and unifying mother-figures.

Campus: Locating a Sense of Place in History

Al-Noor³ is a university for women in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. It is a non-profit educational institution with ties to the royal family. A portion of financial support comes from the King Faisal Foundation, which sponsors and oversees a group of research centers, medical facilities, schools, and social services institutions. While Al-Noor is a private university, it is very much a project of the Al Saud royal family. This distinguishes it from other private universities established by corporations and businesses, which is the norm for other universities in Saudi Arabia and neighboring GCC countries.

Located on the western hip of the Red Sea, Jeddah is the primary port and main gate through which pilgrims arrive by land, air, and sea to perform Hajj or visit the Two Holy Mosques in Mecca and Medina. Such pilgrimage has been practiced since the 7th century. Today, Jeddah is a highly trafficked urban seaport city. Historically connecting trade routes across cultures and continents, the city has hosted exchanges of peoples, goods, ideas, and practices for many centuries. Globalization, understood most fundamentally as the exchange of people and ideas across geographical and cultural borders, is not new to Jeddah. Globalization's tracks, from camels to caravans and wheeled vehicles, have been left on the desert sand for centuries, literally leaving physical and cultural traces of different peoples, languages, practices, beliefs, and goods that have passed through Jeddah. This is not the case throughout Saudi Arabia; much of

³ As a reminder, al-Noor is a pseudonym for the university where I conducted my research.

the kingdom remains very insular. Jeddah is unique primarily because of its historical function as a port for the Hajj and as a point of intercultural contact.

In Jeddah, one experiences juxtaposed layers of old and new, such that the past is all around you, the present is under your feet, and the future is straight ahead.

Architecturally, the city blends traditional and modern buildings and public centers. It is blooming with foliage, as well as shopping malls, and has an extensive cornice that hugs the edge of the Red Sea for miles. There are striking displays of public art located at traffic circles and along major thoroughfares throughout the city. The modern urban centers have broad streets while the old city, known as Al-Balad, is characterized by its tiny, winding streets and arabesque accents adorning homes with fountained courtyards.

In 1905, the kingdom's first public schools for boys had opened in Jeddah. The first public school for girls was founded in Jeddah in 1960. With her husband's support, Queen Myriam opened a "girls' day school" in the early 1950s, despite opposition from religious ultraconservatives. Traditional Wahhabi practices had forbidden the study of world geography, music, art, and so-called "non-Muslim" languages. Myriam's husband, Prince Faisal (not yet king), stood up for her and advocated her vision. He placated Wahhabi clergy by stressing that attendance would be elective and that fathers could choose to send their daughters to school or keep them at home. Perhaps the strongest statement he made, however, was to announce publicly that he would allow his daughters to attend school. This was the beginning of the legacy that continues at al-Noor University today.

When Dar al-Noor opened in the early 1950s, it was actually referred to as an "orphanage" rather than a school, though the students were not orphans in the sense that

their parents were dead. As the idea of sending girls to school caught on and enrollment rates went up, the orphanage moniker fell away and it became known as the first private, nonprofit elementary school for girls. By 1957, the elementary school was registered with the Ministry of Education. Less than a decade later, support and enrollment had grown so much that the school expanded to include an intermediate and secondary facility. In 1962, Dar al-Noor School for Girls was officially registered with the Ministry of Education to educate female students from early elementary through secondary levels. Students were no longer solely from Jeddah; the institution's reputation had spread rapidly, and families throughout the kingdom sent their daughters to al-Noor because it was known as a place where girls were educated in a manner characterized by respect and affection.

I heard it said that every student at al-Noor became Queen Myriam's daughter. She was known for using the phrase "one girl at a time" when she talked about her vision of women's education. This individual attention to students continues to be a goal espoused by the university today. As a teacher who loves to teach, I found the concept refreshing—but I admit that the rhetoric is at odds with the reality of overworked teachers and classes of students with mixed skill levels and dramatically different learning styles. It is also at odds with American-style educational requirements and reliance on standardization. Since al-Noor is accredited through the American university system, this becomes a point of conflict. Educating one student at a time is a lofty goal; it requires access to resources that not many institutions have, and time that not all teachers are willing to invest.

In 1999, Dar Al-Noor School for Girls changed its name to al-Noor School for Women and became the first all-women's college in the kingdom. In 2009, it was granted university status and adjusted its name to include the upgrade. Today, Al-Noor is a premier national higher education institution with a decidedly international orientation, as evidenced by its numerous international partnerships with universities in Asia, the UK, and North America.

Certainly, place matters, and detailed information about Jeddah provides a necessary historical frame. Much that forms the substance of this ethnography could probably happen elsewhere in the world, but the ways in which they happened in this university in this particular city makes this ethnography a unique contribution to the anthropology of education in the Middle East. The university's student body, though diverse as it is, is not beyond the bounded-ness of its historical and geographical orientation. It is shaped by legends as well as local adaptations to transnational migration patterns influenced by economic, political, and environmental factors that force Saudi citizens as well as expat parents working in Saudi Arabia to make educational choices about their children's schooling. The political and economic dynamics of Jeddah as a crossroads enable young women from diverse national, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds to assemble at this university. As emphasized in the introduction, al-Noor students are neither homogenous nor predictable in terms of their histories or futures; they are as puzzling and promising as young people around the world tend to be. Al-Noor students represent a collective of diverse cultures, classes, and personal experiences. Rather than further elaborating on their diversity, however, I focus on the confluence of spaces, ideas, and tools available to these students and how they

strategically enhance learner agency, technology-mediated education, and peer-to-peer (P2P) knowledge production as members of the digital generation.

The institution's office of enrollment reports its undergraduate and graduate enrollment at over 2,000 students. It offers bachelor's degrees and master's degrees, as well as executive education programs and opportunities to get involved in community development programs such as food and clothing drives and environmental clean-up projects. Undergraduate degrees are offered in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, the College of Engineering, and the College of Business. All of the participants in this study were undergraduates.

The College of Humanities and Social Sciences offers degrees in Psychology and English Translation. Within the Psychology program, students choose either Clinical Psychology or Organizational and Behavioral Psychology. The English Translations program allows students to select a focus from Linguistics, Literature, or Translation Studies.

The College of Engineering offers programs in the following five departments: Architecture, Computer Science, Electrical and Computer Engineering, Information Systems, and Visual and Digital Production.

The College of Business has aspired to be the top-ranked school of business for women in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region, and offers concentrations in Entrepreneurship, Operation and Information Management, Human Resources Management, and Finance and Marketing.

I was told repeatedly that al-Noor is known as the Harvard for women in the Middle East. Given the university's focus on technology, however, one might suggest

that they liken it instead to MIT. Radcliffe might also be a more appropriate comparison, given that it is female-only, but students and locals alike refer to it as “the Harvard.” Al-Noor maintains a Facebook page advertising the following statistics (posted and retrieved on 22 February 2012):

Technology Matters: Technology an essential part of academic and administrative life!

- Did you know that there are 685 personal computer and 23 computer labs?
- Did you know that there are 20 smart classes with PC, projector and smart board and 44 Classes with PC and projector?

Exceptional Professors:

- Faculty members . . . are selected for their subject expertise, knowledge and teaching effectiveness. We focus on our students to draw the very best out of each student; 1:11 is the faculty: student ratio (lowest in Saudi Arabia)!
- 99 is the faculty number with 25 different nationalities.
- On the faculty body, we have 60 PHD holders.
- 134 Admin staffs are ready and willing to serve students and respond to their needs.

The university is located in the southern part of the city, known as “old Jeddah.” I found it curious that an elite school for women would be located in a rather rundown and industrial neighborhood, so I asked members of the university why this is the case. They explained the neighborhood was “elite” when the school opened but has changed over time with urban sprawl. Still, the university’s presence has historical and physical significance in the neighborhood. It is an architecturally beautiful space with bright, white modern buildings, a central mosque, and lush manicured hedges laid out around a central courtyard of deep crimson bricks. Once inside its tall white walls, one gets the feeling of being in a small, private village. In addition to being a sort of home away from home to the members of the al-Noor community, the campus has acquired personal

meaning to the local women who are not students, faculty, or employees. It is a women's space in an ideological and physical sense, and is also a safe space that draws women from the neighborhood together and brings them out of their homes. The first time I ventured on foot beyond the university, I was with a group of fellow faculty members walking to a local market less than a mile from campus. After we left the gates, each of us having pressed our thumbs to the electronic reader to register our departure, we encountered a large crowd of women on the sidewalk. They were all in long black abayas and *niqabs*, wearing tennis shoes. Returning from the market, I saw them again and realized they were walking around the university, as the campus was encircled with a sidewalk. They were exercising and socializing.

Sidewalks are not common in Jeddah, so this feature stood out as a symbol of care and concern for public safety and the local women took advantage of it. Pedestrian deaths are quite common in the neighborhood, which was one of the reasons we were discouraged from walking outside the university property. In fact, on my third outing, I saw a young boy chase a ball into the streets and get hit by a car. The playground where he and his friends were playing was located in the median area of a busy intersection and had no fence. There were few sidewalks or fences regulating public space near the university. The sidewalk that wraps around the university is therefore not overlooked by the women in the neighborhood. The next time I saw the crowd of sneaker-clad walkers, I hung out in the vestibule of the main building to watch them, trying to figure out what they were doing. I counted roughly 40 women, who appeared to range in age. Most were spry on their feet, but I did notice a few elderly and larger women bringing up the rear at a slower pace, some with the assistance of canes. They walked around the campus five

times while I watched, and I realized they were “working out.” Some were also talking animatedly. Some were laughing. It looked like they were having fun. Others seemed to just be concentrating as they walked, arms bent and hands in fists, pumping back and forth with each step. There was a positive feeling among them that extended to me as I watched them move past the glass doors of the air-conditioned building where I sat separated from them.

The women who walked around the university were not students, nor did they have any official affiliation with the institution, but they were connected to it. They claimed a part of the university space as their own, making it a place where they went to be together and feel safe—and literally walked the line of public and private space that is becoming blurred at al-Noor and other social institutions and public places in Saudi Arabia. Their walks were a ritual I observed regularly throughout my months at al-Noor. I related to their desire to move within the confines of strictly monitored public spaces. I, too, wanted to exercise my body, to stretch my legs, to move freely. Being female in Saudi Arabia involves being confronted with restrictions on your body’s mobility. Even on campus, a space that was declared a women’s space and maintains a liberal “optional abaya” policy, bodies are closely monitored and controlled. A few years ago, a chain of women-only gyms opened in Jeddah and ultraconservative clerics quickly shut them down. I knew this before I arrived and was delighted to learn that the campus had a gym and swimming pool. Both were indoors, and, after a day of being in air-conditioned buildings, it was more refreshing to exercise outside.

Being at al-Noor consistently afforded me opportunities to reflect upon the relationship between mind and body and environment. Such reflection is critical for

ethnographic researchers, as our positionality within our work is both theoretical and physical. Where one puts her body is an ever-present question in an ethnographer's daily practice. Moving can be a way to stay healthy, but one needs somewhere to move, somewhere to go. The students at al-Noor are finding those places, playing with the structure and purpose of the architecture around them. LeRenard's work, which explores how young women test the boundaries of proper dress and behavior in public spaces such as shopping malls (2013), is an excellent example of how young women extend their ideas of transgression beyond the campus walls. When they are on campus, they often flip the purpose of a space on its head, as well. For example, they convert leisure space, such as the café, into workspaces where they hold meetings and plan events. They turn the library into a Skype chat room or Twitter headquarters. Corners of hallways become places of worship when a student unrolls a prayer mat, kneels, and bends her body in prayer.

As a researcher, I did a similar thing by turning the campus sidewalks into a track. I mapped a 5K course on my GPS watch and ran nightly on the winding paths of the small campus, often wondering if I should stop. I worried that I was modeling transgressive behavior that students could get in trouble for emulating, but I came to realize that I was actually following *their* lead in terms of transforming space, not the other way around. My nightly runs drove home the complex reality that every ethnographer must eventually come to terms with: I was not just a fly on the wall. I was a participant in a community; the conditions and forces I observed were influencing me as much as my presence influenced the conditions and forces I was observing. I was learning from the students how to function in such a strictly monitored space, while they

simultaneously observed me and potentially developing new understandings of their own bodies in the university space. In the following chapter, I return to this discussion of the regulation and relationship of bodies in physical space.

Today, Jeddah is home to a diverse cosmopolitan population, including foreign nationals from neighboring Arab countries as well significant migrant populations from Asia, Europe, Australia, and the Americas. Its urban center boasts international restaurant chains like Applebees and On the Border, an Ikea, affordable and boutique shopping malls, computer super-stores including Best Buy, and certified Apple resellers. Jeddah is the site of many well-respected schools and universities in the region and has a reputation as being more “open” and “educated” than the rest of the kingdom. Despite its historic function as a crossroads and its avowed openness, however, Jeddah is difficult to reach, especially for a non-Muslim American female researcher traveling on her own. The kingdom does not offer tourist visas to non-Muslims, so my only option was to enter on a work visa. The government does not welcome foreign researchers without a local affiliation and close supervision. Since al-Noor supports and shares my desire to better understand educational practice as a critical part of human lived experience and national development in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere, they hired me as a visiting faculty member, and this position allowed me full access to the campus and students throughout my research period.

Cyber-Daughters of Eve

During her lifetime as an immigrant, wife, and mother, “Queen Myriam” made women’s education a priority. She continually concentrated her wealth and power on

projects that enhanced Saudi citizens' access to social services and projects that fostered community pride and development. Though she lived in a kingdom that has a king but no official title of queen, she continues to be affectionately called "queen." Her title is a colloquialism and a symbol that she was beloved and respected as a woman of great power and benevolence. She created the kingdom's first educational and social service nonprofit institutions and made sure women were not excluded. During the 1960s, she founded the kingdom's first two social welfare entities: Women's Welfare Association, which is in Jeddah, and Al Nahdah Women's Welfare Association in Riyadh. Both associations remain active today and provide women's programs and social services. I heard Queen Myriam's story many times, and each time it is retold, it is a little different. Maybe someone met her. Maybe someone saw her walk past at an event. Maybe someone kissed her cheeks and thanked her personally. The gist is that popular opinion of her is very high and many Saudis speak of her as both mother and queen.

Myriam was raised in Turkey and traveled to Saudi Arabia with her family for Hajj at age 15. While in Mecca, she met her future husband, Prince Faisal Al Saud, who became the third king of Saudi Arabia. They were a popular royal couple and raised nine children together. Saudis today speak of Queen Myriam as an instrumental part of her husband's accomplishments and give her credit for efforts to spark rapid growth and development in education and healthcare in the kingdom. As I said earlier, she is the founding patron of al-Noor University for Women and maintains a place of honor in the institutions' evolving identity. In the next chapter, when I go into depth about the research setting, I will discuss how al-Noor grew from its humble beginnings as an orphanage to become the university it is today.

Students at al-Noor, much like their youthful counterparts around the world, are coming of age with digital technology. As technological innovation becomes an increasingly global phenomenon with porous and mutable borders, youth develop naturally into digital pioneers who know their world intuitively and are equipped with expert skills and purposeful curiosity to explore and define new frontiers in technological innovation. There is an inherently social component to technology, and, with education enhanced by and through technology, the digital generation understands “doing” as a tandem act of teaching and learning. The learner is cast as agent rather than passive recipient. There are fewer and fewer solitary moments in their lives, and the need for feedback drives their need to communicate. Furthermore, technology-mediated peer learning is rooted in an evolving knowledge of the self and of shared social space as potentially limitless. Creativity is an instructional tool as well as a learning outcome. I frequently heard comments at the university, such as, “Here, let me show you,” and questions like, “How did you do that?” or “Can you show me how to do that?” The fact that these comments and questions are a common part of young people’s casual everyday conversations indicates a deep connection and affinity with machines forged by similar cognitive processes that bypass constructed boundaries such as nationality, race, class, and gender. Age does not necessarily exclude someone with genuine interest from participating in the world of the so-called digital generation, since one can become tech savvy and computer literate through association and instruction. But the relationship that members of the digital generation have with each other and computers and mobile devices is inherent.

Forty percent of the Saudi population is under the age of 15, and women comprise the fastest growing population of students in Saudi universities. Eventually, the world's leading oil producer will exhaust the natural resource upon which its national presence in the global capitalist market was built, and the kingdom will have to define itself anew through other means—namely its human resources: Saudi citizens. As Saudi Arabia's government and citizens look to the future, myriad preparations are underway. In 2009, King Abdullah University of Science and Technology opened, welcoming international students from around the world into a learning community designed to foster “inspiration and discovery.” The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz, for whom the university is named, issued a message explaining the university's mission:

Wishing to rekindle and spread the great and noble virtue of learning that has marked the Arab and Muslim worlds in earlier times, I am establishing King Abdullah University of Science and Technology on the Red Sea in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

As a new "House of Wisdom," the University shall be a beacon for peace, hope, and reconciliation and shall serve the people of the Kingdom and benefit all the peoples of the world in keeping with the teachings of the Holy Quran, which explains that God created mankind in order for us to come to know each other. (KAUST, 2014)

The king's hope that institutions of higher education might have a significant and transformative impact, both locally and globally, is apparent in his message. The concept of institutionalized education as common ground, or a platform for collaborative inquiry and collective knowledge, is not novel. In fact, it calls to mind the university's earliest origins as an Aristotelian abstraction and the historical mandate of the institution to collect, translate, amalgamate, and preserve scientific knowledge from various cultures in a universal form. However, the statement that “King Abdullah University of Science and Technology on the Red

Sea in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a beacon of peace, hope, and reconciliation” speaks to a more ambiguous and ambitious goal. Students at al-Noor are taking this educational mission seriously. This is evident every day on campus, where students assemble to learn, have fun, and create with each other; and it is equally evident online, where they learn, have fun, and create with people around the world.

Most schools and universities in Saudi Arabia, whether they are public or private, receive funding from the government. Funding allocations differ, however. For example, most university students receive a stipend from the government. This is true of universities in Jeddah, Riyadh, Dammam, and other provinces. Students at al-Noor do not receive a stipend, though. I asked students, faculty, and administrators why this was the case, and they all had their own spin on the same answer. I was told they didn’t need to get paid to go to school. Their students were there because they wanted to be there. It was a privilege.

Some students are members of the Al Saud family and I do not know how their tuition works. Some families do pay school fees, which I heard are determined according to a sliding scale that considers each student’s financial means, as well as her merit. I met several young women who said they were attending al-Noor on scholarships. Most of them mentioned it as a means of motivation. I was told more than once that a student had to get a certain grade or she could lose her scholarship. I do not have the data to make conclusive statements about how scholarships are allocated; however, I can say that the majority of students I met who received scholarships were not Saudi. Ministry of Higher Education scholarships are only available to Saudi citizens, so the fact that non-Saudi

students were on scholarships indicates alternative funding sources for which citizenship is not a requirement. Private funders are linking up with al-Noor and are investing in Muslim women's education, whether they are Saudi or not. Some of the young women I spoke to about their scholarships were living in Jeddah because their fathers were economic migrants.

Calling Home and Connecting

Zeynep is a student from Turkey attending al-Noor on scholarship. She came to al-Noor when her father took an engineering job in Jeddah. I heard her reference her scholarship many times when she came to see me during my office hours. Zeynep's situation is not typical, but it speaks to al-Noor's diversity, which I want to highlight. I mention it here and now in order to problematize the stereotypical view that all al-Noor students are princesses or privileged young women who wear Jimmy Choo heels under their designer abayas.

Zeynep was admitted to al-Noor as an "English language learner," so she was not officially a student at the university. Rather, she was in a liminal space, located at the English Academy, which is located on al-Noor's campus and serves as a starter school for students who have not developed "adequate" English language skills. All classes at the university are taught in English. Students who cannot pass the English entrance exam must pass English classes at the Academy before they are fully admitted to the university. Zeynep definitely struggled with English and spoke even less Arabic, which would become an issue later on, as students must pass basic Arabic language classes to graduate from al-Noor. Every time I met with Zeynep, she cried. She needed help with

assignments and struggled to express herself in a language she had never been taught until the year she came to al-Noor. When I met her, she was in her second year at the English Academy. She failed her first year and feared if she did not pass that year, she would lose her scholarship. She told me she picked up what little English she knew from TV, movies, and language sites on the Internet before coming to Saudi Arabia. She hoped she would return to Turkey eventually, where she wanted to marry a Turkish man and work as a graphic designer. She was a very gifted artist, and always carried her iPad, which was a virtual gallery of her work. She usually walked into my office with her phone in one hand and her iPad cradled against her chest, as if it were her heart, which she held outside her body. She loved sharing pictures of her artwork and I encouraged her to talk about them in English. She said it was easier to use English when she talked about her art, but her mind went blank when it came time for the test. Her academic failures damaged her self-confidence and had her so depressed that she worried she would not survive her years at al-Noor. She wasn't always sure she would make it back to Turkey. She told me she thought of suicide.

When Zeynep's father told her he was bringing her to Jeddah with him, he told her she would go to the best school, and when she went back to Turkey, she would be prepared to be a successful businesswoman. He also said that her mother would visit and they would all go on Hajj together. He did not force her to come against her will; he brought her with him out of love. Circumstances here were more difficult than either of them anticipated, however, and two years had passed. Zeynep said her father worked late and she never saw him. She spent her days on campus and her evenings on Skype with her friends back home.

One day when she was in my office, her iPhone rang. She looked at it longingly, so I told her to go ahead and take the call. She came to life when she answered it. Her voice changed and she launched into robust, easy conversation in Turkish. She was smiling and laughing. Her countenance and posture changed, and she seemed full of happiness as she spoke fluently and animatedly. When she hung up, she said, “That was my mother calling from home.” Home was Turkey.

A 2012 study conducted by researchers at Google declares that “smartphone adoption has gone global.” The study reveals that more than 50% of the populations of Australia, U.K., Sweden, Norway, Saudi Arabia, and UAE use smartphones. In Saudi Arabia, it is closer to 60%, with 47% of those users reporting that they had used their mobile phone every day for the previous seven days. The increasingly popular devices are commonly referred to as mobile phones, smart phones, cell phones, iPhones, and/or Blackberries (BBs). Whatever users call these devices, they are part of daily human experience for an ever-growing percentage of the planet’s population, including the young women in my study. Seventy-five percent of Saudi smartphone users in the 500--person sample reported that they do not leave home without their phone. During my fieldwork, I observed the ubiquity of mobile phones and other technological innovations among students at al-Noor. It became readily apparent that human-machine relationships constituted some of the most significant relationships in the lives of the students in my study.

I concur with the Google report and agree that “smartphone adoption” is a global phenomenon. I particularly embrace the word choice “adoption.” It is apt, as it suggests that the smartphone has been brought into a kind of kinship, a familial relationship

between adopter and adoptee. The smartphone-human relationship is characterized by expectations, frustrations, and love, much like human-human relationships. Around the world, in every life, every home, and every nation where mobile devices have penetrated, there are people who openly proclaim their love for iPhones and BBs. These devices are loved. “I can’t live without it,” is a comment I heard repeatedly during my research, as well as in my personal circle of friends and family. Phones are listened to and talked to, but not because that is their instrumental purpose. Rather, conversations *with* phone—not *via* phones—happen because users have relationships with their iPhones and BBs, which they dress up, coddle like children, trust, adore, and even kiss. This mechanical device, which is made of “vibrant matter,” metal and plastic, is hugged in the palm of one’s hand and becomes more than a phone. It becomes teacher, companion, and friend, as well as an instrument that enables communication and access to information.

Global Higher Education: Scenes from the Arab World

Industrialized and developing countries alike, including those in the culturally diverse and geographically expansive Arab world, have increasingly identified the presence of a thriving national system of education as a cornerstone of peaceful society and a thriving economy. Educational reforms and initiatives designed to meet local demands for socioeconomic change, foster citizenship, and increase participation in the global knowledge economy have swept the Arab world. Education-sector reforms have not been adopted uniformly or as a panacea for social inequality, economic turmoil, or political unrest in the Arab world; rather, they are imbedded in a holistic approach to

national reform within specific national contexts. Finding international models in Singapore, Korea, and Jordan, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (which include Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates), Arab nations are designing and implementing education-sector reform as part of a broad and collaborative regional framework for globally competitive and knowledge-based societies.

Saudi Arabia is an interesting context to explore in terms of development. In many respects, Saudi Arabia is not unlike the other members of the GCC. While Saudi Arabia is the country known throughout the world as simply “the Kingdom,” all GCC countries have autocratic governmental structures with some form of monarchy, and they are all Islamic states whose citizens are either Sunni or Shi’a (Shiite). While Saudi Arabia has a majority Sunni population, it is the only country to officially practice Wahhabi Islam, a conservative branch of Sunni Islam. The political and legal systems of all GCC countries are guided by Islamic principles. *Sharia* or Islamic law provides fundamental legal guidelines in all GCC countries, though interpretation and application vary among the countries and are arguably most strict in Saudi Arabia. Religious, cultural, political, and economic similarities unite the six countries of the Arabian Gulf; yet, Saudi Arabia is unique in the education sector. In Saudi Arabia, education at all levels remains firmly in government hands, whereas privatization has taken hold and drives educational development in all other GCC countries, most notably in Qatar, with the Qatar Foundation’s global corporate connections and extensive international education affiliations (Asmi, 2013).

The Saudi government's unyielding control over all levels education, from preschool to PhD, provides a useful comparative context in the region. More interestingly and relevant to this dissertation, it invites examination of the ways that education, nationalism, and the family interact, which might not be as apparent in countries where privatization has assumed the reins of national education, and foreign universities and international corporations have created branch campuses. According to the Ministry of Higher Education, Saudi Arabia has spent a quarter of its annual budget on education in an effort to improve the quality and outcomes of higher education.

One program of significance in terms of the kingdom's global outlook in relation to education is the King Abdullah Scholarship Program, which has enabled more than 90,000 Saudi citizens to pursue higher education at universities abroad. More than half of these students (estimated at about 50,000)⁴ have attended universities in the United States, including Columbia University. These numbers attest to the educational links that exist between Saudi Arabia and the U.S. at the individual student level, as well as the institutional and policy levels. Sending students abroad for educational exchange is a longstanding strategy for domestic development that has had unintended effects, namely "brain drain." Brain drain is a pattern of the "best and brightest" leaving their home to attain a better education elsewhere, only to remain abroad rather than return to build capacity and improve local infrastructure. Brain drain is neither unknown nor a new phenomenon in the Middle East. Domestic education is a priority. Educational expansion has been swift and broad. The number of public universities in Saudi Arabia

⁴ <http://susris.com/2012/07/30/king-abdullah-scholarship-program-the-saudi-arabian-educational-youth-stride/>

has risen from eight to nearly thirty in a few years. Women's education has expanded dramatically. Even a cursory look into what is happening in Saudi Arabia at the point where education, nationalism, and family issues flow together quickly reveals that women are the education system's primary subjects. Analysis of this educational transformation through the lens of women's educational experiences is, therefore, particularly appropriate and promises to be fruitful in terms of addressing the future of the kingdom.

In 2004, the Saudi government set forth a 10-year education strategy "aimed at not just economic requirements but sociopolitical needs as well." To be successful, educational change must occur in conversation with or in response to broader social change. In 2007, Saudi Arabia founded the world's largest university for women, Princess Nora bint Abdulrahman University, with the capacity to enroll more than 55,000 students to study subjects including education, business, languages, computer science, and medicine. The campus, located outside the Saudi capital city of Riyadh, offers a teaching hospital and cutting-edge information network of computer laboratories, science laboratories, and high-tech libraries. Along with al-Noor, Princess Nora University is creating a bright constellation of women's educational institutions for young women in the region.

Conclusion

The digital generation has come to embody the spirit of connectivity and the innovation that underpins today's global knowledge economy. In the past, developing nations built strong citizenships and stable economies by training human bodies as ideal

workers and channeling material and monetary resources into manufacturing and industrialization. However, success and sustainability in today's global capitalist markets increasingly depend on a nation's capacity to develop intellectual skills and manage strategic discontinuities that generate creativity and spark innovation. There is an emphasis on "soft power" and "green power," which fuel service industries and feed technological advancement. The focus on human beings' creative capacity is happening within the broad global gaze of international development and human resource management, and is articulated in economic, political, and educational policy shifts.

On the campus of this private women's university, one gets "a sense of people living with and through technologies" (McCarthy, Wright, Wallace, & Dearden, 2006). Students use technology to meet mundane needs and lofty desires alike, to share their ideas and talents, to build their dream careers. Questions remain as to whether, or to what extent, their interaction with the Internet will transform local labor markets that, in turn, might bring about significant shifts in the national economy and the cultural mindset of the country. In a world of increasingly excessive information and malleable space, young people with Internet access and ICT skills wield a powerful tool for knowledge production and meaningful experience that facilitates human connection. The following chapters will argue that al-Noor students are exemplars of this global phenomenon.

Chapter 4

ACCESS GRANTED

Introduction

University campuses are educational spaces where young people can encounter new interpretations of power and experiment with choice. Today's universities are hybrid learning spaces where the physical world and cyberspace coexist to produce acculturated bodies with agency in both worlds. Hybrid learning spaces transcend cultural and architectural constructs that may institutionalize sexual or class segregation. They valorize private rather than public space. Can we approach the university as a venue of solidarity that fosters organic expressions of civil society that lead to political action?

The last chapter positioned al-Noor, historically and geographically, as a private women's university in Jeddah. This chapter describes the participants and my methodology, as well as some of the physical and emotional challenges I faced when entering the field. I aim to establish the intimacy of the relationship between researcher and students. I also begin to probe more deeply students' exposure to machines on campus, as well as their use of ICTs to get online and connect in various ways on the Internet.

Twitter as Teacher: Ethnographer as Student

Power dynamics between researcher and participant are often challenging to balance and keep in check, much like the roles of teacher and learner are often blurred beyond recognition on the Internet. The give-and-take is so spontaneous, and the exchanges are so unrelenting, that the playing field becomes leveled. The following anecdote of my interaction with a young woman who was meant to be the subject of my research exemplifies the kind of social education happening because of the Internet and on the Internet.

I opened my Twitter account while I was in Jeddah at the behest of a research participant who told me, “Twitter is the most educational thing ever.” Dina, a newly turned eighteen-year-old architecture major and environmental enthusiast, sat down with me at my computer in the library and helped me set up my account. She was extremely tech-savvy and eager to lead me online. Having lived in Jeddah her whole life, she was committed to preserving the city’s historical district and cleaning up the streets. She maintained a blog, was working toward a degree in architecture with a focus on sustainable development, had started a campus-based recycling program, and talked a lot about “greening” the campus.

We sat side-by-side and chose my handle and profile image together. When my Twitter account was set up on my laptop, she opened her computer, went online, and found me. I asked to follow her and she asked to follow me—then she smiled proudly at me the way a teacher smiles at her pupil. I smiled back

and thanked her as a researcher thanks an informant and as a pupil thanks a teacher. She pointed at the screen and said, “See? There you are. Now you’ll know everything.” The student taught the teacher that day, as they often do.

I have indeed learned a great deal from Twitter since the day she helped me open my account. The Internet is not an unmitigated wonderland of knowledge, nor is it outside the reach of government monitoring, and the Saudi government is on Twitter, too. I discuss examples of this later on. Students are, however, aware of the notable political censorship and instances of online activists and bloggers being jailed. Web 2.0 applications are not blocked, but obstacles to access, limits on content, and violations of users’ right are reported. Public protest throughout the Arab world has increased since the Egyptian revolution in 2011, and Saudi Arabia is no exception. Given the degree of Internet penetration and tight restrictions on public space, it is not surprising that much of this dissent happens online. In spite of increasing government censorship, Saudis continue to connect and share online. Every year, Internet trend-watcher Mary Meeker issues a report of global Internet trends. According to the 2013 Meeker Report, 60% of Saudi respondents said they share “everything” and “most things” online. To the Saudis who participated in the survey, online sharing includes everything from status updates on Facebook and Twitter to expressions of how they feel emotionally, blogging, posting photos and videos, and disseminating other links. Ideas about Internet freedom and assumptions of unbridled online agency require critical examination, however,

since the Saudi government engages in extensive filtering and monitoring, making the case complicated.

The contemporary global university is both a public and a private space. It maintains a presence both online and offline. In this context, the role of social spaces on campus, such as cafés, courtyards, and websites, has been recast. These once-peripheral leisure spaces are critical arenas where students congregate, percolating ideas and gelling plans. Campus cafes, blogs, You Tube, and Facebook are domains where the learner is the primary agent of knowledge production and power. Thus, traditional hierarchies of access and authority are being renegotiated. Learner agency and technology-assisted peer learning are organic and viable alternatives to traditional transference of knowledge practices and cultural reproduction. To be sure, this transformation is contested. Students and educators struggle for a pedagogical supremacy that is playing out in universities around the world. It is a contest that threatens traditional educational stakeholders, as new pedagogical paradigms emerge to replace previous ways of teaching, knowing, and doing that are central to the identities of education professionals and policy makers. The position of the university student is on the move within the academic power structure, unsettling the system. In spite of this—or perhaps because of it—revolutionary climate in universities today, profound educational moments are happening. Today, there is growing momentum among the general public in Jeddah that collective political action will (re)shape the future, particularly in their country and the region. This movement has inspired an unprecedented wave of political activism that resonates with the spirit of revolution sparked in Tunisia in January 2011, which then swept across several countries in North Africa and the Middle East. Saudi Arabia's

universities, including al-Noor, are critical centers and sources of the kingdom's emerging sense of civil society and citizen activism.

Research Participants: The "IT" Girls

All participants in this study were female undergraduate students attending al-Noor University. They range in age from 18-24, and represent the university's diverse population, which reflects the cosmopolitan population of Jeddah. To protect the anonymity of each of the research participants, all names have been changed to pseudonyms. Each of the young women defined herself as Muslim, in addition to other national and ethnic identities.

Pseudonym	Age*	Country of Origin**	Academic Major
Noor (Noorin)	18	Saudi Arabia (F) Egypt (M)	Computer Science
Maria	18	Saudi Arabia (F) Lebanon (M)	Psychology/ Human Resources
Noor A.	19	Syria	Engineering/ Computer Science
Malak	19	Saudi Arabia	Electrical Engineering/ Robotics
Deema	20	Saudi Arabia	Business
Sara	18	Kuwait	Business
Amira	18	Saudi Arabia	Business
Abeer	18	Pakistan	Business
Lulu	21	Saudi Arabia	Architecture/ Business
Manal	18	Saudi Arabia	Engineering
Aya	18	Saudi (F) Lebanon (M)	Psychology
Reem	20	Bahrain	Business
Zeynep	19	Turkey	Undeclared
Bushra	20	India	Business
Fatima	18	Lebanon	Psychology/Translation
Djeneba	20	Nigeria	English
Miriam	19	Nigeria	Computer Science
Ayesha	19	Nigeria	Psychology/English

Participants in this study represent the following countries: Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Canada, United Kingdom, India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Lebanon, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. However, not all research participants from whom I collected demographic data and personal stories are mentioned in this dissertation. I therefore omitted them from the table above. Also, aside from the time these participants spent in Saudi Arabia while attending al-Noor, some stated that they live outside their country of origin for periods of time, from several weeks to six months, and in countries ranging from Canada, the United Arab Emirates, the United States, The United Kingdom, Germany, and Switzerland. Aya, for example, spends summers in Switzerland. Reem, who is Bahraini, attends university in Saudi Arabia and spends summers and long weekends in London. A group of students from Nigeria who were sophomores and do not have any family members in Saudi Arabia, lived on campus. They only leave Saudi Arabia for the summer break. Altogether, about 50 students live on campus, many of whom do have family in Saudi Arabia, but outside of Jeddah. Most of these students live on campus during the week and go home on weekends and holidays.

The participants mentioned in this dissertation and in my study represent a fraction of the diversity of al-Noor student body, and there might be al-Noor students from countries not represented in my limited sample size. I collected demographic data from each participant during in-person, semi-structured interviews I conducted on campus; and asked each student her age, “home country,” and her academic major.

Data Collection: Getting There and Being There

My research was conducted in English, as instruction in all subjects on campus is in English, but my knowledge of Arabic was advantageous to my positionality within the community, and helpful with issues of translation. The cultural and linguistic diversity on campus is a reflection of the transnationalism that characterizes the university community, upon which I elaborated in Chapter 3. Not all students speak Arabic, so English was the common language. We know this from the story of Zeynep, the Turkish student. Because there are many regional dialects and forms of Arabic, some of the native Arabic speakers have difficulty understanding each other because they come from different Arab countries where dialects are quite different. Moreover, some students from countries including India, Pakistan, and Nigeria, have never studied Arabic—other than memorizing the Qur'an until they come to the university—and vernacular and colloquial Arabic are very different. Some students seem to be natural language learners, while others struggle. In contrast to Zeynep's struggles, Bushra, a business student from India, was the top student in her Arabic class, outscoring native Arabic speakers. All students are required to take at least two semesters of Arabic language as a graduation requirement. Whether the classes are introductory or advanced level depends on the student.

The Arabic language is an important part of al-Noor's identity. Even if English is the language of instruction, it is rarely seen in official institutional literature without an accompanying translation in Arabic. Even the daily menu at the dining hall is published in Arabic and English. While newcomers to Arabic might not be fluent by the time they

graduate, their senses daily filter the sounds and shapes of the language, and they are indelibly touched and transformed by it. The interplay of languages on campus and online is interesting, but outside the focus of this dissertation. I do want to emphasize, however, that exposure to the Arabic language is an integral part of being a student at al-Noor. Speaking Arabic helped me, but speaking it imperfectly might actually have helped me more, as it was a point of connection with many of my participants as we fumbled through multilingual conversations together.

Before I left for the field, my advisor asked me, “Where will you put your body?” I thought I had it all worked out in my head; I’d be at the university, on campus. I’d be in classrooms. I’d lurk in hallways. Pay attention in bathrooms, hang out in the café, watch the gates open and close each day. His question was posed seriously and wisely, and I thought I was prepared seriously and wisely in response. I entered “the field” having read the relevant literature on education policy and social change in Saudi Arabia. I was prepared to employ grounded theory and operate in the spirit of mobility and spontaneity. I was unprepared, alas, for the places and spaces in which I found myself. The contemporary university, I learned, has porous borders and its students move between campus and the Internet fluidly, shifting between online and offline contexts as though that movement was as simple and natural as inhaling and exhaling. I observed in classrooms and hallways, yes. I took pictures of the lipstick graffiti left on the bathroom mirrors and listened to students talk about upcoming exams and wedding parties they’d been to the weekend before while I washed my hands and dried my hands, every so slowly. I saw them kneel individually and in small groups for prayer on prayer rugs at the ends of the hallways. I chatted with them in the café. I also observed them searching

for information and cultivating new knowledge online in ways that seemed to be common sense and easy to them. Today's tech-savvy students function like cyber-hunter gatherers and cyber-subsistence farmers on the Internet. I had to figure out how to follow them online to survive. To do so, I needed guides.

Entering the Field

Many researchers consider ethnography the *sine qua non* of anthropology. It is distinguished by heavy investments of time and energy in participant observation, and said by some to be the definitive method of anthropological research. At its best, ethnography enables access to the "hard to reach" interior worlds of human experience and produces authentic new knowledge. It goes places that surveys and questionnaires cannot go. It is not just a matter of being there and watching or hearing. The ethnographer asks and listens. It is a messy practice, and getting to the location where you will engage in that messy practice is the first step.

Physical access to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is not easy for a non-Muslim American female anthropology student. I collected data for this dissertation from September 2010-June 2011, the initial 10 months of an ongoing study. I spent five months on campus at a women's university in Jeddah and five months doing ethnographic research online while based in New York City. My visa application was returned a few times before it was granted. The first denial was because the Saudi embassy wanted a more recent AIDS test. The results I submitted were more than two years old and deemed invalid. The second time, they denied my visa they requested

“official” results of a recent pregnancy test administered and certified by a doctor. Apparently, my checking the “no” box was insufficient. My personal knowledge of my body and my certainty that I was not pregnant did not meet the Saudi government’s desire to know the state of my womb before allowing me into the country. Eventually, I fulfilled all requirements and received my visa.

On my first day in Jeddah, shortly after arriving at the university that sponsored my fieldwork, I was driven to a government-affiliated lab where technicians collected extensive biometrics from me: chest X-rays, samples of my blood and urine, and another pregnancy test. After five months in the field, I was exhausted by restrictions on my physical mobility and lack of access to public spaces and the Internet, so I returned to New York and completed my research online. The decision to move to the Internet as my main fieldsite was fortuitously timed and opened up a realm of intimacy and connectivity with my participants that I had not imagined possible.

While I was at al-Noor, I was employed as a visiting lecturer in addition to my role as researcher and Ph.D. student at my home institution. In addition to conducting my dissertation research, I taught six classes in one semester, and I was relieved when I decided to move to online research for the second phase of data collection, as I no longer had the time restrictions or ethical constraints of being a teacher.

However, online research presented its own set of challenges. Having set out to do fieldwork in Saudi Arabia, the “place” where I spent most of my time, months later, was not physically within the boundaries of the Kingdom. In fact, it was not a physical “place” at all. I found this logistically and culturally disorienting to encounter a plurality of online spaces that exist outside the national, cultural, and religious boundaries that

define Saudi Arabia. Connections to machines and online, networked spaces open up new worlds. There is a tendency to perceive online culture as singular when it is actually more like an endless proliferation of complex ever-evolving systems of signification. I argue, in this sense, we may approach anthropological studies of the Internet and culture in terms cultural proliferation rather than cultural production or reproduction.

Participation in online communities and cultures affects the everyday lives of social actors, and thus becomes an anthropological question that begs us to re-approach our definition of culture and its role in human experience. This query leads us into ontological debates about bodies, reality, identity, and what it means to be human. Here, we should foray into cultural analysis or cyborgology and virtual reality studies, but these theoretical fields are beyond the scope of this study. The social and the technical are indeed inseparable (Latour, 2005); in this dissertation, I focus on students and their relationships with the devices and online, networked spaces through which they gain access to the Internet rather than online cultures per se, although I acknowledge they are inextricably connected. A robust literature exists on online cultures, but this is outside the focus of my present study, so I do not engage with it here.

In considering the strategies that this diverse community of university students applied to everyday life, we can better understand the impact that organic pedagogies and emergent educational ideologies have on young people's collective imaginations, and the social networks they use to accomplish goals. Relevant findings presented here beg additional conversation about how these networks are (re)shaping local and global socio-political landscapes, especially in the Arab world at a time when it is experiencing a historic rise of revolutionary momentum toward civic participation in political change.

Fitting In (and Keeping Fit)

As I have explained, my role in the university was two-fold; I was a visiting lecturer and an ethnographer conducting my dissertation research. I taught three sessions of two courses: Communications or COM 101, an introductory course on critical thinking and academic writing, and Interdisciplinary Seminar or IDS112, a public speaking course that focused on writing and delivering speeches.

This was a normal load for most professors. I was initially assigned to teach seven classes, but negotiated my way out of one. Each class had between 19 and 29 students. When I expressed concern about my ability to adequately instruct and assess a class of up to 29 non-native English speakers in an English composition course, the dean told me not to worry. I explained to her that most assignments would involve writing and that evaluations would be in essay form. The amount of time needed to grade them would most certainly prohibit any other activities during my waking hours. Her response was, “Just do your best and give them multiple-choice and true-and-false exams.” I therefore had to make weighty compromises to my teaching philosophy and professional ethics to fit in at the university and earn the acceptance of the administrators and other instructors. When I expressed concern to a colleague about assessing students’ writing ability in their second (and sometimes third) language with true-and-false questions, she said, “Teachers don’t really teach here, we are just warm bodies.” For the most part, exams were standardized, coming from the Ministry of Education without consideration of the students’ circumstances, experiences, or skills. Even exams designed by individual professors had to be cleared, and the Ministry often modified them. I experienced the

latter personally. I compromised myself as an educator, and felt I constantly rode the line between being subversive and following directions and depriving my students of the best learning experience.

My advisors and colleagues had cautioned me that juggling two jobs would be a challenge, but a work visa was my only ticket, so I took it and tried to manage the stress as well as possible. Full-time employment was the sole option for me to secure a long-term stay in the kingdom. I had worn the dual teacher/researcher hat in past research sites in Tanzania and Sudan, and I thought my previous experience would help and guide me. It did not.

While the complexity of my position in the field was something I anticipated, I did not expect to have such extreme constraints on my personal time, physical mobility, or expression of self. I could not do much of anything on my own outside the university walls and very rarely ventured off campus. My early field notes reveal that I was feeling bored and depressed. I could not walk to a nearby market when I needed groceries. Shopping outings required herculean acts of coordination with other faculty who lived on campus and the arduous task of retaining a driver. Once we were on the road, beyond the campus walls, we were stuck in traffic jams, so even a simple outing always took several hours. Everything seemed so difficult. Every movement was grueling. I began to feel caged and my stress level rose. I decided I needed to relieve some stress; I needed to move, to exercise.

Running is my exercise of choice. It is how I build trust with my body, unfurl my mind and think clearly, and how I learn about and connect with my environment. I put on my shoes and went running within the university walls, eager to feel healthy and clear

my mind, but I was immediately reprimanded. I explained that I was dressed modestly and it was after school hours and no men were around. But I was told in no uncertain terms that running is not allowed on campus. I went to the university president and told her I wanted (rather, needed) to run on campus and she gave me her blessing. The next time the housemother yelled at me, suggesting that I wear my abaya over my long pants and long-sleeved t-shirt, I told her she could complain to the president about it, but I was running. And I ran, every night for months, until the rain came. Sometimes I passed students out for an evening stroll along the garden paths. I knew that students living on campus saw me run. I knew they saw my exchanges with the housemother. They saw her shake her head and point her finger at me, and they saw me wipe tears from my eyes when I turned away from her and ran into the cool wind, toward the academic buildings stacked low and square against the blushing pink sky at dusk.

One night, after I'd been running for a few weeks, a group of students cheered me on and clapped as I passed them. A few of them eventually joined me. I wore a Garmin GPS device when I ran and mapped a course around campus. At first, they were uncomfortable leaving the gardens next to the residential buildings, so I told them how many laps around the garden equaled one mile. It was several laps and they got bored quickly, so I showed them where to run on campus among the buildings. I had figured out when and where the male gardeners were and how to avoid them. I chose routes with nooks and alleys so I could dodge male maintenance workers who unexpectedly popped up in my path. They appeared utterly in shock to see a woman running around. The students and I joked that running our 5K course was like playing a video game, twisting and turning to avoid the enemy: the men. The students probably had mental images of

themselves as players in highly sophisticated videogames, such as World of Warcraft, when they said this. I am not a gamer and could only conjure a mental picture of myself as the yellow, pie-shaped Pacman, munching up bleeping dots as I ran along the path. Our running was significant for many reasons, including the fact that it helped relieve stress and promote health.

The extreme restriction on my physical mobility had both positive and negative outcomes, but tipped in the direction of the positive as it provided the impetus that thrust me in new directions, most notably online. I believe the constraints on my physical self and mobility enabled me to experience first-hand the spirit of innovation that springs from extreme isolation and allowed me to eventually appreciate the value of online activity in the students' lives.

It is important here to distinguish between the presence of technology in students' lives, which is ubiquitous, and the *value* of that technology, which needs to be properly contextualized in relation to young women in Saudi Arabia. Young women on campus are technology virtuosos, walking around with earbuds, listening to music, chatting with friends on mobile devices. Most carry two phones, a Blackberry (bb) for text messaging and an iPhone for Internet. They rush to class cradling their laptops, and iPads are as common as backpacks. However, few students go through the day consciously aware of the ways that technology fits into their lives. The following excerpt from my field notes demonstrates one student's feelings about technology in response to a direct question about whether she uses it. The entry title is: "Maria told me today, 'I don't like technology.'"

We talked a little bit about the technology and social media because I was explaining my research to her she said she doesn't like technology very much. Interesting, because every time I see this girl she's got her headphones on, listening to music—she even wears them in class. And most of the time I see her she has a phone in her hand.

The devices are physically part of their bodies: In fact, before I knew her name, I called Maria “the girl with the headphones”. Maria is also the one that said to me maybe a month or so ago that the laptop was too heavy for her to carry around on her back all day. It was giving her a humpback!

Though she says she does not like technology, it is a topic of casual conversation: She told me today that she had heard the citizens were getting microchips implanted into their arms in place of passports. I don't know if this is true or not. But it's interesting. She's told me several times that her father goes to Germany a lot. She told me her father speaks German. So perhaps he came back with the stories—and she shares them—why?

She said, “I don't like technology very much.” At one point in the conversation she said once again that her mother is often gone because she visits Lebanon a lot. Both parents are gone a lot. She said that she talks to her mom and her aunts all the time when they're not here though. I asked her how she talked to them and she said Skype.

What exactly do students think technology is? It is like they don't even think about it as “technology” unless they are building robots like N and L. They just use it all the time. It's not technology to them. It's just talking to my mom or listening to music. It's so much a part of who they are and what they do. It's life, not “technology” to them. It keeps her connected to her family but she says she doesn't like it.

Maria later posted the following comment on her Facebook site:

Teacher: Please tell me the name of your favorite book.

Student: Facebook xD [big smile]

The role of ICT and SNS in popular uprisings and political change in the Middle East and Northern Africa since 2011 confirms the direct link between online activity, civic activism, and social transformation, a theme I return to repeatedly in subsequent

chapters. The rapid emergence of the Internet as public space is both exciting and disorienting for anthropologists like me, who are trained in physical field-based research methods. The task of ethnographers is to provide “thick descriptions” of the observable. Anthropologists of education provide descriptions of human situations in educational settings, namely schools.

Spindler, who is often designated as the “founder of the anthropology of education” (McDermott, 2008) suggests that the ethnographer’s aim is determine the range of resources individuals use in their adaptations to the situations under study. Furthermore, the ethnographer seeks to understand the individual’s perception of the situation and the choice of beliefs and behaviors she embodies and enacts within that situation. Some cultural anthropologists argue that her culture provides her with the meanings that give form to her thoughts and purpose to her actions. An individual’s culture also designates the resources she perceives to be available to her in a given situation. Thus, culture is both constraining and enabling. The structural and agentic determinants of one’s cultural identity can be observed in educational contexts, including schools, as the individual navigates the conditions and systems intended to reproduce (or produce) her in the form of an “educated person.” We must bear in mind that the notion of what signifies an “educated person” is both culturally specific and relative (Holland, 1996).

To ethnographers interested in understanding changes in contemporary educational practice, the online world clearly beckons. Some researchers hear the call in advance of their undertaking and fortify themselves with “virtual methods” designed for Internet-based research (Hine, 2005). Others fall into the online world, rather ill

equipped. They stumble around in its novelty, bumping into the unknown and unrecognizable as they struggle for footing *sans terra firma*. I fall in with the latter group.

As I have discussed, the university campus was often a site for the exchange of information between the online and offline worlds. Whether that information was related to education, entertainment, or more complex phenomena that I discuss in the following chapters on “clubbing,” there is a seamless connection between living online and offline. The points of convergence between the university campus and the online world for today’s college students are striking. Many educators and social scientists believe that the traditional university campus has been “decentered” and that the role of professors is gravely threatened (Francis, 2011; Varenne, 2011).

Indeed, a power shift in the structure of the university is afoot, but I argue here that the role of the university is as important as ever. The university’s role as a temporal marker in life, when young people meet and experiment with ideology and identity, is continuing and intensifying, as universities like al-Noor rapidly globalize through partnerships and further incorporate technology into the fiber of the institution, as a means of communication, a platform for learning, and a space for students to work and play. Today, these spaces that support imagination and experimentation are constantly converging, so it makes sense that, as an anthropologist, I should conduct work online as well as offline if I want to understand the relationship between them. However, some issues continue to vex me in my process of becoming an online ethnographer.

In keeping with current scholarship in the anthropology of education, which advocates for a broader conceptualization of education and analysis of its manifestations

beyond the classroom (Varenne, 2007, 2008), my fieldwork extended online, beyond the physical university setting. This meant that I was online, lurking, chatting, and messaging at all hours of the day and night. Through particular attention to “daily-ness,” which often happens at night in the online world, and through the personal relationships I developed with students, I hoped to capture strands of sameness and uncover the common ground that leads ethnographers to what Abu-Lughod calls a “discourse of familiarity to counter the distancing discourses of anthropology” (1993, p. 27). Drawing upon Latour’s (2005) Actor Network Theory, I emphasize ways that the social and the technical are inseparable. Using Facebook, blogs, and websites, I approached students’ online posts and profiles as acts of partnership with the technologies themselves, as well as expressions of their cybercultured selves, which depend on the technologies to exist.

It is the complexity of cyborgization that I wish to present, though I cannot claim to comprehensively explain it. The concept and construction of selfhood is a multifaceted process involving social, psychological, material, and cultural elements. In the physical world, the body is central to one’s self-awareness and identity—but without the body as a reference in virtual space, identity becomes a vast realm of possibilities, negotiations, and choices. How we self-identify in new environments has always been part of the process of self-revelation that goes with growing up and becoming in the world, whether it is the physical or online world.

Names and images represent personal identity in new and meaningful ways when they are self-assigned. The students make choices about how to represent themselves online. For example, one post on my Facebook page read, “Hello Doctor, I’m lama from your IDS 111 class AKA the girl with the I-pad hahaha.” The quotes I include in this

dissertation from my field notes are presented exactly as participants posted them on Facebook. The students' spelling and grammatical form, which is often not standard, is reprinted here as it originally appeared online or in physical documents. Each student negotiates the information she shares by abbreviating or altering her name. They also select images with great care. For example, few students post pictures that show their face. Sometimes they distort the picture in an artistic way or post images of themselves before the age of 10 or so. Marwick and Boyd (2011) suggest that teens' representation of themselves online is an expression of the struggle they have with public and private space. Internet users' online practice is directed by multiple influences, including their understanding of the social situation in which they are engaged, and how they feel privacy and publicity apply, as well as their technological skills. Skills and perceptions of what constitutes expected or acceptable social behavior combine to shape their actions in the networked spaces they explore and navigate on the Internet.

The first online contact I had with students was via the university email system, so I always knew to whom I was talking, as her email address indicated her given name. Nine months later, the majority of my online research happened on Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and occasionally via email and Skype. I had to figure out who was who because many of the young women use "screen names," and the pictures they post are not of their faces. When emails started coming from private accounts with names like "pookie3@yahoo" and "firesmile@gmail," I could have several exchanges with the sender before I figured out who she was.

Facebook is the site on which I interact with students the most. I have various options, including the effortless "like" button, the comment bar, and the behind-the-

scenes personal message feature that we use to “in-box” each other. I use them all depending on the level of interaction I am willing or able to engage in. My willingness and ability were regulated by my interest as well as the amount of time I had. The latter constraint is the one that gave me the most trouble as I began to get my bearings as an online ethnographer.

The temptation is strong to stay online for hours on end for fear of missing a profound post or status update or a particularly revealing interaction. When I began my research online, I returned home after a full day of work, and, just like the students, I turned on the computer. The late hours that students kept online were hard for me. This was even more challenging when I returned to the U.S. and there was an eight-hour time difference to factor in. Initially, I thought it was my age, but I learned that even the students struggled with lack of sleep and occasionally complained about it online. One student wrote on her Facebook status: “[her name] IS TURNING INTO A FRIGGIN CHICKEN!!!!!! why cant i stay up late anymore :(??” Two friends liked this within one minute. Then her friend wrote, “dont sleep, the best ta7shish convos r those at midnight !! LOOOL.” It is true that some of the best conversations happen late at night when the world outside is quiet.

After admitting to myself that sleep deprivation was affecting my research, I developed strategies to allow me to “put down the iPhone” or “step away from the computer,” as one student said in her most serious mock police voice. It was difficult for me to do this at first because I felt guilty about not “being there” when an exchange or activity happened: It felt inauthentic for me to read the posts after they had been online for hours. To address these trepidations, I had to embrace the suspension of “real time”

online. For me to take part in a conversation happening in the morning in Jeddah, I would have to be up in the middle of the night in New York. This is not always practical, so I accept that I won't "be there" when it occurs. I also developed strategies to stay connected during these time gaps. For example, I would see a post that I wanted to follow and respond with a short comment to ensure that I would be alerted to all the subsequent comments. I can get my foot in the door, so to speak, with my first comment and then leave my computer (sleep, go to work, etc.), knowing that I will be alerted by email updates as the conversation continues. I can also see the screen names of the participants and the time intervals at which they joined the conversation.

I observed many fascinating exchanges this way, but I still struggle with the lag in time between the occurrence and my "observation" of it. Reading the comments retrospectively the next morning has little of the thrill I get from watching the posts pop up in "real time," and capturing a student in the moment of experimenting with new expressions of self, which is an integral part of the ongoing process of teaching and learning and the transformation of education. I followed students as they skipped between online and offline contexts, blending private and public learning methods, including autodidacticism and peer-to-peer knowledge production, to think outside the box and fill gaps in their university experience and course offerings. They were using the Internet as both a tool and a location of learning. I needed to be on the Internet to be with them to observe this relationship as a participant. It became clear through my participant observation on Facebook, Twitter, and blogs that the skills and knowledge gained through informal online education are critical factors in the ability of these young women to think critically and respond to community problems, including environmental

disasters, political flashpoints, and economic crises, which occurred throughout my fieldwork.

Courses in politics and law are not offered at al-Noor; however, students use social media sites and microblogs, such as Facebook and Twitter, to educate themselves and each other about social issues and political and legal processes. Their online conversations spilled over into the campus café, where they sipped chilled coffee drinks, planned fundraisers, and organized symposia. Young Saudi citizens are taking the initiative to extend their education beyond the university by designing and enacting a form of online education that I refer to as a “curriculum of desire.”

The campus is a safeguarded space in a few different ways. It is literally surrounded by tall white walls and guards are posted at the gates. Those who do not belong are excluded. Exclusivity is a measure of maintaining privacy, which is highly valued in Arab-Muslim culture, particularly in Saudi Arabia. Exclusivity is not the same online. Those sites have gatekeepers, and Facebook friends must be accepted, but there are ways to peek over walls online. Online activity enables the public and private selves to lurk or frolic. Students might be spying on an “ex-friend” through another friend’s Facebook site, at one moment, and looking up a book in a library or buying shoes from an online shopping site the next. Students use the Internet for socializing and networking in the broadest sense. The things they talk about in the café and hallways of the university are like seeds that bloom to life online. I found their discussions of school, family, career aspirations, music, pop culture, politics, and personal feelings to be deeper and more vivid online.

Dating was one issue that was, however, more common in my face-to-face conversations than online. In person, students opened up to me about first kisses and skipping class to meet young men in cars, but I did not read many specific comments about dating on Facebook.⁵ I have chosen not elaborate on the dating experiences that students shared with me in person-to-person conversations because I do not want to reveal potentially identifiable information that may harm them. In short, I wish to respect my participants' privacy, and, since their stories about dating and sex are not directly relevant to educational transformation, they do not need to be included in this dissertation. Dating is not accepted, and sex outside marriage is a punishable offense in Saudi Arabia. Most marriages in Saudi Arabia are arranged, though not forced. Dating per se is not allowed in Saudi Arabia; however, it happens both online and off. Students communicated with young men by Blackberry message, texts, and certain online sites. They also arrange meetings in malls.

While the spillover between online and offline activity was constant, some issues were more acceptable to discuss in one realm than the other. I recall seeing a banner hung across the doorway to the business school building in support of women's right to drive. The gist was that the Prophet Mohammad was not against women driving, since his wife was a businesswoman who rode a camel, an equivalent of the modern-day car they argued. On campus, I heard women talk openly about wanting to work and having the choice to work, yet views about politics were expressed almost exclusively online. My notes do not show conversations about political issues that involved political assertions. Arguably, all, or certainly most, of the issues that students talk about are

inherently political, but they do not use a language of politics or human rights. Rather, they position matters of mobility and social participation in terms of desire. For example, in January 2011, I received a Facebook notice that a friend (who was also an al-Noor student) had edited her profile. I clicked on her page and saw that she had changed her last name, deleting all but the first three letters. Her name read Noor AlSa. Noor is a very common Arabic name and there are hundreds of possible endings to AlSa. The change made her difficult to identify. Then I noticed that she had just posted the following comment within five minutes of changing her last name:

I wont let go of my right of FREEDOM , without freedom all other rights are lost, I will struggle and fight , i will speak up and tell the world about the oppression going on, about the Massacres that are happening , I HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE FREE ! AND IM WILLING TO TAKE THE RISK !

I pushed the Like button and she immediately responded by thanking me for my support. A few other people also liked the post within minutes, and she replied to each with individualized gratitude. Then she changed her profile picture from a science-inspired whirl of cosmic colors to the Syrian flag. This was a bold public expression of self, and “being there” as it happened was thrilling for me. The support of her “friends” might have played a part in her decision to be bold. Since that day, she has kept her full identity concealed and continues to post bold criticisms of the Syrian government and videos revealing violence against Syrian civilians. When I concluded my data collection in June 2011, her profile picture was still the Syrian flag. She took a risk by making this brazen political statement. We don’t choose the family into which we are born. For individuals whose communities or families practice arranged and consanguineous marriage, marriage partners are not their choice, either. Nor, for the most part, do we choose our colleagues

in the classroom or the workplace. But we do choose our friends, especially our Facebook friends. The decision to invite a person onto one's Facebook page is not taken lightly. In fact, I learned that it is often regulated by social formalities such as invitation and thank you notes. It is common for me to receive a personal message from a student thanking me for liking their post.

In the Blogosphere, however, I was strictly an observer. I never posted a comment on any of the students' blogs that I followed. I observed that their blogs are thoughtfully crafted narratives with questions and statements about society and culture in mind, ranging from fashion and debunking stereotypes about Arab-Muslim women to collective rants about the right to drive or travel without a *mahram* (male guardian). One blog chronicled a young woman's decision to do her laundry for herself. It was a story of a young woman getting to know herself through washing her intimate apparel and also a critique of social norms and customs that suggest a woman of her status⁶ should not do maid's work. The headline, "I am Saudi and, yes, I do my own wash," caught people's attention. Her posts were as much reflections on social stratification and immigrant labor as they were accounts of self-realization and female empowerment.

Topics tend to be broadly conceived and addressed to a wide and sometimes international audience. Most blogs I read are in English, whereas Facebook posts tend to be a mix of Arabic and English. This fluidity can be seen in an exchange that took place between two students on Facebook, in which conversation about a quiz led organically to comments on their use of hybrid language:

⁶ She is a university student and also a princess, a member of the Al-Saud royal family.

N: 1st quiz kan multiple choice w true & false w kda kan sahl awi w b3d ma zakrna 2alna open book!! zakry enty 3shan el midterm bs azon ymkn y3mloko zyna isa y3ni

R: nada look 2 our language !! half english, half arabic in english letters... omg how did we learn that :D ...but we feel more comfortable when we write in english letters

N: reem we r simply superhero ;) we born to be like this ;P⁷

During my fieldwork at al-Noor, I found myself directly observing the offline (or physical) and online (or “virtual”) worlds. I was often simultaneously present in both. For example, on a typical day, I would position myself near the front gates at the start and end of the day, often watching students while I read Facebook. The last class concluded at 4:00 p.m., and students flowed steadily to a serpentine line of vehicles waiting outside the front gates. It reminded me of the car-line that snaked through the parking lot of the suburban school in the U.S. where I taught, except that every car here had tinted windows and was driven by a man; not one nanny or soccer mom was behind the wheel, as there is a customary ban on women driving in Saudi Arabia. I had observed the students gathering and chatting, and concluded that this was an enjoyable social time for students. When I went online though, I gained insight into the complexities of waiting to get picked up. Apparently, after a day spent in the company of friends, in an academic environment that encourages imagination, experimentation, boundary-pushing, and empowerment, the act of waiting for a driver can be frustrating, as one student posted on her Facebook status: *“When this nightmares r going to end: I need to driver I can, I can't waiting my driver to pick me everyday, really that what is called ‘Consuming Time.’”*

⁷ “We born to be like this” is a reference to a pop song by Lady Gaga.

Since women cannot drive or take public transportation in Saudi Arabia, female students rely on male family members—mainly brothers—or hired drivers to shuttle them to and fro. Traffic in Jeddah rivals that of any major metropolitan city. As I mentioned earlier, traffic in Jeddah is heavy and snarled as in many major cities. The sheer number of cars, lack of public transportation options, and poorly maintained roads make mobility in and around the city very difficult, especially for women. Some students told me that they spent up to four hours a day in the car. Two hours was considered a short commute. Students pass the time listening to iPods and checking email or texting on their mobile phones. Those with iPhones or so-called *MiFi* bubbles go online.

Counting Bodies and Crossing Boundaries

If you were on the campus of al-Noor in the fall of 2010 as I was, you would have seen scenes, like the one I recount below, play out every day. The following vignette is based on my field notes, and I include it to illustrate social interaction between humans and machines at an access point with “binary framing of the relationship of openness and closure from the perspective of everyday practice” (Cohen, 2012, p. 29). Manifestly, the machine daily mediates the students’ sense of “being present.” On a latent level, however, the multiple, complex implications of machine-mediated affirmation impact students’ developing senses of self and their attitudes about access and belonging. Some students try to gain access repeatedly by asking permission while others naturally trespass.

Each morning the university gates open at 7:00 a.m. and hundreds of young women enter campus. They step from vehicles driven by hired drivers or male family members, walk about 20 yards to the clean, clear glass doors of the

building. They open the doors, enter, and queue up to pass through the turnstiles of an automated thumbprint scanner. The atrium fills with sunlight, laughter. Bits of Arabic and English conversation mix as the line progresses. Each student approaches and positions her thumb against the glass face and the machine reads her skin. She waits for an arrow to alight, a chime to sound, and the voice to say, "Accepted." She then passes into a place where science fiction and science fact coexist.

Most students enter campus daily without thinking of their brief interaction with the robotic sentinel. When the machine functions, their ritual interaction is normal. However, students respond to the machine's malfunctioning differently. In cases of the latter, dramatic scenes occur. If her thumb is not placed just right or if she does not press it firmly enough, a red X appears on the glass face and the voice says, "Denied, please try again." When this occurs, the student usually repositions her thumb and gets the green arrow without much fuss. She may roll her eyes and sigh.

If the denial continues, however, she might look up with a furrowed brow and say, "It hates me." Her friends usually assure her that the machine does not hate her. Sometimes though, they nod in agreement, confirming that the nefarious machine is indeed hateful and vindictive. They concur that the machine "has an attitude." An exasperated student might address the machine directly, "Why are you doing this to me? Hurry up! I have to get to class." If thumb repositioning and verbal reasoning (or assault) fail, she simply jumps over the turnstile. Every morning I saw at least one student hop the turnstile. Those with furrowed brows have experienced such emotionally charged technical difficulty with the thumbprint scanner that they jump in desperation. Others approach with a smile and no intention of asking permission; they instinctively jump the turnstile because they can.

The ways that placing her thumb on a scanner affects a student's understanding of who she is are very subtle and differ from student to student. However, I argue that each time her flesh brushes against the smooth face of the scanner, she engages in a fleeting, perhaps subconscious, process of positioning her body and self in the world.

Certainly, the habitual interaction normalizes relations with computers and establishes a point of contact between human and machine during which personal information is exchanged. The nature of the information transferred is significant. How

personal is the information in a thumbprint? In terms of our right to privacy, should it be troubling that the students offer it so freely? And to whom are they offering their information? When I coded students' responses to these questions, they overwhelmingly fell into two categories: "I don't know" and "I don't care, they know everything about me anyway." I found it rather surprising that by "they," students meant the government rather than the university.

Each of us has a unique thumbprint that bears the unique, identifiable pattern of the friction ridges on our skin. Reading a thumbprint can generate personal data and reveal information about an individual. From conversations I had with students about the thumbprint, I gathered that many of them live under the assumption that they are perpetually monitored and the government has access to their private data. They seemed rather cavalier about it. In terms of where this data goes and who sees and ultimately owns it, students' attendance records belong to the Saudi Ministry of Education and are therefore government property.

This becomes an issue if a student rescans her thumb to open the turnstile, allowing her friend to enter. Though they are both granted physical access to the campus, the one student will be counted present twice, while the other will be considered absent. None of my interviews revealed that students had ethical issues or privacy concerns with the system. Several students said it was "high- tech" and showed how advanced the university was. It made them feel "modern." Some students liked the thumb scanner as opposed to an ID card (which students are also issued and use for other purposes), because, as some said, "You cannot lose your thumb." One said she liked that she did not have to dig around in her purse/book bag for it. Thus, students offer their thumb without

reserve. Each time they present their skin to the scanner, however, they subtly comply to give away their data. As I illustrated in the vignette, some students will keep trying to the point of mental exhaustion and ultimately feel rejected. Others simply resort to physical skill and jump the barrier. In any case, I argue that students' everyday sense of "I am here" and "I belong" to this community is negotiated when they come into contact with the thumb scanner, which is a computer and essentially the same medium they use to access the Internet. I also argue that interactions like this morning ritual normalize government access to personal data. Moreover, I should mention that all members of the university community are required to scan their thumbs to gain access and sign in. As a teacher, I scanned my thumb every day. And I, too, furrowed my brow and felt a little offended when it gave me a red X and told me I was "not valid."

Conclusion

As I sat and observed the students' ingress and egress day after day, I noticed that the majority of cars carried only one student, in addition to the driver and a maid. I discussed this with a student who explained that her driver was an Indian man who had worked for her family for nearly five years. He liked to listen to Indian music on cassettes in the car, so she wore her earbuds and filled her ears with her own music. Her Filipina maid, who always rides with her in the car, had practically raised her. The student expressed deep affection for her maid (though she repeatedly called her "my maid" until I asked the woman's name). The student said she loves the woman like a mother and wouldn't know what to do without her. Following this statement of devotion,

the student said she worries about her maid because she is always on her mobile phone. On the ride home, the phone is stuck to the women's ear and she even sleeps with her phone under her pillow. The student said, "I tell her not to do this. It will give her a brain tumor!" I asked the student if she talked to the driver and the maid on the way home. She said "no, never."

Despite the fact that these people were in the car together for about three hours a day, the student referred to the commute as "my time to go online and be alone." This is an interesting statement about togetherness and solitude, because she admittedly "talks" to friends when she is online in the car; she holds her phone in her hand and rests the laptop on her legs.

Being with friends online is like being alone, in that she escapes the presence of those whose company she did not choose. For her, being alone means being in control of the company she keeps. Here, I challenge Turkle's (2013) suggestion that our increasingly close relationships with technology creates dangerous distance between human beings; I found that the companionship of ICTs and Internet use enables the rare and precious "alone time" in which many women attending al-Noor make the connections they desire.

Chapter 5

CURRICULA OF DESIRE

Student life is bustling to life with a variety of clubs to choose from. Students have the ultimate chance to get involved in their community by joining the club of their choice. If you still haven't joined any club yet, it's never too late. Take a look at what [our university] has to offer and I am positive you will find the right fit for you. After all, university life isn't all books and studying right.

-Excerpt from *BE Magazine* (student-run journal) Spring 2011

Introduction

In this chapter, I develop the argument that “school work” is a socially accepted reason for young women to use the Internet. Discussion draws directly from my empirical database and builds upon earlier discussion of the university as an evolving educational space that serves as a transitional platform for the students’ participation in an array of social and economic spaces. Furthermore, I approach the students as curators of their selves and their lives, working with Madeleine Arnot’s (2009) concept of “self-culture” mediated through “reflexive individualization” in which “people’s lives become an art form—something to be created” (p. 199). I treat students’ offline and online educational moments as organic expressions of learner agency and technology-mediated peer education, as well as models of networked lives. I also argue that al-Noor students, who are motivated by the spirit of auto-didacticism and possess the creativity and skills

of the digital generation, are at the forefront of a technology-driven renaissance in Saudi Arabia.

“Clubbing”

Extracurricular activities are an essential part of college life in universities around the world; al-Noor is no exception. This chapter discusses the role of ICTs in the genesis of student initiated and organized clubs at al-Noor campus, and how participation in the clubs, which students refer to as “clubbing,” is an act of learner agency that also embodies the negotiation of educational time and space that is part of their identities as university students. Motivations, experiences, and outcomes associated with “clubbing” touch upon the social and economic value of women’s education in contemporary Saudi society, and while not all students are Saudi, they are exposed to Saudi social norms and practices during the time they live in Saudi Arabia. Through ethnographic portraits, this chapter shows how young women at al-Noor extend their educational experiences to networked spaces online and leverage their student status and express themselves on the Internet. They extensively and creatively use social network sites (Facebook) and microblogs (Twitter) to connect skills and new knowledge to issues that are not addressed in the formal curriculum, such as human rights, law, and politics. In doing so, they challenge the traditional exclusion of women from public spaces, economic, and political activity in Saudi Arabia. Again, it is worth mentioning that many al-Noor students are not Saudi and are encountering sex-segregation and women’s exclusion from public spheres or the first time. Non-Saudi students might complain more openly, but their coping techniques are not much different from those of Saudi students. Whether they are

Saudi, Indian, Syrian, or Turkish, these students go online as one way to cope with the restrictions on physical mobility and exclusion from participation in the public sphere. In doing so, they present a collective presence online and on campus that may be understood as a form transnational cyborg feminism. Whether they are Saudi citizens or not, they comprise an ideological and practical entity that disfigures local, normative gender roles and reshapes the category of woman in Saudi society. Under the pretext of “clubbing,” they use the Internet to cultivate professional knowledge and experience and gain access to political and economic sectors they are often excluded from offline.

Through ubiquitous use of ICTs, students imagine, create, and participate in what I call a “curriculum of desire.” By this, I mean that students design and enact authentic online teaching and learning practices based on a combination of auto-didacticism and peer-to-peer (P2P) knowledge exchange that leads to educational experiences that are applicable in meaningful ways to their everyday lives. I present the concept of a “curriculum of desire” as a way to understand and discuss educational choices and practices that shape the everyday lives of young women coming of age in Saudi Arabia at this particular moment in history. The “curriculum of desire” functions in addition to the university designed curriculum, which does a fair, but inadequate, job of providing students with the knowledge, skills, and experience they need to build the lives and careers they want for themselves.

Clubs are academic and social groups that spring to life at the moment when students’ interests converge into a critical mass to highlight an absence of available, quality learning opportunities that align with the issues and interests that students believe are relevant to their lives. Clubs are student initiated and operated. There is an

application process and administrative approval is required, but faculty involvement is minimal. “Clubbing” is something students enjoy, but it is also an expression of their desire for quality teaching and learning opportunities. The birth of each club thus challenges fixed definitions of education, but also, paradoxically, affirms the value of educational space on campus. The relationship between online and offline educational spaces is further complicated by the argument that classrooms are becoming “dead space.” Many students’ view teachers as grim reapers .. I heard students in casual conversation refer to sitting in a classroom as “painful” and “miserable.” Yet the same students would engage in spirited and intellectually rigorous discussion of the class’ subject matter while reclining on sofas and sipping coffee in the café. By theoretically linking education to leisure, we can approach learning as a creative process that casts students as knowledge producers and empowers them to select and perform desired roles. In a practical sense, blurring the line between learning and play on campus draws attention away from the subversive potential of students’ collective mobilization and emergent political identities.

Students’ personal negotiation of time and space on campus encourages the formation of student-led, non-academic, special-interest groups called clubs. I argue that gaps and failures in the university curriculum, poor teacher quality, and the presence of technology on campus combine to imbue a sense of independence and activate personal responsibility that students channel into these extracurricular clubs. Their collective complaints create solidarity over their shared dissatisfaction with the quality and seeming irrelevance of education in general. The issues that they care about and the skills they really want to learn are not available in the classroom or in their “free time,” so they

imagine and generate their own cooperative groups based on common desires, talents, and interests, and call it a club.

From inception to execution, clubs are student initiatives, and students get no academic credit for their participation. The grassroots development of clubs, and the fact that they are not deemed deserving of academic credit despite real life relevance and popularity with students, explicates the highly contested nature of learning and provides a lens through which we might examine the value of formal versus informal education. Ultimately, clubs allow students to engage in self-directed, real learning moments under the cover of leisure time. “Clubbing” embodies students’ ability to manipulate educational time and space to produce learning experiences that are meaningful in relation to their future careers and life after graduation. Drawing upon Goffman’s (1959) theory of “performance” and the concept of “performance groups,” the following discussion places public and private acts of what constitutes women’s education on center stage.

Dozens of clubs thrive on the campus of this women’s university, with its population of approximately 2,000⁸ students between the ages of 17 and 25.⁹ At al-Noor, they have formed an environmental club, spirit club, photography club, business club, poetry club, cooking club, drama club, Toastmasters, engineering club, Qur’an club, Kalaam Circle, computer programming club, art club, etc. To restate my point, the emergence of clubs challenges a fixed definition of education, and suggests that

⁸ At the time of data collection, I received different numbers for total enrollment from various sources. This number reflects the latest number confirmed by the university as of 2013.

⁹ There are students outside this range at the university; however, all my participants are within this range.

classrooms can be zones of educational trauma where students and teachers, clash, miscommunicate, and disconnect because of cultural, ideological, or simply generational differences. In response, students seek and create new spaces in which to learn. Ineffective teaching practices and missed learning opportunities in the classroom can lead to low self-confidence, frustration, and passionate feelings of powerlessness, as Zeynep's struggle in the English Academy highlighted. Repeated instances of poor learning experiences in the classroom can stifle students' desire to learn or can inspire students to start clubs or otherwise craft new learning experiences.

Each club's genesis demonstrates how a particular group of students struggles to reconcile their personal desires, talents, and interests with different elements of their educational environment. The activities that clubs sponsor serve as metaphorical bridges, connecting students' academic experiences to their lived experiences. They are also often acts of resistance to women's historical and systematic exclusion from economic and political power. Club agendas may be considered subversive to the social order in Saudi Arabia; however, neither the university nor the Ministry of Higher Education perceives the proliferation of clubs as threatening, because they are considered leisure pursuits. Clubs are emphasized as extracurricular and "non-academic" activities, and are therefore outside the purview of the powers that be. In short, "clubbing" happens below the radar and behind the scenes.

Going Online: Students Take Center Stage

Beyond the university walls, students have adapted to the strict regulation of women's mobility that uniquely defines Saudi society. They go with the flow, following customary laws and legal and religious rules of behavior. However, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., students are free to move about as they wish within the tall white walls that wrap around the campus. Again, this is a "structured" freedom, within boundaries. Once their drivers have dropped them off, the electronic thumbprint scanner has accepted their thumbprint, they have been recorded as resent, and are inside the gates, students are free to decide where they want to go in the little village of whitewashed buildings and open spaces that comprise the campus. Most choose to begin their day at the café. They walk around the perimeter of the campus' central square, known as the "red spot" because of the bricks that pave it. They stroll along in lively little crowds under the portico, avoiding the clear and hot morning sun that already reaches into the upper 90s by 9:00 a.m. and drenches the central square in heat throughout the day. Others congregate in hallways, discussing homework and upcoming assignments or gossiping. It is a morning ritual for some to take orders and collect money to order Papa John's Pizza for lunch. As I noted in the introduction and previous chapters, watching the students arrive each morning, one might think that the university dress code has a technology requirement that includes cellphones and laptops, as well as a fashion requirement. Students are adorned with accessories and devices that express personal and collective identities, ears with ear buds and headphones, eyes with sunglasses and

color contacts, hands holding cellphones, feet with everything from colorful Chuck Taylor sneakers to stilettos.

Academic classes are held five days a week, Saturday through Wednesday, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Two days a week, the period from 11:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. is designated as “activity time.” No classes are scheduled during activity time, and students are supposed to meet with faculty, study in groups, or attend university-arranged lectures and events to earn “value points.”¹⁰ They must earn a certain number of value points each semester to graduate. Activity time is referred to in the university’s literature as “structured free time,” when students can accumulate value points. The university schedules a variety of simultaneous lectures and events during activity time, which causes frustration among students, but also presents these women with an uncommon opportunity to choose where they want to be. This intentionally empowering moment does indeed enable students to exercise personal choice; however, its consequences extend far beyond the intention of those who designed it.

The exercise of making a personal choice transforms the form and function of the university space into a world of possibilities. In a society that encourages women’s freedom at home amongst relatives and guests and in sex-segregated spaces, but strictly regulates women’s space and time and does not permit them freedom of movement in public without male supervision or permission, young women appreciate the mobility and choices they have as university students on campus and online. They take to heart the

¹⁰ The value point system is a trademark of the university where I conducted my research. I only mention it briefly here and do not elaborate in the interest of maintaining the institution’s anonymity. Further details about the value point system are not necessary to understanding the university’s mission, nor are they generalizable to higher education in Saudi Arabia—they would only derail the focus of this dissertation.

institution's concept of "activity time" and use of the term "free time." They drop the word "structured" from the term "structured free time." To them, it is a contradiction, though one that is not irresolvable, as Giddens' (1979) theory of structuration suggests. Giddens points out that the relationship between agency and structure, which is arguably awkward and counterintuitive at times, is natural and necessary for social cohesion and progress. To al-Noor students, the seeming contradiction of "structured free time" presents a problem, but is also fertile ground for organic learning moments to pop up and transform the educational landscape.

They act as social agents within social structures. They have time, ideas, and a social space to gather and make decisions. They create their own curriculum, in a sense, working informally on a variety of cognitive and professional skills in areas such as problem-solving, creativity and innovation, collaboration, communication, professionalism, work ethic, ethics and responsibility, self-efficacy, leadership, time management, financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and global citizenship. An excellent example is how the environmental club functioned as a way for students to respond to a local environmental disaster.

Since 2009, torrential rains have flooded the seaside city of Jeddah. Each year, rains claim lives, wipe out critical transportation routes, and destroy cultural heritage sites, homes, and businesses. Saudi citizens, including al-Noor students, repeatedly turn to social media, namely Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, to manage the disaster. Tweets keep citizens connected and informed, and disseminate critical, real-time updates and alerts that often save lives. In the aftermath of the floods, Twitter functions as a platform for public debate and pointed criticism of the city's antiquated infrastructure and

laws. Online debates have led to a number of online campaigns targeting the government's failures in urban planning, environmentalism, emergency preparedness, and immigration policies. In this context, the city's tech-savvy youth awakened a new level of civic consciousness. "The Jeddah Floods," as they have come to be known, embody a moment of historical social connectivity when mobile devices and community members transcended ideological and physical boundaries, including race, class, and gender, to work together and address an emergency situation.

The students at al-Noor students were among the first responders to the floods in 2009 and since then. The university was preoccupied with keeping students safe and did not engage, as an institution, in local relief efforts. Essentially, al-Noor locked its gates and moved remaining students and faculty to the highest area of campus as buildings flooded and roofs leaked. Students went to work in other ways, however, and when the rains stopped, they approached administrators and suggested the university open its gates to the community to provide assistance and shelter. Social engagement, which is particularly developed in members of the so-called digital generation, played out in students' ideas and how they used the campus as a space to pre-form these ideas. This example highlights how al-Noor students are emerging as educators and leaders in response to local conditions. In that moment, students connected the grassroots activism and technology savvy, which typifies their generation's Internet-based activity, with the reach and resources of their universities to create new tools for crisis intervention and powerful public expressions of political will. When local governments were too slow or failed to respond, students organized food, clothing, and medical drives to meet urgent needs. They utilized Twitter to monitor the situation, assess community needs, and spread

location information about shelters and aid sites, which happened to be on the campus of their university.

Largely because of their efforts, government officials and policy makers became aware of the severity of what happened in Jeddah. Students, both male and female, who actively tweeted throughout the crisis, emerged as community leaders in the aftermath and have since publicly called for timely government assistance and appropriate policy change. Public interest in policy change in response to the Jeddah Floods reaches across broad sectors that include environmental policy, historic preservation initiatives, architectural design, sustainable building practices, zoning policies, immigration laws, recycling and waste management policies, and policies affecting foreign workers and their families. These are all areas that interest students at al-Noor, but classes are not offered in all of these fields, so students are making creative connections and using clubs to fill such gaps where they can.

In one of my Communication classes, I gave students an assignment that involved writing a proposal for a public education project. They had to submit a written proposal and also give a presentation using any media of their choice: video, poetry, posters, interpretive dance (seriously), etc. One group's presentation was about immigrant rights and included YouTube videos made as a tribute to a Pakistani man who died saving a Saudi family whose car was being swept away in raging floodwaters. He had come to Saudi Arabia to be a taxi driver. The number of views and comments to the videos suggest that the incident got Saudi citizens thinking about immigration policy and the way that immigrants and migrant workers are treated. Our classroom discussion covered the spectrum of "immigrant" experiences. Students are aware of the presence of

immigrants and often hear their parents talking about how immigrants are changing and even threatening Saudi society. Students are quick to say that Pakistani and Indian communities dominate the taxi driver industry, but are also aware that many Pakistanis and Indians hold white-collar jobs at global firms based in Saudi Arabia. Issues of immigration and global economics are not explored in classrooms. Economic classes are strongly geared toward business models and start-up stories. Politics and culture are not on the table for discussion. After my students and I watched this video in class, we engaged in robust discussion about work permits and treatment of foreign workers in Saudi society. They were talking culture and politics and they were passionate and eloquent. There is no “politics” club at al-Noor, and no courses are offered by the university in political science. There is no anthropology club and no anthropology classes are offered. The environmental club’s website posted these videos online and the resulting discussions happened in the comments sections.

Students at al-Noor and other universities (specifically KAUST, which was mentioned earlier) are conducting cutting-edge research to understand how and why the Jeddah floods and other environmental disasters in the region occur. They are also calling on governments to be accountable. Since the floods of 2009, the number of al-Noor university students who study environmental sciences and climate change, as well as civil engineering and sustainable urban development, has increased significantly. Students spoke plainly about how the city’s current inability to respond to the floods inspired them to study science.

Coping

With so many club choices to make, it is not surprising that many of even the most dedicated and conscientious students are overwhelmed by the unfamiliar opportunity to choose exactly what they want among so many appealing options. One of the college deans smiled and lightheartedly huffed a bit—then said, “They become paralyzed” by the process of analysis, and their inability to make a choice leads to “doing nothing” or “just wasting time.” She waved her hand dismissively and wore a look of resignation that suggested little surprise or concern about the situation. As a result of students’ decisions to skip university-organized activities altogether—or as the dean sees it, to “do nothing”—some very bright and creative students end up in the café, lounging on the brightly colored rectangular Ikea sofas and sipping iced coffee and frappuccinos from the Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf outpost, surrounded by friends, phones, and laptops.

The café is a large, open room with a soaring ceiling and full-length windows hung with bamboo shades drawn to different positions throughout the day, depending on the strength of the sun. Brightly colored bistro tables and chairs are set up in a neatly maintained garden area between the mosque and the café, but the weather was rarely cool enough while I was there (from September to January) to draw students in significant numbers. Oppressive heat and occasional rain showers forced the majority of campus life indoors. Across the threshold of the café, the great room is always abuzz with signs of university life—food, talk, music, and bodies in motion. Students gather in groups and listen to music on laptops, pulling up additional chairs and plush ottomans as more young women arrive. Pairs of students lean close together, shoulder to shoulder, to share the

flow of music through a set of ear buds. There are phones, laptops, books, and papers scattered on tabletops. Students' unzipped purses and school bags, bearing designer labels from Gucci to Gap, are slung over chair backs and nestled next to bodies on sofas. They spill over with notebooks and various chargers and cords. Electrical outlets along the wall are plugged up with recharging devices.

A piano in the corner is perpetually in use and sometimes gets vocal accompaniment. On my first day of observation, one student sat at the piano playing "My Immortal," by Evanescence, an American rock band. The lyrics are:

I'm so tired of being here
Suppressed by all my childhood fears
And if you have to leave
I wish that you would just leave
'cause your presence still lingers here
And it won't leave me alone

Dappled sunlight played across the floor as the dramatic chords of the rock ballad filled the expansive space. The effect was hauntingly beautiful amid the commotion of bodies and voices.

The café is a dynamic, welcoming space. Contrary to the perceptions of some members of faculty, students in the café are not "doing nothing." They are eating, drinking, talking, dreaming, and sharing creative moments. They are having fun and laughing, and they are also commiserating about their collective discontentment with school. For some students, skipping class to hang out with friends reveals a lack of motivation. For many others, however, skipping class is a deliberate expression of dissent. Dissenting students share their frustration face-to-face, on-line, or via blackberry instant message. The most frequent device-mediated communication on campus occurs

via blackberry or “bb” instant messaging. It is also common for students to have real-time conversations on Facebook. Mobile phones and smart phones also allow for calling and texting.

These forms of social media enable students to communicate even when they are separated by physical boundaries. For example, I observed a student sitting in the café messaging her friend who was in class. She posted on her friend’s Facebook wall: “r u sure u signed us up for the carrear thingy? cz iza la2, 3ndi 7agat to do instead...i cud rele use the time.”¹¹ The “career thingy” she referred to was an important event, according to the university. It had been in the planning stages for months. I had encouraged all of my students to attend, and most, including the student who posted the above comment, suggested they would. At times such as this, being on Facebook allowed me to see discontinuities between students’ intentions, or what they said to me, and what they thought, said to friends, and actually did. It felt a bit like I had a spy glass. I watched a volley of Facebook posts from my computer screen as several students joined the conversation and rationalized their reasons for not attending the job fair. In the end, my student and her friends skipped it.

To promote the event, the university had hung banners on campus and advertised in local newspapers. Local businesses and parents were invited to attend. The purpose was to provide a chance for students to explore career options. However, the reality is that the vast majority of women in Saudi Arabia do not work outside the home. Unless they have enough family money to finance an independent business venture or leave the country and work elsewhere, few will ever have careers. I expand upon such situations in

¹¹ Translation: “Are you sure you signed up for the career thingy? Because if not, I have things to do instead . . . I could really use the time.”

Chapter 7, when I discuss students' starting businesses online. Most of the students at this private women's university, which, as I have noted, is referred to as the "Harvard of women's education in Saudi Arabia," do not ever expect to hold a job outside their home. They are considered educated elites, but membership in this exclusive group has very limited advantages in the economic marketplace. Students are earning a degree in computer science, engineering, psychology, and English translation, but are they becoming scientists, psychologists, and translators?

Elite education is highly advantageous on the marriage market. Students earning degrees in psychology and English literature expect to and almost definitely will become wives and mothers, not psychologists and writers. Women in some social contexts have the opportunity to be a professional, as well as a wife and/or mother. Women in Saudi Arabia are working toward expanding their opportunities, but most students currently see the situation as either/or. The daily decisions that young women make about their personal space and time are part of this effort to having more options.

I was sitting at the same table as the student who posted to her friends about the "career thingy." We sipped our coffees and I followed the volley of Facebook posts from my computer screen as she sat next to me and typed. The students rationalized their desire not to attend the career fair in the hybrid English and Romanized Arabic language that characterizes their online and text communiqués. In the end, several of these students' Facebook friends—who may have also been in the café, sitting in class, or somewhere across the world—"liked" their decision to skip the event.

The irony of holding career fairs in today's dismal employment markets can be appreciated by students all over the world. Many young people feel that their plans and

dreams have been hit hard by the global economic crisis. The post-graduation employment situation is dire for college students in Spain, the U.S., Greece, the U.K., and many other places, but hosting a career fair at a women's university in a country that openly discourages women from working in the public sector is perhaps more than ironic. At best, it is a sign of hope; at worst, it is a tease or cruel delusion. The students at al-Noor who will stay in Saudi Arabia after graduation know the reality of their chances of a career there and may therefore have chosen not to participate. Education for employment does not ring true to them. They want education for life. Thus, they choose to design their so-called "free time" according to their desires. They are redesigning the space they inhabit during the school day so that it extends beyond the white walls into their lives. They are taking their learning into their own hands, literally through their fingertips, with the assistance of mobile phones and laptops, and redefining their educational experiences in ways that make their education more meaningful to them. Whether that means posting their art on a personal webpage, recording themselves singing and sharing their voice on YouTube, or organizing a food drive in the aftermath of the floods, students are finding ways to hone their skills and express them with the help of ICTs.

Behind the Scenes

Members of the al-Noor faculty have doubts about the purpose of women's education in Saudi Arabia. Conversations among faculty and administrators revealed that they question whether the Saudi government really wants young women to be educated, or if all the pomp and circumstance about women's education is just an act to

humor restless women and appease the packs of international women's rights watchdogs. Foreign faculty from other Arab countries, and from Asia, Europe, Australia, and the Americas, are usually the most vocal critics of the Saudi education system and often lament their roles in what they see as women simply "playing college." Faculty members routinely use words like "façade," "sham," and "farce" to describe women's education in Saudi Arabia. Restrictions on women's mobility make it difficult for non-native female faculty to get out and meet Saudi women, and their views are often skewed by their frustration about being overworked, though they cannot argue they are underpaid. Faculty salaries are high, and a three-year contract with free housing and tax-free income is a way out of debt for some. Transplanting foreign teachers and adopting a foreign education model comes at a high price for the local institution, though.

The administration at al-Noor has tried to implement a model of the American university in Saudi Arabia and likes to recruit American teachers. The university's president attended an elite women's university in the U.S. and sent her daughter to an American university. Participation in American education is designed as a prelude to participation in democratic government. Like the United Kingdom, Jordan, and other GCC countries, Saudi Arabia is a monarchy, but its interpretation of Sharia, as well as local laws and legal culture, influences public and private education in particular ways. Espoused aspects of American law and political ideology, particularly individual rights, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, are at odds with Saudi law and legal culture.

I will not venture into a comparison of American and Saudi legal and political practices, as that would move my focus away from education. However, I will say, as I

emphasized in Chapter 1 and discussed further in Chapter 2, that education is a political act and there is a system of means and goals built into the American education system that in Saudi Arabia does not abide. That said, education in Saudi Arabia functions as a means of social stratification and the reproduction of class, much as it does in other contexts, including the American and British school systems upon which al-Noor is modeled. I observed serious problems with the faculty and curriculum as a result of forcing foreign education models into a local context in ways that do not fit. Further details of that ill fit are important for understanding international educational policy exchange, but are beyond the focus of the present study.

To be sure, critical thinking about the power of civil society and the individual's role in it, as well as personal responsibility is taking place at al-Noor. Students are thriving in these ideological realms. However, this is not because their university follows an American education system. Rather, the emergence of students' civic consciousness is a result of their engagement with the world around them. It is the result of their aptitude and curiosity, and the skills they learn and how they use them. The Internet is one way that the world is opening up for these students. Media theorists pose questions about the role that social media plays in contemporary capitalism, crisis, political uprisings, strengthening the communications commons, and the potential to promote participatory democracy. Looking at educational transformation through the lens of media studies begs questions about what kind of society and what kind of learning are desirable, how power structures and social media are connected, what current developments in teaching and learning tell us about potential futures, and how participatory, cooperative, society based upon open information can be achieved in Saudi Arabia and globally. Educating

for democracy per se would upset the balance of power in Saudi society, and those who are acting on their newly found sense of “civic duty” might be put in danger.

Nancy, an American teacher at al-Noor, shared her concern that she was sending her students out into society “to become martyrs.” She has lived in Jeddah for 20 years and is married to a Saudi—a man she met her husband at university in the U.S., and moved to Saudi Arabia with after they both completed their Master’s degrees. She is the mother of four daughters, and told me she worries that the American-style al-Noor education is too liberal for Saudi society. She said it wasn’t so much the subject matter, but the fact that girls come together every day and talk about things they want to change. They mobilized on campus and now they were mobilizing online. University women were a presence in the community—have become a social force in the kingdom and hold opinions that challenge the status quo—and are now gaining strength and volume online. The Internet is a kind of global megaphone for them.

Nancy believes that today’s university women are acquiring a critical perspective that will compel them to demand change in their homes, communities, and governments, which might very well get them arrested or killed. Uttering the words caused her to shiver visibly. She wants to teach critical thinking but says she has to teach to the test. The university brought her there to teach, so she teaches the curriculum in the classroom. Administrators glorified her American training, but did not account for the influence of her pedagogical style on the young women she “educated” through her methods of instruction and her personal example. She told me she was drawn to al-Noor by Queen Myriam’s vision, and no matter what she has to do, she will find a way to reach every student. To this end, she did some brainstorming with the psychology club and started a

Facebook page about psychology. She says that the Facebook site is more of a classroom than the room she teaches in at the university. Teacher-student relations are different online, but Nancy acknowledged that, for her, the two spaces are interdependent.

Teachers teach on multiple levels in a physical classroom. When we talk about education and technology, we often overlook the body as a technology. Teaching and learning in the offline world, whether in a brick-and-mortar institution, or under a tree in a makeshift school in a refugee camp, are centered on physical presence. Bodies are part of that presence. Teachers' bodies enact intentional and unintentional techniques—and physically affect students' learning with their mood, body language, tone of voice, etc. A compassionate smile from a teacher has a certain value, just as a cold stare, roll of the eyes, or sigh of exasperation has deep meaning to the young woman on the receiving end. The following Facebook exchange illustrates the impact that teachers' attitudes can have on students:

D: all of my instructors hate me this semester :(m i didnt do anything i swear ! i dont talk , i do my work , so wuts wrong :(?

DP: maybe u talk with them when they`re mad or they`re busy or somehtin

N: no dana .. your not the problem .. they are >.<
and that's why i dropped the COM >.< (Fieldnotes March12, 2010)

Experiences like this are common in classrooms, but must negatively impact classroom dynamics and learning outcomes. When students have choices, as they do with access to the Internet, they take their learning into their own hands. I watched and listened to students in the café and noticed that, over time, their collective complaining

turns to solidarity over shared dissatisfaction with the quality and relevance of education in general.

“Hard Play”

Since the early days of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in the 1930s, the state has provided public education to boys and girls. The Ministry of Education has had to promote the value and relevance of education in a society with enormous oil wealth and a domestic economy fueled predominantly by immigrant labor. It has also faced the challenge of selling women’s education as a benefit to society, even though women have not been allowed to engage in the public economic sector. As previously discussed, however, the kingdom has made education a priority, especially higher education. National policy initiatives suggest an understanding that education means more than attaining skills to get a job. Education in Saudi Arabia is being sold as a means for building the future. This approach, or vision, appeals especially to the youth, who want change in the future.

Linking education to leisure reveals learning as a creative process that enables participants to select and perform roles, which is a measure of power and also pleasure. As mentioned previously, in a practical sense, blurring the line between learning and play on campus draws attention away from the subversive potential of political mobilization. The photography club is less threatening if it is perceived as a group of bored girls learning how to snap shots of ladybugs crawling across the courtyard than if those girls are recording human-rights abuses and uploading the graphic images to You Tube. Once

members of the photography club have learned how to operate a camera and have convinced their fathers to buy them one so they can take pretty pictures, the potential for both scenarios exists. Of course, this is not meant to suggest a direct cause-and-effect relationship. Young women have had phones and cameras long before they became students and have simply linked up with peers to use them for newly inspired purposes.

In an educational environment that fosters healthy exploration of self, a student can be producer or consumer, scientist or artist, teacher or learner—or any selection or combination of the above. She makes choices and works toward her goals in ways that combine imagination, reason, and spirit—thought by ancient philosophers to be elements of genius.

In a global society that valorizes the merits of hard work, it is important to recover the long-lost meaning of the word leisure. In drawing upon Rheingold's (2002) concept of "hard play," Arora (2011) points out that the positive and productive relationship between labor and leisure that is central to cyberculture is not new. In countless contexts around the world, particularly in American schools and society, young people are taught to work for work's sake. Leisure is often associated with wasting time or frivolous amusement leading to ephemeral pleasure. Re-examining the concept of leisure in relation to contemporary educational transformation requires a return to classical education dating back to ancient Greece, a time when the function of leisure was fundamental rather than frivolous in terms of human experience and social and economic productivity. Ideologically and linguistically, the relationship of leisure and labor has deep roots. The words "scholastic" and "school" are etymologically rooted in the Greek word *scholē*, which means leisure. In addition, Greeks used the word *ascholia* or "not

leisure” to refer to work. Rheingold (2002) suggests that labor and play are not necessarily dichotomous and can be productively combined, particularly in virtual communities. Arora also picks up on the natural ways that labor and leisure complement each other. Referring to the combination of labor and leisure as a “power couple,” she argues that the interrelatedness of work and play is evident and advantageous in the networked spaces where we interact online. In line with Rheingold and Arora, I argue that the natural interplay between labor and leisure is especially evident in “clubbing.”

Clubs are, therefore, acts of labor, in the sense that they are “hard play.” They are born of students’ imaginations and take shape in reaction to failures and weaknesses in the education system—and, as such, they can be understood in the particular context of a women’s university in Saudi Arabia as acts of resistance. At al-Noor, clubs spring to life at moments when students realize 1) that the education system is not working for them, and 2) that they possess the knowledge and skills to do the work that needs to be done to fill gaps and strengthen weaknesses.

Clubs are, for the most part, student initiated and operated, but they also reveal the critical role of the university in mobilizing students. Such a group of women would be difficult to organize outside the university. It would be logistically challenging to get so many women together in a large, comfortable, quiet space. Women cannot drive, and traffic is truly horrible, so timing tends to be iffy. Alternative spaces where women can gather en masse include shopping malls and private homes, neither of which offers the privacy of the campus café or library. The university campus makes these clubs possible in many ways, but students make them happen and succeed.

While going about their everyday lives, the young women in this study are ever vigilant and thoughtful about their roles in society, both as women and as students. They act out different roles through their relationships with time and space in a particular context. In their homes and social settings, they play by the rules of society, going where they are allowed only when they are allowed. As students, behind the tall walls of the campus and beyond the electronic thumbprint identification machines at al-Noor's main entrance, they go where they want, when they want. We can say that the actor perceives her situation and plays to the specific audience as a means of survival. She embodies the character that she believes reflects the values of the given audience. In the case of young women in Saudi Arabia, we can push Goffman's classic metaphor of performers on stage even further to include set-specific wardrobe, voice, make-up, and gestures that have been mentioned repeatedly as an aspect of everyday life at al-Noor.

Conclusion

The connectedness of work and play is evident in al-Noor students' use of activity time to create clubs. The amount of energy they put into what they call "clubbing" is often quite intensive and arduous. Participation in the clubs is understood as an action, which is evident in the way that students alter the noun "club" to a form a verb: "clubbing." Speaking of clubs in verb form emphasizes that they are doing something, as opposed to the dean's perception that they are "doing nothing" or "wasting time." Clubs are fun, but they require work to be enjoyable and sustainable. Students make deliberate use of time and space in the university context to imagine, design, and execute each club

to express their own value-driven beliefs about what education is and what makes it meaningful in their lives. “Clubbing” is indeed “hard play.”

By examining the act of “clubbing” on campus, we can begin to understand the ways that students strategize within their role as students and ultimately reclaim control of their time and space. The behaviors that students enact when they are on campus are roles set within a cultural drama that Saudi society calls “women’s education.”

Backstage at this university, students are emerging as authors of a new script and becoming “poets of their own acts,” to use De Certeau’s (1984) term. On center stage, which exists beyond the white walls of the university, however, these women must position and maneuver themselves and their activities within hierarchical and misogynistic social structures. They craft their clubs as non-threatening leisure activities, but, in reality, these clubs are power tools for social change. Power is the capacity to act independently on one’s own short-term interests to achieve long-term goals (Bachrach & Baratz, 1970; Lukes, 2005). Participation in clubs empowers these female students by allowing them to take ownership of time and space that is usually beyond their control. In the new temporal and spatial networked spaces they create on the Internet, al-Noor students execute self-written social roles with creativity and authority.

Chapter 6

CASE STUDY I: PSYCHOLOGY CLUB

Introduction

Examples throughout this dissertation have shown that students at al-Noor live with and through technologies. Machines and Internet- enabling techno-artifacts are ubiquitous on campus, in forms that range from personal devices and the thumb scanner to computer labs and ATMs. All students are expected to be online for various school-related reasons, whether to check for updates, such as school closing due to weather conditions, traffic conditions, or electrical outages (all of which I witnessed during my fieldwork), or to check their grades on Blackboard. Students also turn in assignments on Blackboard and participate in various online forums and websites related to school events and clubs. All of my participants are on Facebook and Twitter and several write personal blogs. I did not meet one student who did not have at least one smart phone, whether it was a Blackberry (BB), an iPhone, or another brand.

In this chapter, I discuss how the concept of “clubbing” that was presented in Chapter 5 factors into the educational experience of students at al-Noor who are majoring in psychology. They study it though they have other majors, or simply have an interest in the field. I also delve into the relationships and attitudes between students and faculty. In particular, I highlight the role of an American psychology professor in the genesis of the psychology club and its vibrancy and sustainability.

Not of Adam's Rib: Birth of a New Professional Woman

According to its public profile on the Internet, the purpose of the Psychology Club is two-fold: 1) to raise awareness of women's physical and psychological wellness as a critical component to social wellness, and 2) to elevate mental health practitioners to a place of respect in the local community and national consciousness. The club illustrates students' vision of themselves as educated women and skilled professionals with extensive reach between campus and the Internet, and it is the product of creatively combining academic training and imagination.

Previous chapters have shown the broad impact that extracurricular clubs have on students' subjectivities, as well as the important ways that student-led organizations serve as bridges to their political awareness and community activism. This chapter offers a deeper discussion of how al-Noor students use the Internet to build community, share information, and foster critical discussion about the state of issues relating to well-being. In particular, the Psychology Club exists to build community among people committed to improving psychological services in Saudi Arabia, and serves as a space where participants develop leadership and communication skills that will hopefully transfer to better practice in the field of clinical and counseling psychology.

Psychology is a fairly new major at the university. It began with 10 students in 2008, and enrollment at the time of my data collection was around 60 students out of a total undergraduate population of more than 2,000. That said, I met scores of students who said they would be psychology majors, but their fathers pushed them into other fields with better job opportunities, such as business, engineering, and computer science.

Success in “business, “ which I will discuss in the following chapter, is often linked to family connections, while jobs in engineering and computer science fields are opening up at a fast rate for both men and women in the last decade as part of the national economic expansion plan. Still, cultural norms and a dearth of fields, such as women’s health and wellness, makes the job market difficult, if not inhospitable, for young women who stay in Saudi Arabia after graduation. Those who go abroad for further education and employment have achieved great career success in a wide range of fields, including science, law, and politics.

Two psychology concentrations are offered: Clinical Psychology and Organizational Behavior Psychology. An introduction to the Psychology Department on the university’s website explains the program’s uniqueness and goals:

Al-Noor University for Women is among a few selected universities that offer a bi-dimensional psychology degree that is research, and community-work based. The Psychology Department at al-Noor University for Women stands out as a beacon for students seeking an alternative to traditional psychology. The program introduces students to a broad range of topics in the field of psychology, and also gives them the opportunity to focus on two applied areas of psychology; Clinical Psychology, and Organizational Behavior Psychology.

A range of transferable skills deemed necessary for employment prospects are also incorporated into the program and enhanced through a range of curricular and extra-curricular activities as well as teaching approaches and methodologies that emphasize students’ personal, academic and professional growth. Graduates of the Psychology Department will be effective agents of change in their communities promoting the wellbeing of individuals and contributing to the excellence of organizations.

University website descriptions are limited in scope and crafted to appeal to a general social audience, as well as the Ministry of Education. In attempting to say the right thing, they often say nothing. The blurb above does not mention it, but the students

were the first to tell me that faculty in the Psychology Department are “the best at the university,” and described the department as having a “family” atmosphere. The blurb does state that “the department stands out as a beacon for students seeking an alternative to traditional psychology.” This is true and will be elaborated in the examples below. In particular, members of the Psychology Club have assumed the task of thinking deeply and seriously about ICT use and how the technologies that people use affect their mental and physical health. This is not a scholarly debate happening in the university’s classrooms; it is a kind of organic research project that is ongoing and evolving among the students and faculty at al-Noor. The official website statement also mentions neither the dearth of mental-health jobs in the kingdom, or the active and dynamic club of the psychology students, which has become an extension of their classroom experience in many significant ways. This omission suggests a missed opportunity to call attention to the bridges that students are building between campus-based and online learning.

Being Present

The Psychology Club is unique in that it is directly linked to one major; however, many of its members are not psychology majors. Many members study computer science, engineering, or architecture. I monitored continuous activity on the club’s Facebook page throughout my fieldwork from October 2010 to June 2011, attended psychology classes, interviewed psychology students and professors, and participated in a roundtable on “Internet addiction.” I also followed members of the club who played prominent roles in organizing the university’s participation in a local breast-cancer

awareness event. The club's inclusive identity is embodied in its accessibility. It is active on campus and online. Students who miss an event on campus can go online and read about it or see pictures.

On a sunny day, the Psychology Club held a cookout in the red spot. The timing overlapped with my Interdisciplinary seminar (IDS) class. Pop music and the smell of the grill filled the air on campus. The event was fully staffed by student members of the Psychology Club. Arriving students were focused on the cookout as they entered the classroom, and many were visibly distracted, checking cell phones and computers for updates. I asked what they were doing. "Come on, share it with the rest of us," I said.

The computer screen showed a picture of a student named Sara flipping hotdogs. She wore a broad smile, a tall white chef's hat over her hijab, and a t-shirt with the image of a fuzzy, yellow baby chicken under the words "Psych Chicks." Sara was a student in my class and a leader in the Psychology Club. She had asked me the day before to be excused from class so she could participate in the fundraiser, telling me that she was going to be "a cook" and making a convincing case that her role was essential. The event couldn't go on without her. I asked if she had experience grilling, and she confessed she had never even seen a grill and could only guess how to do it. Her enthusiasm was compelling, though, and I appreciated that she asked me, rather than just skipping class. Sara was a hardworking student who never missed class or assignments, so I gave her permission and wished her luck.

Truancy was actually a big problem at the university. There are, of course myriad reasons why students choose not to go to class. For example, many professors enforce a "no-technology in the classroom" rule. I allowed students to use their ICTs in my classes

and had several positive outcomes. I had students look up dates, facts, and definitions. In my IDS class, we used students' computers to refer to maps and show clips of relevant TED talks as examples of public speaking. There were impromptu moments when a student's phone, tablet, or laptop became part of the lesson and enhanced the process of teaching and learning. However, many teachers expressed frustration and anger about feeling they had to "compete" with technology, and they did not want to even see students' phones or laptops during lessons. I heard one professor say she was so fed up with the ubiquity of technologies in her classroom that she tells her students "simply do not attend class if you plan not to pay attention to your instructor." Anti-ICT attitudes, coupled with the fact that most teachers post their PowerPoints and lecture notes on Blackboard, make a student's choice to skip class that much easier.

The following Facebook posts nicely illustrate the different reasons that students have for skipping class. Both posts were made on the same day, and I recoded them before I understood the strong collective statement they made about students' motivation and the idea of "being present." The first example is especially relevant to this study, as it shows how students use the Internet as a way to communicate about school issues—particularly how students use SNS as spaces to create dialogue about why they do or do not attend class. The second example is important because it exposes students' awareness of a problem that the university administration gives little attention, but that clearly affects student attitudes toward learning and their motivation to show up for class: faculty members are also guilty of "skipping."

Example 1:

Lulu: saadia u barely go to uni :P

Saadia: that is soo not true :P

Lulu: that is sooo true, u miss almost all the econ classes!!

Saadia: that is if there were any eco classes :P i show up and he doenst show up :P
check my attendance i good girl :P

Lulu: haha i saw him today - he finally came - & he ddnt give a single class :P

Dina: looooooooooooool 7atta ana ba2ool keda :P:P:P

Nisrine: sadia.. u dished da bio, econ n da mgt class. u better stfu n admit it -_- i
cant rememner da last time i saw ur ass xD

Lulu: seee saadiaaaa !!! :P

Saadia: no i only bunked bio i came for eco he wasnt there and mgt i came in teh
last 15 min and attended the quiz :P and nisrine your one to talk i hardly see you
in bio i attened two bios with u not in them hah :P but after all this argument i will
agree :P i happen to miss classes alot but hell i cool like that :p and this is the part
where if i knew a word in arabic for cool :P i would add it :p and nosaa dun worry
next time i step in uni i make sure u see my ass :P Luv ya all ♥ ehehhe

Example 2:

Shahad: Woke up @6 a.m , got dressed extremely fast, had my breakfast in the
car; I didn't wanna be late on my first day ;D !!! And guess what!!? There's No
classes ;D ! How amazing is that :)?

Dana: LOOOOOOOOOL !! Amazingly Amazing!! xD

Nazih: Dayman kida lma titrbshi ykoon mafi classes!!;P

Maria: Same as me ya shahed i was telling my driver to drive fast because i don't
want to be late... And u know what happened... No class!

Shahad: I know -.- its annoying . I'm really thinking about skipping tmw ;p

In Sara's case, I was happy to give her an opportunity to do something
educational outside the classroom and share it with class. The deal I made with her was
that she could skip class if she gave a short presentation about the event in the next class.
She was very shy and whimpered and pleaded a bit before agreeing. I told her she only

had to speak in front of the class for two to five minutes about grilling hotdogs. How hard could it be, really? Earlier in the term, on the day of her first presentation, she asked to use the restroom before it was her turn to talk, and she never returned. She missed her presentation. When I asked her what happened, she told me she started her period and had to go to the nurse. I was certain that it was an excuse to avoid public speaking, as it became a trend: Students left to use the bathroom and never returned, only to tell me later that they had started their periods.

The day of the cookout, the students and I shared a good laugh at the picture of Sara standing at the grill with a hotdog flipper in her hand. She looked happy and quite competent in her outfit. I heard a student suggest under her breath that they should not have shared the picture with me because now I knew Sara was skipping class. I said that Sara was not skipping class. I explained that she requested permission to participate in the fundraiser and I gave it to her, and I used the opportunity to emphasize the value of learning beyond the classroom. We scrolled through the other pictures from the cookout—pictures showing friends preparing and sharing food.

As we stood around the laptop, looking at pictures on Sara's Facebook page, an engaging discussion began in the classroom about the similarities and differences between American BBQs and Saudi cookouts. Students talked about their favorite foods and meals that their families served on special occasions. There were a few comments about American baseball and hotdogs. I said that one major difference was that hotdogs in the U.S are made of pork products and are definitely not halal. I assured them that they were not missing anything, as hotdogs are considered "junk food" in the U.S. None of us was quite sure what the hotdogs being served on campus were made of.

Conversation started to spin off in interesting directions, including the global trend toward slow-food movements and the merits of locally grown foods, as well as the virtues of vegetarianism and vegan diets. A few students said the discussion led them to the topic for their next presentation, which was what we were supposed to be talking about in class that day. So, the intervention of conversation about the cookout and the time we took to look at Sara's pictures did not derail us. Rather, it enhanced the goal of our class that day. It was not the lesson I had planned, but it met (and possibly exceeded) the learning objective of the lesson. Indeed, when the students next presented, one spoke naturally and excitedly about the history and health benefits of chocolate, explaining that dark chocolate is an excellent source of antioxidants that promote brain function. Another probed health issues more deeply by addressing links between the glorification of skinny models and eating disorders.

We had been discussing the importance of a strong conclusion, and I was impressed when she ended her talk by saying, "Remember, you are what you eat, so eat smart!" The teacher in me beamed with pride, and the ethnographer in me jotted down that phrase to add to my field notes. I don't know if that student was a member of the Psychology Club or not, but she was affected by the club's simultaneous physical presence on campus and its online presence, which became part of our classroom experience through a shared computer screen.

Members of the Psychology Club who do not study psychology bring their own backgrounds and interests to the club, but they all seem to share a love of the Internet, and they enjoy the probing and provocative discussions that the club has engaged in on a

myriad of topics, such as women's mental and physical health and ICT use, including Internet addiction.

Once Upon a Time, Blackberries and Apples were Just Fruits

Being online is social and educational and can even have political and economic purpose, but it also has complicated effects on students' developing sense of identity and well-being, as many students' struggle to balance intimacy with, and addiction, to ICTs. Students regularly compared addictive drugs and technology. They jokingly use "smack," as in smack or heroin, in place of "Mac" when referring to their Apple Macintosh computers. It is typical to hear a student say that she has something saved on her "iSmack" instead of iMac. They also call a "Blackberry" phone a "crackberry," as in crack cocaine.

Membership in the Psychology Club is one way that students attempt to make sense of the range of relationships in their lives. Significant interactions in students' lives include relationships with family members, friendships, love affairs, and the increasingly close connection they share with Internet-enabling ICTs, such as laptops, smartphones, and tablets. An early-morning exchange from between three students on the Psychology Club's Facebook page offers insight into students' shared struggles and the multiple purposes for which they use SNS. One of the students, Asma, posts a link to a site "Crackberry.com," and suggests that she has a problem controlling her dependency on her Blackberry. Her friend Bayan is also awake and engages conversation by "liking" the

post. In addition, their mutual friend Layla is also awake, and they begin a lively exchange of understanding and support:

Asma: Does anyone know where I can find a blackberry support group :0
Top Ten Signs You Are Addicted to Your BlackBerry | CrackBerry.com
The Top 10 Signs of BlackBerry Addiction!
(Bayan likes this)

Asma: What are you doing up at 5? You do not need it for your Blackberry, but yput IPAD :-)

Bayan: I prayed then never went to sleep :/

Bayan: Then I started looking for my blackberry like an addict looking for....!!

Asama: Satisfaction :-)

Layla: I could come up with at least 25 more to add to that list! (confessions of a prior blackerry addict—I'm 2 months 'sober' now)
(Bayan and Asma like this)

Asma: Shall we start a support group????? I need one for angry birds, bb, Facebook :-)
(Bayan likes this)

Layla: LOL!! This could be an Myriam Project. Take the lead ladies!! Awesome!!

Asama: Lol If I put anything more on my plate.....I might puke! Yes I know that was disgusting!
(Layla and Bayan like this)

Three friends bantering online in the pre-dawn hours of a normal day can also be understood as three psychology students problematizing the issue of Internet addiction, a real issue that affects their physical and psychological health. Even before arriving on campus, they are engaging in problem-solving educational activity, without any teacher-directed prompting. They employ humor as a way to frame discussion, but ultimately

agree that the issue is serious and that the university has a role to play, though it is not the main stage.

*Noor*RTIN: Acts of Becoming

Noor was a 19-year old sophomore when we met one afternoon in the university café. She was working on an iPad, which was somewhat novel as they were new on the market that year. When I approached her and asked what she was working on, she said, “Homework. And I’m charting my menstrual cycle.” The puzzled look on my face must have given me away and she instinctively began to explain to me what she was doing. She was multitasking on her laptop, iPad, blackberry, and iPhone. Someone might see her from across the room and say she was alone, but as I watched her in the minutes before I approached her, I realized she was not alone. Not only did she appear to be deep in thought—she was engaged in social discourse via more than one device. She had an email tab, a Word document, and several websites open on her laptop. She also had her iPad on her lap and her phones in front of her on the table. She appeared to be in very good company.

I took a seat next to her and she explained how she uses a website to keep track of her period and told me how she ended up being a computer-science major. She wanted to study art or music, but the university did not offer these degrees. She considered psychology, but her dad wanted her to study computer science, so she did. However, she is a member of the Psychology Club and posts to their Facebook page regularly.

We settled into the Ikea sofa in the university café, shoulder-to-shoulder, coffee in hand, a laptop warm across our legs. Her headphones were plugged into the side of the computer. We each had an ear bud. She went

to YouTube and found the song she wanted to play for me. She said it was one she “adored.” She’s a HUGE Coldplay fan, practically obsessed with the lead singer, Chris Martin. She’s so connected to him that she’s morphed her name with his to create her online name, “N∞RTIN.” Her Facebook page just says “N∞RTIN” and it is scribbled all over her notebooks and written on her hand. Her Facebook profile picture is an image of a Coldplay album cover. She played the song and we listened together. It was a video of a live performance in London. I asked her the name of the song and she said, “The Scientist.” I crinkled my nose and asked why the song had that name. It didn’t seem to be about science or a scientist. She must have sensed my confusion, looked me in the eyes, smiled, and said, “Everything is about science! We’re all scientists.” (Excerpt from field notes, 20 December 2010)

Noor is a scientist—a computer scientist, in fact. She is also a poet and a songwriter. She has the skills to build websites with graphic art and text and animation. She can code, and technology is so incorporated into her life that she tracks her menstrual cycle on the computer, but she wants to study creative writing, art, or music. Like many other students, she is majoring in science, per her father’s wishes. Ironically, or perhaps not, the computer savvy and technical skills she is learning as a computer science major help her find and navigate online spaces where she can write (Fan Fiction, Facebook, etc.), sing (YouTube, Vimeo, etc.), and be an artist (Facebook, GoogleArt, etc.). As a successful student and obedient daughter, Noor embodies the nation’s hope for the future. So, it may be difficult to understand why less than a year ago she was contemplating suicide. Her parents are divorced. Her father is remarried and her mother lives in Egypt as a single woman—who drives a car. Noor described her mother as her hero and says she maintains a close relationship with her, mostly through Skype. After years of begging, Noor’s father allowed her to travel to Cairo in 2010 to visit her mother, accompanied by her younger sister and a male cousin on her mother’s side as her *mehram*

(required guardian). Noor recounted that summer like a dream, with the highlight being a night that she performed “Living on a Prayer” by Bon Jovi for a crowded house in a karaoke club. She explains that she found herself on stage and knew at that moment that she wanted to be a singer and songwriter. It was the best summer of her life, driving in the car with her mother, singing karaoke, and feeling like a grown-up.

Noor’s father met her at the airport upon her return to Jeddah, and the first words out of his mouth were, “You are no daughter of mine.” Word of her public karaoke nights got back to her father, who believes such behavior is wrong and sinful. Noor said that when her father spoke these words to her, “the sky turned upside down.” She locked herself in her room for weeks, stopped eating, and thought about killing herself. Behind closed doors with her computer, she listened to music through earphones and sang to herself. When school started, she re-engaged with friends who encouraged her to sing again and suggested she post songs on YouTube. She followed their advice and began to recover from her depression. YouTube has been a place for her to express her voice as well as her desires and dreams. As she puts it, “I live there.”

For young women like Noor, YouTube is part of growing up in the digital age. True, by posting her voice on the Internet, she is transgressing on multiple levels. Yes, her act is an affront to Saudi customary law, which bans music in public places and forbids women from singing publicly because it is considered dishonorable. Even though she is 19, her father is still her legal guardian and will remain so until she gets married and her husband becomes her guardian. She has no brothers, so if her father dies before she is married, another male relative will become her guardian.

She defies her father's wishes each time she posts a heartfelt rendition of Christina Perri's "Jar of Hearts" or Alphaville's "Forever Young" online. Having dealt with heart-wrenching depression when she was not allowed to express herself or share her talent, she believes it is worth the risk. She is aware of her transgressions and takes measures to maintain her privacy. She changes her name and only posts in audio. She is aware that she is pushing the limits and is happy to have her voice heard.

Noor's story offers a poignant example of how access to sites that enable freedom of expression, like YouTube, are significant and meaningful in people's everyday lives. Access to spaces that foster free expression, like the university campus and YouTube, helped Noor regain enough confidence that she was bursting into song at any opportunity when I met her. She also has a supportive group of friends that were never far from her side when I saw her on campus. Notably, many of her closest friends are psychology majors, and she said that talking with them about her problems helped her stay positive, possibly preventing her from sliding deeply into depression and giving in to her thoughts of suicide. It is impossible to know if the students' training in psychology had any impact on their ability to help their friend, but the possibility itself is a compliment to the efficacy of the Psychology program and its students. Noor continues to struggle with the tensions in her life and finds support in her peer relationships, using both campus and online spaces for self-expression through song and poetry. For example, she posted the following poem on the Psychology Club's Facebook page, rather than on her private Facebook page:

Do I have the right to write about you and you are my dear Dad . . .
How can I write about you: you are my dear Dad . . .
I say to myself, how can I write or end my endless note?

How can I write when my tears
Compete with my words, my dear Dad?
What if I forget to mention something my dear Dad . . .
How can I forgive myself, if I can't find the words, my dear Dad . . .
Do I have the right to smile when you are far, my dear Dad?
We live under the same sky, but you're not here, my dear Dad . . .
Despite distances, I do adore you, my Dear Dad.
Do I dare write my gratitude to you, my dear Dad
Tears prevent me from writing, my dear Dad.

Reshaping Boundaries with the Internet

I was told that the Psychology Club began in 2009, which was a little over a year before I began my fieldwork. The university maintains an active, informative website with a page devoted to students' activities. Information includes: club name, club leader, brief description, projects, and mentors. There is a chart containing information on clubs to date, though I heard of clubs I did not see listed there.

The official mission of the Psychology Club, as publicly stated on the university website, reads as follows:

The Psychology Club is a student organized, on-campus based club, which serves as an important network for undergraduate students of Al-Noor University, who will come together to share ideas and learn more about their major. Psychology Club is open to the students majoring in psychology, and in the future plans on bringing the involvement of other majors to increase the interest in the field of psychology.

While I was on campus in 2010/2011, members of the club called themselves the psychology "chicks," employing the slang term for girls—not literally baby chickens. However, the implication of an innocent creature is intended. Members play up the image of sweetness and softness that comes to mind when one sees a fluffy yellow chick.

They had shirts and hats made with cute little chicks on them to wear at club events. On any given day, an array of posters around the red spot announced various events. The posters bearing a little yellow chick were quickly identifiable as Psychology Club events.

The choice of such a nonthreatening mascot belies the group's radical goals. The psychology chicks want nothing short of revolutionary change in social attitudes toward women's wellness in Saudi Arabia, including mental and physical health. They want to change public opinion and transform the job market, as well as influence social values and perceptions of health and illness. As such, their goals are inherently political. I did not hear the word "political" come up much on campus, but political activity was ever-present, in the act of education itself, as well as in the events, conversations, and various forms of negotiation that played out interpersonally, institutionally and socially. There is no Political Science Department at al-Noor. There are also no formal cultural studies, anthropology, or sociology classes. There is, however, a lot of talk about economics and culture.

The following Facebook post (December, 2010) is an example of how one student expressed her frustration about the need for political change, specifically in relation to booking transportation for members of the Psychology Club to attend an off-campus event. She had to go through the university student activities office, and vents her anger to her friends about the bureaucratic system and incompetent staff, but also makes a clear, powerful statement about the relationship of education and political power:

Smoke is coming out of my ears and nostrils right now!!!! I feel like I am dragging one of those iron balls with a chain behind me . . . to make any progress I have to pull and drag and wait. If you want to get something done in this country, you've got to do it yourself. If you don't now how, learn, because that's the only freakin way.

Al-Noor students speak openly about their desire for economic rights—primarily for equal opportunity in the job market and the hope of being financially independent one day. Venting, like complaining, is a positive part of the creative process that leads students to develop innovative ways to cope with stress and injustice, as well as to problem-solve and imagine ways to create change within systems that exclude and disempower them. Human-rights language is tricky on campus, though. Buzzwords like “gender equality,” “democracy,” and “civil rights” may not be used outright, but the concepts are ever-present in the examples of frustration that students share regularly. They complain about having to buy lingerie and personal hygiene products from men because women are not allowed to work in stores. They criticize the current workforce model and say they deserve to work. In fact, they have thought out many jobs that they believe should be done exclusively by women, and explained to me why they think women would do a better job. It is very common to hear women suggesting that Saudi Arabia would be better off if women could work in any profession they chose. However, it is very uncommon to hear people speaking about the political system and how it might be improved.

In monitoring various Facebook pages, including the Psychology Club site, and listening to conversations on campus, I picked up on the political expression that is woven into everyday discourse, and I also saw how students use caution when voicing criticism of the system. They do so carefully and for good reason, as the Internet in Saudi Arabia is heavily monitored by the government. According to the country's Communications & Information Technology Commission (CITC), Saudi citizens play a

prominent role in regulating content on the Internet (Burrows, 2008)¹². While the CITC intervenes to block content such as pornography, subversive activity, and insults against Islam, the government, royal family, and citizens report and request removal of offensive material. Conservative clerics, including members of the Mutawa (also called the morality police) and students are said to lead such “reporting” efforts. The Mutawa are unique to Saudi Arabia. They exist under the direct control of the religious council, and their policies and actions are often at odds with views of members of the royal family. In the past, they have been responsible for banning cameras and mobile phones with cameras, and making movie theatres illegal in the kingdom. Recently, members of the Mutawa have redirected their censorship enthusiasm toward photo-sharing and video-sharing sites, such as YouTube and Flickr (AFP, 2012). The type of citizen reporting that was crucial in the early days of Internet adoption is in keeping with common community policing practices on the streets. However, as the priorities of communities and broader society shift in new directions—in some cases reflecting the desire for increased freedom of expression and women’s rights—Saudi citizens’ social networking and technology skills are being applied online for new purposes. The psychology chicks at al-Noor are an example of how Saudis are choosing to organize collectively rather than report on each other.

Increasing online collaboration and organization amongst students and political dissidents, which are often the same, have led to tighter government monitoring and censorship, as well as arrests. After announcing her new membership in a group called Youth Parliament, one young woman said her mom made a worried face and said, “We

¹² <http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2008-11-12/internet-censorship-saudi-style>

don't want to hear the news that you were shot dead. Just keep yourself away from politics.” This mother's comment, as well as the fear that underlies it, resonate with something a psychology professor told me one afternoon when I went to talk with her about work and my research, which she expressed great interest in. Nancy, the professor whom I mentioned previously, told me how important the psychology program is to the students and how much the kingdom needs mental-health specialists, joking that she has to be her own therapist because of the lack of quality therapists available and the stigma her husband's family associates with seeking help to maintain one's mental health.

Techno-Mental Health Conditions on Campus

At al-Noor, there exists an unwritten rule that classes really start 10-15 minutes after the time they are “supposed” to start. Most students have back-to-back classes for the first few hours of the day. Schedules are blocked much like high school and there is a rush between classes. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, when activity time begins, the students are ready to unwind and let loose. However, as I described earlier, many students are exhausted and overwhelmed by the sudden opportunities of “activity time,” which is relative leisure time. I attended several scheduled events during activity time and was struck by the low student attendance. On the days that I stayed in my office during activity time, I began to notice a trend: The organizers of university-sponsored events often sent several desperate emails in a row, pleading with students to attend the lecture, roundtable, or Q & A session. About a month into my fieldwork, I started holding office hours, which overlapped with activity time in the café and library. I saw

students hanging out after class, and I noticed that continued to hang as events came and went. Shortly before an event began, I often heard talk about it. Students stood up and some grabbed their bags, which appeared to be their attempt to motivate and head for events, but conversation continued, momentum was lost, and students dropped their bags and sat back down. Someone or something had convinced them to stay.

I always brought my laptop with me to office hours and regularly kept my Facebook account open for observation if I was not meeting with a student. My method was to observe and not intervene in conversations during this time, even if students sent me a message directly, which I had asked them not to do during school hours. I explained to the students in my class that I could not accept their friend requests until the semester was over and I was no longer their teacher. They understood the ethical complications of participating in my research study while I was grading them, and by the end of the term, I had a long queue of friend requests from my students. For this reason, the majority of my early online data is from the Facebook pages of students whom I did not teach, but there were instances when I saw comments from my students because they entered into conversations with the other students. As I sat nestled in the corner and monitored the Facebook newsfeed, I would see posts such as, “i use my laptop to do my homework here and somehow, somehow, i always find myself on fb wasting time! Blah.” Over time, however, it became clear that students were not “wasting time” doing “nothing.” They tended to be connecting, communicating, and often commiserating about collective disappointments. As I just mentioned, actions that are often thought of as petty and discouraged among women, such as venting, complaining, and

commiserating are in fact productive acts that foster group cohesion, encourage collective thinking, and lead to desired outcomes for students at al-Noor.

Students shared frustration face-to-face, on-line, and/or via Blackberry instant message. Despite the institution's optimistic attitude, awareness of the numerous barriers to employment that await al-Noor graduates affects faculty and students in different departments in different ways. Psychology majors speak openly about the lack of employment opportunities, as well as the stigma associated with psychological health and practices such as therapy and counseling. Some teachers have difficulty understanding the point of teaching if the students are not going to get jobs, but others consider themselves pioneers and forge ahead with passion (and caution). Those I interviewed who approached their jobs as a means to "make money" tended to hold fixed notions of what education means. Many were openly technophobic and knowingly fostered asymmetrical power relations between themselves and their students in their classrooms. Without venturing into an analysis of their specific stories and reasons for teaching at al-Noor, their comments indicated that they were not committed to a broader understanding of education for critical thinking or social change. As such, they appeared closed to the possibility of redefining what going to college might mean for their students. They did not express interest in the extra-classroom educational moments happening around them, and more often than not, they did not interact with students outside their classrooms. In short, their rigidity in relation to the purpose of education, and their failure to adjust their pedagogical practice to meet the needs of the young women they taught made for tense student-faculty relations. In 1916, John Dewey suggested, "If we teach today's students as we taught yesterday's, we rob them of tomorrow." The practice of hiring teachers

with what I call “mercenary mentalities” and outdated pedagogies has its own set of serious problems, which deserve elaboration and further scrutiny, but fall outside my focus here. Instead, I will focus on one teacher, Nancy, whom I mentioned in Chapter 5, mainly because her pedagogical practice includes discussion of and use of the Internet. Furthermore, Nancy’s relationships with students reflected her belief that they can and will shape the future. I realize the possible limitation of focusing on one faculty member as an example, rather than presenting multiple examples for contrast and comparison. However, my focus in this dissertation is educational transformation and the role of the Internet and ICTs and SNS that enable online learning. I am not writing about institutional problems stemming from some foreign faculty’s lack of intercultural sensitivity, ethnocentrism, and possible Islamophobia. But it is worth mentioning a correlation between outdated pedagogical practice, cultural micro-aggressions, and technophobia.

An American woman in her late 30s, Nancy relates to her students remarkably well, but openly distinguishes herself from them since she was raised in a different country in a different generation. She is one of the few faculty members who “friends” her students on Facebook. She is a self-described “digital immigrant.” My observation was that she is a highly adapted digital immigrant who moves easily, with confidence and success in the online world. She was present in many of the conversations and exchanges I observed among students on Facebook and Twitter, and attributes her technological aptitude to using social media and Skype to staying touch with her family and friends in the U.S., as well as “lots of online shopping.” She is outspoken, but keeps her online comments about restrictions on women’s freedom or “inconveniences” at the level of

acceptable public discourse, and had developed certain benchmarks that she used to monitor what was allowed and not allowed online. For example, if something was written about in the newspaper, it was fair game for her to discuss. I saw this pattern with students, as well. They would post a link to an article in *Arab News* or *The Saudi Gazette*, and discussion opened up in the comments section.

Nancy has faith that the political and economic situation for women in Saudi Arabia is changing. She says she is proud to be part of that change, and credits al-Noor for playing an essential part in preparing women to make changes in global society, as well as in Saudi Arabia. As a mother and educator, she says she firmly believes a more equitable future for Saudi Arabia rests on the ideas and work of the leaders of the digital generation who are currently university students, male and female. She said change is happening everywhere, but behind the scenes, and considers the Internet a big part of it: “It is breaking down barriers.” I asked for examples, but she only she shook her head and gave me a complex smile that came across as both resigned and hopeful as she apologized for not being able to tell me more about “what things are really like.” She suggested we might connect out of the country at some time in the future, perhaps when she was back in the U.S. for a visit, and she could talk freely “without fear.” We were having this conversation on campus, and though we were the only ones in the hallway, she said, “You never know who is listening, and I just can’t risk it.”

What struck me as most important was her comment about the Internet as a way that young people in Saudi Arabia are breaking boundaries. I also recall the poignancy of her saying that she sometimes does not sleep at night because she is worried about what her students will do after graduation. Will they get jobs? How will they make use of

their highly skilled minds and hard-earned degrees? How will they balance motherhood and a career?

Nancy told me she is afraid that al-Noor graduates will become “martyrs.” Students are exposed to many new ideas of “liberation” and “freedom” that conflict with the daily realities of restrictions on their mobility and participation that she fears they will decide to go outside the rules to get what they want, like the students who choose to jump the turnstile at the thumbprint scanner in the morning.

Psychology courses draw heavily on social theories from sociology and anthropology, neither of which is offered as fields of study at al-Noor. These theories function like seeds that take root in the students minds and flourish through their interactions on campus and online. New thoughts can be intoxicating, and students are impassioned by ideas about mobility, political and economic participation, alternative gender performance, equality of the sexes, and social justice. They draw these conclusions from their lives and from online resources, rather than formal curriculum texts, but psychology courses sometimes serve as gateways.

As a psychology teacher, Nancy expressed concern about what would happen to them if her students take their new ideas into society and try to change things too quickly or in the ways that the government defines as subversive or criminal. She is certain that change-agents will encounter violent resistance unless they are patient and the conditions are right, and said: “We want them to leave here and become pioneers, not martyrs.”

Indeed, political activism is a dangerous business in Saudi Arabia. Public space in the kingdom is not designed to accommodate political opposition. However, the Internet has become a site of political expression that could be considered oppositional, if

not critical. Thus, dissent is expressed covertly, lest it be quickly suppressed by force. Political parties are illegal in Saudi Arabia. Criticism of Islam, the royal family, and religious leadership is also illegal. To be sure, political opposition to the government exists in Saudi Arabia and al-Noor students have opinions about politics, but they are careful to hedge (and sometimes hide) their opinions. To observe political opposition at work (or at play), on campus or online, one must look for subtle, coded, even camouflaged messages in unexpected places.

In spite of their frustration about being excluded from political and economic opportunities, I heard students speak lovingly and with respect about the government, and the king in particular. I never heard anyone who lived in Saudi Arabia (except for foreign faculty) criticize the government or the Saudi royal family outright, save for some offhand and somewhat humorous remarks that students made about Saudi princes and princesses going to private parties and secret clubs where they got drunk, did drugs, and had premarital sex. These comments were always hedged in the language of hearsay or gossip, which I coded and eventually decoded as a strategy that students have developed to express criticism of the royal family, while they are circumspect about the dangers of such remarks. They retold stories of royal family members' bad behavior as if they were jokes or clips from comedies, and then laughed about them, engaging in organic expressions of subtle political satire.

Gossip is, in fact, an example of political speech and an act of political activism, carefully embedded in uproarious laughter with no mention of politics. Even though the students' comments were not overtly political, comments were often indictments of acts of hypocrisy, dereliction of honor, and misuse of power. As political commentary,

gossiping about the royal family acknowledges that people in elite positions and hold power are capable of illegal and criminal acts just like anyone else. It emphasizes the equality of people and exposes the function of hierarchy.

One student asked me what it was like to live in New York City. I told her I was a full-time student, so I didn't get out much. She asked me if I watched *Gossip Girl*, an American television show. I said no, and she told me I had to watch it because it would help me understand what I was missing out on. "*Gossip Girl* shows what college kids in New York are like," she claimed. I explained that I didn't even own a television, and she raised her eyebrows at me, gave me a slight scoff, and told me that full episodes from several seasons are available online. Apparently, not having a television was not an excuse for my ignorance: She watches the show on the Internet, usually on her iPad.

I bring up this anecdote because it introduced "gossip" to my field notes and was the point from which I began to understand how students use "gossip" to talk about the royal family. On campus and online, students employed gossip as way to engage in discussion of politics and culture. They engage in it strategically as a complex production of everyday politics and an expression of political action (Besnier, 2009). Their gossip has entertainment value and political purpose. When told for entertainment value, stories of the royal family members' misbehavior were framed as a series of events with actors, like a television show. Students could see themselves in the roles and imagine that they, too, could have the freedom to break rules without consequences. Gossiping gives students a discursive tool and opportunities to explore the relationship between imagination and reality—and to develop moral selves in relation to choices they make and opinions they hold.

Staying out late and dancing in private clubs appealed to students I spoke with, but many stated explicitly that they are against the consumption of alcohol based on their religious beliefs. I did not hear of any instances of drinking on campus, but I did hear many stories about drug use. In fact, a group of students regularly smoked marijuana behind the auditorium. On several occasions, I smelled cigarettes and marijuana on students entering my classes. The drugs I heard about most commonly were sleeping pills and painkillers. Students obtained painkillers from the campus clinic, crushed the pills into a powder, and mixed them in an energy drink such as Red Bull to get a buzz or a sense of feeling “out of it” during the school day. If they were depressed, they took sleeping pills. I was told by one student that a princess who suffers from depression forced her driver to go to the United Arab Emirates to obtain anti-depressants for her because her family would not let her leave.

Mental health issues are as prevalent in Saudi Arabia as they are anywhere else in the world. Stress is a big part of the students’ lives. They stress over school, relationships with friends and family, and romantic relationships, both heterosexual and homosexual. They worry about the future. They are distressed over world events, especially violent conflict in the region. Many students at al-Noor are not Saudi. They have family in Palestine, Egypt, and Syria, and follow political events in the region with grave concern and heavy hearts. The campus, as well as online blogs and social networks like Facebook, are spaces where students talk openly about what is stressing them out. When clubs venture into these online spaces, the exchanges take on a new educational element. As the club’s mission is to promote action rather than just talk, the Psychology Club keeps one foot on the ground and the other in the online world.

Standing Together: One Foot on the Ground, the Other Online

On event days, the club's active presence is noticeable. Club members were identifiable by the t-shirts they wore, with fuzzy yellow chicks across their chests. Some women wore baseball caps over their hijabs, or backwards over long pony-tailed hair. During my fieldwork, the Psychology Club organized many events, more than any of the other official clubs on campus. Some events were fundraisers, such as the BBQ at which Sara flipped hotdogs. Funds were used to purchase hats and t-shirts for members and to pay for transportation to events outside the university, such as conferences and lectures held at other universities and hotels. Cupcake sales were popular and big moneymakers.

Indeed, I arrived for lecture one day to find a cupcake on my desk. I asked if it was someone's birthday. "No, Miss, it's from the bake sale," someone told me. I drank a cup of hot coffee and ate my cupcake as I stood behind the podium and started class. Several students had cupcakes in front of them, and one asked if they were allowed to eat them in class. I said "Of course. I am eating mine." Not only was it fair, but I was certain that none of us would be able to concentrate during the lesson if we all had cupcakes staring at us. The smell alone was distracting, so we ate them, commented on their deliciousness and got to work. From then on, I always knew when the Psychology Club was having a bake sale because students brought cupcakes to class. Over time, I became convinced that the sugar spike led to more lively and active student participation.

Not all of the Psychology Club's events were about hotdogs and cupcakes; they tackled serious health and social issues, including a forum on local attitudes toward women in business and a student round-table discussion about Internet addiction.

Members of the club were also active in a national breast cancer awareness event, “A Woman’s Stand,” which took place in Jeddah in October 2010 and earned the participants a title in the Guinness Book of World Records for the largest human pink ribbon in support of breast cancer awareness. Over 4,000 women wearing Pepto-Bismol pink scarves stood together on the field of the Ministry of Education Sports Complex stadium to make the human ribbon. The event was an initiative of the Zahra Breast Cancer Association.

Rates of terminal cases are higher in Saudi Arabia than in other countries because of a lack of public awareness. A surgeon in Jeddah reported, “Approximately 70% of breast-cancer cases in Saudi Arabia are diagnosed when victims are in the advanced stage of the disease, which means the survival rate is lower than in nations where more cases are diagnosed early” (AMEinfo, 2010).

As I mentioned, the breast cancer awareness event was held in October, which is globally acknowledged as Breast Cancer Awareness Month, so participation was a show of global solidarity. It was a city-wide event, and al-Noor students represented fewer than 100 of the thousands of participants from different universities, businesses, and community organizations. Afterward, I spoke to students in my class about their experience. Many were quite critical and disappointed that there was no formal educational component or information to go along with the gathering. They saw a missed opportunity to disseminate information about a critical health issue at an event that was the largest public women-only gathering in Saudi Arabia’s history. I heard students express disappointment and anger. Many simply shook their heads disapprovingly and said they were not surprised. I gave students who had attended the event the opportunity

to write an extra credit essay about it. The majority wrote about the difference between doing something to get recognition (i.e., Guinness Book of World Records), and making lasting change in their lives and community. Their eloquent words expressed that they know the difference between talk and action. They feel that there is a lot of talk and not much action—which is why the college educational experience can be frustrating for many of them at times.

The “performance” gets old if there is no real change. Getting to be part of a human pink ribbon in the Guinness Book of World Records is impressive and fun, but these young women aspire to be community leaders, mental health professionals, and lawyers someday. The event was generally applauded as an overall success for women in Saudi Arabia and most likely raised awareness, but many students at al-Noor had expected more and saw it as a disappointment and a missed opportunity. Aya, a student in my COMM class complained, “They had no formal education features. They just gave us all pink hijabs and told us where to stand.” She was a psychology student who wanted to be part of real social change.

Midway through my research, in early 2011, the Psychology Club moved to a new space online. They set up a new Facebook page, dropped the fuzzy yellow bird image, and identified themselves as “psychology lovers.” The Facebook page states: “Psychology Lovers aims to raise awareness of how Psychology touches on all aspects of our lives!” and had 918 members as of June 2011. Obviously, not all members are psychology majors at the university. The club’s mission and reach has extended beyond the campus and the local community to engage a global community. In addition, the Psychology Lovers Facebook page has become a “brag page,” or place to share student

and alumna success with the immediate community and world, “brag tagging” the people mentioned in the posts. It serves to celebrate members’ accomplishments and also to dispel the myth of the oppressed Muslim woman or the invisible woman behind the black abaya. Below are examples of the announcements:

...so proud of what you are doing and how you are representing with dignity what it means to be an intellect, advocate, and woman! MH is one of our Al-Noor PSY students who has been in Paris representing Saudi at the G(irls)20 Summit! Keep up the wonderful work and I hope you always maintain your passion and love for the betterment of humanity (Mashallah)!

Some more exciting news to share about Al-Noor Alumni President and PSY graduate, A! A has been accepted into another executive training program at Harvard! A.....Alf alf mabrook and I personally wait for you to come back and share with us what you have learned from all these programs.

Dear A, has been admitted into another leadership seminar at Stanford for spring 2012 A, we are proud of you for continuing your educational and personal growth by continuing to engage in the learning process.

It is worth noting that another new Facebook page has developed since I completed my research. In late 2011, Nancy started the new page shortly after she dissolved her official affiliation with al-Noor. The new site is called “Breaking Boundaries with Psychology” and had 1,700 members in June 2011¹³. Its mission expresses the growing sense of confidence with which al-Noor university women, students, alumnae, and faculty claim the Internet and SNS as spaces for them to engage in teaching and learning about psychology. The mission of the new website is stated as follows:¹⁴

¹³ As of April 2014, membership on this Facebook page was up to 2,743.

¹⁴ Typos are from the original text and were not corrected for inclusion here to preserve authenticity.

Breaking Boundaries With Psychology is a page that has been created with the purpose of sharing information about the field of psychology and how to use the knowledge of the various subfields of psychology to breakdown the various boundaries that as humans we have created in living more productive authentic lives personally, socially, professionally, and politically.

Please feel free to add members to this group that you think would have an interest, but I will warn you that I do not plan on censoring information of taboo subjects as I have done with my participation in other projects because of my past professional affiliations.

I believe that positive changes in our lives often occur by approaching some aspects of life they maybe uncomfortable to talk about, but it is a necessary process to deal "with the big pink elephants" that exists in our living rooms that no one wants to acknowledge that exists. The one important boundary I hope we can create in this group is respect for each other and our differing views on matters. perhaps we will be able to create a model for others in the world :-)

Nancy's previous fear of politicizing the university or involving the students' club in an activism campaign is no longer a professional liability for her. Since she is no longer working at the university, her Facebook page cannot be directly linked to the institution. "Breaking Boundaries with Psychology" can transparently state the goals that the Psychology Chicks and Psychology Lovers had to keep under the radar, lest they call attention to themselves as budding social activists, or bring shame on the university and compromise its position as a trusted and respected educational institution with longstanding ties to the Al Saud royal family.

Conclusion

Students act out different roles through their relationships with each other in particular contexts: On campus they tend to be students, whereas on the Internet they vacillate between being teachers and students. They collectively problem-solve and co-produce new knowledge that circulates and enlivens local discussion of women's mental and physical health issues. Examples in this chapter have illustrated some of the challenges that students face on campus, but they are not willing to give up their role as students, as it affords them a place of privilege in society and access to a variety of networked spaces on the Internet they might otherwise be unable to access. Moreover, for many, "school" is the reason they have computers. They tell their parents (usually their fathers) that they need to be online for school, and then get a personal laptop. When I asked them how they came to own their laptops, I was usually told something along the lines of "my dad bought it for me for school."

By examining how clubs and "clubbing" fit into students' networked lives, we see that campus and online learning spaces converge to represent the contemporary university experience. For students at al-Noor, being on campus is one of the few times they are away from their family homes and able to engage with a diverse group of women from different countries, with different ideas and experiences.

As educational inventresses and professional innovators, they express themselves in ways that are not readily possible in their homes or other public social settings, such as shopping malls. Previously unknown or illegible expressions of their personalities and passions come through in the online-offline university matrix. In the company of peers

and faculty and administrators, students find ways, sometimes through thoughtful planning and sometimes through so-called “bitch sessions,” to identify their needs and express their desires in ways that translate talk into action.

While going about their everyday lives, al-Noor students are ever vigilant and thoughtful about their roles in society, as well as the opportunities that await them after graduation. When they are faced with a lack of opportunity, as is the case with psychology, school counseling, family therapy, etc., they collaborate about ways to create opportunities. The Psychology Club is an example of how this happens. Psychology students’ engagement in “clubbing” highlights the critical role of ICTs and SNS on the Internet, both in the collaboration stage and in the stage of creating a new form of the professional women.

Chapter 7

CASE STUDY II: THE BUSINESS CLUB

We visualize a world where the students contribute positively towards the growth and development of our economy, society and homes. We want to create a social fabric in the society that is distinctively active, prudent, farsighted, proactive and positive in its initiatives to development of all kinds; and yet stick to its moral, cultural, social and religious values.

-Business Student Association mission from al-Noor's website (2010)

Introduction

The exchange of knowledge, ideas, and goods illustrates multiple ways in which Internet access and advanced technological skills influence students' everyday learning and teaching moments, as well as their understanding of what a business is. The examples in this chapter represent transgressive education, as well as intentional rule-breaking, with the best of intentions.

The Business Club was one of the first clubs to emerge at al-Noor. More than one member told me that it was the very first. It is prestigious and has strong links to the economic community beyond the university. The founder is a member of the royal family and membership in the club carries a measure of distinction for all of its participants and is seen as a privilege, with rights and responsibilities. The club organizes career talks with members of the local community and invites local and global business representatives to come to campus for recruiting; members join because they want a bridge to future success in the local business sector. Moreover, the club sets students up for internships and entrepreneurial endeavors.

The Business Club takes its business seriously. I recently noticed on the website and official documents that it has morphed its name to the Business Students Association (BSA), as a symbol of the gravity of its mission and the serious work it does.

Serious Business: Negotiating Work and Play Space

Although the official mission statement does not specifically mention the Internet, it is posted on the Internet, which indicates the role of the online realm. However, I did not spend as much time observing the BSA on the Internet as I spent observing the Psychology Club, because the club's Facebook site does not host much discussion, and students rarely post personal comments. Rather, the Facebook site is a reference to the al-Noor website and serves much like calendar for upcoming events both on campus and in the community. While I checked the BSA site often, I rarely found provocative postings, nor did I ever watch a volley of comments spark into a heated debate on the BSA Facebook page. It was a presence on the web, but it was not a space for debate or creative problem solving—which is not to say that BSA members are not active on SNS.

The difference I noted is that BSA members keep BSA business and personal business separate. Sometimes this means they are more active on Facebook, in the sense that they have personal Facebook page, as well as a business Facebook page, which was just for business. BSA members take their career plans very seriously, and this attitude distinguishes them on campus. In fact, the BSA came under fire from its own members last year: Students were reporting other students for misusing the room, which the university allotted them only for club-related meetings and storage purposes. The BSA is

the only student led club with an official space on campus while I was there, and it was not meant to be a clubhouse—a place to relax and hang out—but was becoming just that. Apparently the students were having too much fun. In response to the misuse of their official space, the BSA president drafted the following decree, which now hangs on the “office” door. Its words reflect the tension over time and space:

To Whom It May Concern

I state that I am a full time official Business Students Association member for the year 2010-2011.

I have been provided with the BSA Office as a privilege to aid my BSA related tasks and activities.

I hereby confirm that I will not use this office for socializing, parties, wudu,¹⁵ praying or sleeping. I will not eat, scream, sing or shout; watch movies or videos. Any movies I play will be for BSA use and any appreciation I want to show will be done with a loud round of applause with members. This is my room and I promise to make an effort to ensure that it is always looking presentable. I will not do any action that may compromise the BSA image. To protect the rights of BSA members, I will not bring in friends or let my friends keep their belongings in the Office. Only I and my fellow BSA members are allowed the full use of BSA Office facilities for our related tasks, activities and meetings.

That clubs are perceived as leisure activities is a testament to students’ creativity and resourcefulness. All clubs, whether they call themselves “chicks” or “lovers” or the “Association” must negotiate a balance between purpose and playfulness. Though it was designated as a strictly for business-only space, I had some of the most revealing intimate, personal interviews of my entire fieldwork experience in the BSA office. Despite the pledge hanging on the door, students brought their lives with them when they crossed the threshold of the BSA office. I heard them talk about dating, marriage, and sexuality. To their credit, they found ways to carve out time and space where they were

¹⁵ *Wudu* is an Arabic word that refers to the Islamic ritual of ablution. It involves washing the hands, face, and mouth with water. Muslims must perform *wudu* before prayer or *salah*.

free to learn from each other about the topics and issues they wanted and needed to know about, without drawing attention themselves and conversations that could be seen as controversial or subversive. Whether the administration thinks they are “wasting time” or behaving like good students is fine with them, but they talk to each other about issues that matter to them when they need to, and sometimes these conversations happen in the BSA office.

Some of the issues that members of the Psychology Club talked openly about on their Facebook Pages were not supposed to be addressed in the BSA office, but I still heard the conversations, and it made me think students felt freer to express themselves and have fun online. Since the BSA students saw the Internet as their place of business, they were more cautious about their online activity. This put them in a predicament, as they had nowhere to go where they felt free to talk about problems and frustrations in a stream-of-consciousness, messy kind of way, which is what often happens online. I got the sense there was more pressure on members of the BSA, and that they often suffered in silence for lack of an appropriate space to vent.

Class is an identifiable marker amongst BSA members. Many, but not all, are from the social elites. Membership functions as a means of class reproduction for these elites and for a mode of social mobility for enterprising young women without ties to the royal family. Students at alNoor who are princesses or members of the royal family are under more pressure to self-censor, and, surprisingly, also have more resources and connections to get them out of trouble should they transgress in public. So, it cannot be said definitively, or in any general sense, whether their elite social status is an advantage or a challenge. I heard comments that support both realities.

One afternoon, I was hanging out with students in the BSA office. I told them I was just observing and wouldn't be joining the conversation, so they shouldn't pay me any attention. They were making plans to host a Toastmasters event on campus that would bring together students from other local universities, including co-ed universities. Men would be involved, so they were talking about how to make sure all the male participants knew what to expect upon arrival. They decided to draft an email to send to all participants, which would tell the men to wait in the lobby until the security guards came to escort them. They also decided that the email should remind all the female participants to wear their abayas and hijabs because they would be in the same room with male participants. I heard one student say, "I feel bad" for the guys. This comment sparked conversation about what it would be like to go to school with "guys." I was jotting down notes and enjoying the debate about the pros and cons of single-sex education institutions when I heard a student say, "I wish I went to an all-guys' school, because this place is torture." Her friends assured her that it wasn't that bad, and she became agitated and told them they had no idea how she felt. She wasn't saying she wanted to go to school with men because she was attracted to them—she was trying to tell her friends that she struggled at al-Noor because she was attracted to women. I understood what she was saying, but her friends made comments dismissing her attempt to open up to them. I heard one student say, "You are just messed up because your parents have a bad marriage. You don't really like women." The student who was trying to come out responded, "No. I really do like women. I love them." I sat silently, aching to tell the student that I heard her. Instead, I watched as they all eventually stood up and continued to try and convince her that she really did like men and was just "confused."

As the conversation shifted away from composing the email and closer to the issue of their friend being a lesbian, the students walked toward the office door. Eventually, I was leaning against the doorframe listening to them talk in the hallway. Based on the topic of conversation and their awareness that it was not an appropriate discussion to have in the “office,” they casually moved their bodies outside of the restricted space. It seemed almost instinctual and not a word was said about it as they moved. They just relocated and continued the conversation in a more appropriate space, though I am not sure the hallway was a good place to be talking about homosexuality, considering it is illegal in Saudi Arabia. In the end, they were speaking loudly and plainly about their friend’s struggle with her sexuality. The last thing I heard her say about it was, “Even my father admits it. He wants me to graduate and get out of here, so I can be happy being who I am somewhere else.”

If the BSA must compose a declaration stating that they will behave appropriately and acknowledging that permission to convene as a group on campus is a privilege granted by the university, that is not a problem. They do it. The declaration bears 13 original signatures and hangs on the door of the business club’s office as a public performance of self-governance and mediated sovereignty. The faculty interprets the letter as a show of good behavior, while the students see it as a display of their power. They do not hang the declaration for show or in jest, as they are indeed serious about business, but they do not treat it as a gag order, either.

The more time I spent on campus, the more I learned and observed how different students in different situations with different needs manage space. The common theme was resourcefulness and adaptability, and it became clear that online activity fosters their

entrepreneurial spirit. There are several success stories of former and current students who have started businesses, particularly Internet-based businesses. A jewel in their crown is the local story about an alumna who owned and operated a cupcake café, the first woman-owned-and-operated business in the kingdom. A cosmopolitan place like Jeddah did not escape the global cupcake craze, as one can witness in the campus café, where students enjoy cupcake parties. The cupcake craze illustrates the merging spaces of campus and the online world, not only with reference to the young entrepreneur's success, but also in terms of everyday life. A Saudi university alumna, who later attended graduate school in the U.S.¹⁶, posted the following statement on her Facebook page: "If one more cute cup cake business pops out in Jeddah, I'm gonna shoot myself!" The post is meant to be humorous, but it also speaks to the worldwide popularity of cupcakes and the ways in which global business trends manifest in local business markets throughout the world. A volley of 17 subsequent comments quickly ensued, from which I have extracted the ones below, which I found particularly interesting in terms of women and business:

Salma: "Some one should do a study on girly business trends in jeddah. With all the competition they create in a relatively small market, do they really make money?"

Nadine: "lool ..X in food business akeed they make money..i'm still waiting for good ice cream in the area !"

Nadine: "Maybe you need to spearhead some serious businesses.....that'at what we dreamed for you!"

¹⁶ Salma is not a research participant in my study. She is a personal friend and gave her consent to have her remarks included in my study. I found her remarks relevant, as she is an al-Noor alumna. She is Facebook friends with several al-Noor students, who chimed in on the conversation, and she also attended al-Noor events while I was in Jeddah.

Salma: “Thank u all for the emotional support to go thru the cup cake market hijack. I decided I won't shoot myself, i will just eat them instead :)”

Nadine: “I advice u to make ur own at home since many of the store bought ones r better crocker ready mixes with malteseres or oreos or nutella ontop anyway”

More important and subtle than their intended humor, these posts suggest how social networking sites, such as Facebook, are spaces where multiple spheres overlap and trends are discussed and vetted. Here, if we look beyond the cupcake joke, we see the confluence of one young woman’s multiple networks commenting on a local business trend. The post earned 25 likes within an hour, and 12 of them had university affiliations listed under their names.

Cupcakes and Robots: (Ad)ventures in Online Entrepreneurship

An article in *The Economist* (June 2013) reported that 10 percent of global Internet entrepreneurs are women, while reports from Middle Eastern cities cite rates of local female entrepreneurship as high as 35 percent. The article goes on to state, “Well-educated women in Saudi Arabia want to work, but their family often objects. . . Running an internet start-up from home is the perfect compromise.”

I learned a great deal about the Business Club’s history, mission, and success at the annual Entrepreneurs Showcase, which brought together students, their families, and members of the Chamber of Commerce. The event demonstrates how the club serves as a bridge, connecting students to the local business sector, and also highlights the role of

Internet in promoting sustainable new businesses. “The 2010 Young Female Entrepreneurs’ Showcase” opened with a computer-generated Saudi flag waving from a large screen located on the stage. The digital image sparkled and moved combining elements of the real and imagined. The lights dimmed, and brilliant green shone brightly as speakers positioned around the large auditorium crackled to life as the first chords of the national anthem filled the air. Then silence—followed by a meek female voice: “We thank you for your patience during our technical difficulty.” I took the opportunity to jot some thoughts in my notebook:

The organizers all wore soft cotton silver scarves. Wearing color coordinated hijabs/ headscarves is a material expression of solidarity - we saw this again with the Women’s Stand event, where over 4,000 women wore pepto bismol pink hijabs and assembled on a football field to make the world’s largest “living pink ribbon.” Contrary to what western feminists may suggest about the hijab being an instrument of oppression, these cases demonstrate that they are symbols of unity and fashion accessories- and more. They are visual cues - symbols of shared ideologies. Colors are linked to ideas and causes - such as pink-girls’ women’s health at the breast cancer event. These women here wear silver hijabs - it is a cool, sleek color, cutting edge, makes me think of high-tech, like robots. Their silver hijabs are lovey as well as tools of solidarity. (Excerpt from field notes, December 10, 2010)

Men and women filled the auditorium, separated by an opaque ceiling-to-floor partition. Men sat on the left side and women on the right. I peaked around the partition and saw row after row of men in white *thobes*, with red and white *shemaghs* on their heads. The voice came again: “We apologize for our technical difficulty.” The image faded and the woman at the podium welcomed the crowd.

This was one of the few times that I saw women and men interacting in an event. Despite the partition, there was a sense of togetherness. Men and women were not

physically next to one another, nor could they see the other sex, but they were there together in the same space, at the same event. As the event progressed and laughter and applause came equally from the men and women, I got the sense that they were united in the BSA's mission, as well. The conditions in the auditorium that night reminded me of being online. It offered the experience of feeling like you are together at the same time, in the same place, perhaps with a friend, colleague or even a stranger, even though you cannot see the person in the flesh. They are present at the same time and in a common location. They share the same sensory intake, though they are not with each other in the sense of a physical space. Saudis are accustomed to the concept of simultaneously experiencing physical distance and cognitive connection because of the measures the society has taken for decades to preserve sexual segregation in public spaces, such as mosques and universities, where women congregate in a separate room and watch the Imam on video or listen via speakers. The same practice is prevalent in mixed-gender schools, where female students watch male professors on video screens. This has been the practice for generations that predated the emergence of the Internet. One might argue that people who grew up with this type of physical isolation built into their social experience develop the skills to function exceptionally well in online environments.

In many ways, women's physical isolation is a normalized feature of Saudi society. Members of society have personal feelings about the practices. Some do not agree with it or enjoy it, but all are nonetheless shaped by it. Being physically apart from other members of a group with which one is engaging in a collaborative social activity, as well as relying on technology to bridge the distance, is not a new concept to the students,

nor is it new to the majority of women who know what it's like to "be there without being there," as a colleague explained it to me.

When it comes to adapting to and navigating within the online world, Internet users with such experience may even have an adaptive advantage. I mention this adaptive advantage here only briefly and in a somewhat speculative framework, but I intend to pursue research in the future that explores the relationship between technology use for sexual segregation, and the potential adaptive advantage for people who are conditioned over long periods of time to interact with and learn via a screen, rather than an in vivo teacher.

Bloodlines and Online Connections

The first speaker at the showcase was the father of an al-Noor alumna who had been a leader of the BSA when she studied at the university. They are part of the royal family and share the same bloodline as al-Noor's foundress. The university is a special part of their family bond and their individual lives. His daughter asked him to speak that night, and although he admitted that he did not like public speaking, he confessed that he could not say no to her: "I blame my daughter for making me give this speech."

Queen Myriam was his grandmother and he became teary-eyed when he spoke about her. He took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his eyes. "This makes me very emotional," he said, wiping away tears. To lighten the mood, he said something about a Beatles song and asked how many people in the audience were old enough to remember or even know the Beatles. This made the audience laugh. He spoke a bit more

about his grandmother's vision and the pride he felt in every al-Noor student, and said that his grandmother was a great woman and a "great friend" to women in Saudi Arabia. Then he proceeded to address the local unemployment problem: "It's not the hardware; it's the software that is the problem." He explained that plenty of Saudis are capable of getting the jobs done—"good people, smart people, brilliant people, capable men and women"—and suggested that technology is the promise of the future for local and global business. Then he told a story about a text message with his son that became what he called a "significant text moment." The father sent a text to his son after a couple weeks at his new job asking how things were going: "*Interesting? Enjoyable?*" His son replied, "*Yes, but very long hours.*" The father said he remembered laughing out loud and then sent the following text: "*Welcome to the real business world.*" He told the crowd that this had been a significant learning moment for both him and his son, and it had happened via text. He held an iPhone in his hand in one part of the world, and his son held his iPhone in his hand in another part of the world.

The interaction, which was enabled by a technological device, constituted what the father called a "significant" moment between them. In years past, this father might have told a story about talking face-to-face with this son. Later, the story might have had the exchange happening over the landline telephone, or on a computer screen. The way it happened now, by text on an iPhone, is an example of the ubiquity of smart phones and also the emergence of texting as a legitimate mode of communication. His final comments, however, were about his daughter. "Regrettably," he said he did not have enough of these moments with his daughter. They had beautiful father /daughter

moments, he explained, “qualitatively but certainly not quantitatively, because the opportunities for women here are just not enough.”

The next speaker was a young businesswoman. Dana¹⁷ was introduced as the founder of Yummy Tummy, “the first cupcake shop in Saudi Arabia.” She expressed her gratitude for the introduction, and made a point to add that she was also a proud former al-Noor student and a “lifelong BSA member.” Dana is a member of the royal family, but she emphasized that she felt she would never have earned the success she did without al-Noor as a strong source of support and inspiration. She stood on the stage elegantly and paced casually as she spoke in a relaxed and easy way, explaining to the crowd that her idea had come out of a project she did for a marketing class at the university. She drew it up on paper and presented it for a grade.

After getting strong support from peers about her product design and business plan, she started a Facebook page as a way to test her idea. That Facebook page became her business platform and eventually led to her owning and operating a brick- and-mortar cupcake café. She said she had no idea how powerful her presence on Facebook would be. She thought it was “just a trend,” but it became her “business platform.” She marketed strictly on Facebook and smiled broadly as she announced, “On February 13, 2010, Yummy Tummy opened as the first woman-owned bakery in Riyadh.” The following day was Valentine’s Day, and orders flooded in. She gave credit to the Like feature on Facebook for helping her predict the most popular cupcakes flavors and colors and getting to know her customers. “This Like button is a very useful tool.” Contrary to

¹⁷ This woman’s name is Dana, yet she is not the current al-Noor student mentioned elsewhere in this dissertation.

the criticism that Facebook is a platform that hides one's identity, Dana said, "Everything at Yummy Tummy reflects me, from my flavors to my Facebook page."

The next speaker, Basma, was also a young woman who started an online business. She is not Saudi, nor was she a former al-Noor student, but she attended all her school years in Saudi Arabia, including university in Jeddah. When she was very young, her family relocated from Bangalore, India, for her father's work. Saudi Arabia is her home, and she is invested in its future. She named her business BethechangeKSA.com, and credits Gandhi's nonviolent means of conflict resolution as her inspiration. Her praise of Gandhi echoed what I had heard from several other students who expressed their love of him as the model of a peaceful human being and non-violent political leader. The Facebook page that served Basma as her first business platform was called "Be the Change." Her Twitter account is #bethechange. She designs and sells t-shirts, and her display of Arab-language tees on the big screen brought applause. A man asked if she offered shirts for men, and where he could purchase one. She replied, "Right now they are clothes for women only, and we are located in cyberspace, no store." She thanked him for giving her the idea, though, and told him to "stay tuned"—then went on to position herself as designer, marketing executive, and saleswomen, pointing out with both humor and a hint of political dissent that if women in Saudi Arabia want to buy clothes from another woman they have to go online because women cannot work in the store in the kingdom. The salesmen at the malls are men, and she said she was "sick of buying my clothes from guys."

The last speaker of the evening was the first female member of the Chamber of Commerce. She was also a member of the royal family and had graduated from al-Noor.

She spoke to the students plainly and directly, telling them that they must do three things to be a successful businesswoman in Saudi Arabia, or anywhere: 1) “learn to lobby” 2) “learn Islam,” and 3) “study the Arabic language.” She did not speak long—instead, she said she wanted to hear from the audience, so she opened up the floor for questions. The first question was, “Who is your role model?” She responded that she has two role models, “My father and Khadija,” the Prophet’s first wife, who was a businesswoman. She said if you know Islam properly, “nothing will stand in your way.” This is where her concept of lobbying came in: “Lobbying is very important; it basically means informing everyone.” Her final message was, “Study the Arabic language with fervor. The Arabic language is so important.” She said she had experienced more times than she could remember when she wanted to “say it in Arabic, but the words do not come,” And urged students to “know your mother tongue.” This advice resonated especially deeply with the Saudi students and those for whom Arabic is their first language.

While the speakers all spoke about the business culture in Saudi Arabia, the common theme that reached non-Saudi students—even those whose first language was not Arabic—was that the Internet is a place where business opportunities flourish. Nationality, language, and class do not disappear online, but resourceful and skilled Internet users, such as many young women at al-Noor and elsewhere around the world, are seeking and finding ways to get around these impediments to communication and success. This is not to suggest that access to the Internet is a panacea for exclusion based on race, class, or gender. These belong to a broader issue that cannot be justly addressed in this case study. My argument is that al-Noor is a point of access for young women,

where they are cultivating the skills and connections they need to transcend barriers that block them from public, economic, and political participation in the offline world.

ICTs at Work: Likes and Links

Aya put up the following post on Facebook, and within seconds it received multiple “Likes.” Several friends also asked permission to repost it as their own status. It caught my attention because of the creative way that Aya expressed her relationship with her brother:

Love+ Care = Mother ♥♥
Love + Fear = Father ♥♥
Love + Help = Sister ♥♥
Love+ Fight = Brother ♥♥
Love + Life = Wife / Husband ♥ ... ♥
...Love + Care + Fear + Help + Fight + Life = Friend ♥♥♥

In my face-to-face- interviews, participants and I often discussed family relations. The role of the brother is particularly complex and sensitive, even at times volatile. Brothers and sisters are interdependent. Suad Joseph ([1994] 2009) has introduced the brother/sister relationship in Arab culture to scholarly discussion through the reproduction of patriarchy through her work. Looking at the daily life and politics of family ties in Lebanon, Joseph points out that brothers and sisters share a deep connectivity that is shaped by both love and power. Her work is enlightening, and many of the intimacies she addresses are shared between brothers and sisters across cultures and societies. How family ties reproduce patriarchy and male-dominated social structures in Lebanon, however, cannot be generalized to Saudi Arabia simply because

both countries have Muslim populations. Nevertheless, Joseph's work deserves mention in relation to my observations of brother-sister relations.

In Saudi Arabia and also in other Arab and non-Arab societies, older and younger brothers often function as their sister's designated driver and chaperone. The brother might therefore see himself as the keeper of her honor, protecting her from situations that will harm her or the family's reputation (Joseph, 2009). But most of the conversations I heard about brothers turned into rants: brothers who sleep late, causing the students to get to school late, or brothers who chastise them for their choice of music. Most of the stories, however, just recounted the stereotypical sense of being controlled by their brothers, who are men and essentially the agents of their fathers. Having heard few positive comments in person, I was surprised to see how many students are friends with their brothers on Facebook. A few even have a picture of their brother as their profile picture. However, I never heard anything to suggest this was required. Brothers often appear in the "family" section on students' profile pages. One student told me over coffee that her brother was "a controlling jerk," but later that day on Facebook, the following exchange took place:

R: my brother and i baaarely text each other. today i got an unexpected message from him saying: W d y d & for some reason i directly knew he meant "what did you do" ..dont even ask how i knew how to brake that code, cz i dont know yet
!!!!

H: telepathy

R: most probably..bs its freakingly wierd !!

H: that it is my frend

Though she openly complained about feeling oppressed by her brother, she also expressed a deeply intuitive connection with him. The fact that she can figure out what

his unexpected text acronym meant thrills her. The moment was significant enough for her to share with her friends. Without trying to generalize from this one post, we can say that she and her brother share a bond that transcends physical and linguistic barriers and facilitates clear communication in this instance. Perhaps her post was motivated by pride that she shares a close bond to him after all, or because of her guilt for calling him a “controlling jerk.” In any case, she struggled to make sense of her relationship with her brother, who could be both controlling and caring.

I want to point out on a methodological note, that my understanding of her relationship with her brother would have been skewed and overly simplistic had I not observed this online interaction. Based only on what she told me about her relationship with brother during our face-to-face conversations, I would have had a very different picture. Moments like this, when I observe something as an online ethnographer that complicates or contradicts my findings from face-to-face communication, are rewarding, because they illustrate that seamless connection between the online and offline worlds that comprise everyday life. Facebook friendships are usually carefully crafted and are often extensions of the relationships students that have in the offline world, rather than random associations. I noticed this when I began to accept friend requests from the students and they sent me personal thank you notes for “joining their list” or “accepting” them. It was a very businesslike interaction.

Designer Dreams

The social actor perceives her situation and (re)acts to the audience at hand as a way of belonging. Belonging begets security. It also puts one in a position to give and receive, to exchange, trust, favors, and gifts. To become a member of a group, one must display traits that reflect the group's values and preform acts of belonging. She embodies the character that she believes reflects the values of the group or audience, and plays the part to become part of the group. In the case of al-Noor students, we can push this Goffmanesque metaphor to include set-specific wardrobe, voice, make-up, and gestures. In the case of women in Saudi Arabia, including the students, they *wear* the part. The abayas that students wear on campus, if they choose to wear one at all, range from haute couture to pop culture. One day I saw a student pass by my office window in a slim-fitting black abaya—and only after she had passed did I notice the image on the back of a wide-open mouth with a thick, unfurled tongue made of sparkling red and white rhinestones. It was the symbol of the rock band, the Rolling Stones¹⁸. I ran from my office to catch her and ask her about it. “Hey!” I yelled, “Do you like the Rolling Stones?” She turned and looked at me as though she was scared or did not understand my question, so I asked again in Arabic. She looked embarrassed, said, “I guess,” and walked away. I was confused and recorded in my notes that evening that I wondered if she even knew the image referenced the band. I thought perhaps she just liked it and bought it without knowing what it meant. I was wrong.

Later that week, Deema showed up in my public-speaking class and I got to know her over semester. She is a huge fan of rock music, like many of the students. In fact, for her first classroom assignment, she gave a three-minute speech on heavy metal music, arguing that the chords were musically complex and the lyrics were deeply poetic. After the semester was over, I asked if I could interview her for my research. We sat in the café over coffee and she told me that she remembered that day I called to her in the hallway. She acted the way she did because she did not know me and thought I was “just a teacher,” meaning that I might not approve of her music choices. After she got to know me, she shared her preferences openly and allowed me to snap a photo of her Rolling Stones abaya. However, she asked that I make sure it just showed only her back, not her face. She also told me that she only wore that abaya on campus—never at home or in public. She threw an all-black abaya over her Rolling Stones’ tongue when she left for the day and switched clothes in the car or when she got home.

Another student, Amira, routinely wore a denim abaya on campus. It was inspired by the artwork of Thomas Hardy, an American tattoo artist turned fashion designer, and had green sleeves and a small, classic, tattoo-esque heart embossed on the left breast. On the back was a larger image of a red heart, along with a skull and crossbones, and a golden scroll unfurling across it, which read “Love Kills Slowly,” one of Hardy’s signature images.

When I approached Amira one day and complimented her on her abaya, I learned that she made it herself. I asked if she was aware of the so-called imposter abaya designer controversy, which had sparked lively debate in one of my classes about on-line abaya shops and business ethics. My students and I had just read and discussed an article

that recently appeared in a local newspaper about self-taught abaya designers making knock-offs of expensive designer abayas and selling them on-line at affordable prices. It was intended to be our oral reading material for that day, but it sparked such vibrant conversation that I decided to seize the moment and have a class debate. Opinion among my students fell decidedly in favor of the original designers, which was coincidentally the bent of the article. This made me wonder if they were able to be critical of sources they thought of as authoritative, so we spent some time discussing critical-thinking strategies. Nevertheless, for them, the issue was not so much about copyright and profit. They thought the so-called knockoff artists were selling themselves short, and felt that the new designers should just come up with their own ideas, which might be even better. “They have their own minds,” one student commented, while another remarked, “It is theft.” Comments admonishing the knockoff artists and defending the famous designers were repeated and reiterated until consensus grew like a snowball and there was unanimous agreement on the issue.

That is when I introduced the debate exercise. When I randomly split the class in half and arbitrarily assigned one group to argue for the rights of knock-off designers, while the other half defended the rights of the original designers, the students were not happy. They said their minds were already made up that it was wrong, so they could not do the exercise. The team that had to argue a point of view they did not believe in vehemently resisted the idea, but they eventually understood it as an exercise in perspective to take and articulate another’s other point of view. Hesitantly, they agreed to cooperate. To reopen our minds, which had been frozen on the issue, and get their critical thinking skills moving again, I asked them if they saw any parallels between

watching pirated videos online and buying knock-off abayas. They immediately said they watched pirated movies because they had no other choice: Movie theatres are illegal in Saudi Arabia. They would be happy to pay for movies if they were legal in the kingdom, and sometimes drove to Bahrain to watch movies there because the big-screen experience was so much better than watching it on a laptop. But they were unable to drive to Bahrain every day, and they loved to watch movies, which they did almost every day. Finally, they thought pirated movie-watching was okay because Hollywood had enough money and wouldn't be hurt by a little piracy here and there. This was not the first time that issues about copyrights and business came up in class, on campus in general, or in my personal experience.

One afternoon, Manal, a student in my COMM class, came to my office and gave me a flash drive I wasn't expecting. It contained a full-length, pre-released copy of the film, , about Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg. I had mentioned in a previous class that I was disappointed because I wanted to see it and would have to wait quite a while, since I wasn't scheduled to be back in the US for months. As I accepted the flash drive, I was overcome by a sense of reservation. I knew copyright laws were being broken, and it felt illegal for me to accept the film, not to mention watching it on my computer, which I knew to be monitored. I imagined being questioned by US authorities upon re-entry, "Did you watch a pirated version of the *Social Network*?" What would I say? Could I be punished for breaking US laws when I was in Saudi Arabia? I started to wonder where the film had even come from, and asked Manal how she got it. She simply replied, "From the Internet." I asked her if she had watched it already and if the quality was okay. The quality was good, she told me, and yes, she had watched it with her father. She told

me that some of her friends had “movie businesses.” They download movies, copy them, and sell them. I asked her if she liked the movie, and she said she loved it and it motivated her to be an entrepreneur. The story of betrayal among friends bothered her, but her take-away message was positive. She told me she wanted to invent something as useful as the Internet one day, and was inspired to contribute her skills and imagination to the betterment of the world. A very dedicated student, she was a computer science major who wanted to go to Johns Hopkins Medical School one day, perhaps to pursue biology and robotics.

I accepted the flash drive and watched the film. Indeed, the quality was perfect, and I enjoyed a private movie theatre experience alone in my room on my 17-inch MacBook that evening.

As to the debate about “imposter abaya designers,” students used many of the same ideas to defend the knock-off artists. Both teams came up with sound arguments to defend their stances. The pro-knock-off team found their footing in the fact that not everyone has access to the education and training needed to become a successful designer. Most people cannot afford to go away and get formal training in fashion design in Italy, the US, or France. They did not know of any fashion merchandising programs in local universities. In addition, they argued that there might be a gifted young Saudi designer whose father would not let her go to school to learn how to be a designer, or maybe her husband would not let her work, but she could learn design principles from copying major designers and eventually develop her own style. What some might see as cheating or illicit activity was a necessary step to eventual legitimate production, due to the constraints a young Saudi designer might face. Students took the scenario even

further and said that the young Saudi designer could create her own business. She could sell her goods online, living her dream and sharing her talent without upsetting her family. I think I disappointed the students, however, by calling the debate a draw. They wanted a winner and a loser, but I said both sides had made their points so well that they both deserved to win. The debate was a success.

Amira was not aware of our classroom debate and she told me she was unaware of any so-called imposter abaya designers. Though it was a growing public issue that closely echoed her personal experiences, she did not make a connection. She told me she simply makes her own designs and sells them to friends, at local markets, and online. Her online clients are located throughout the Arab Gulf, and she ships the ones she or her driver cannot deliver. She did not acknowledge any parallels between herself and the knock-off designers, though her denim abaya heavily reflected Thomas Hardy's designs and certain elements were identical.

Amira described herself as a business major, artist, and self-taught fashion designer. She is also member of the BSA, and told me that her membership in it helps her business grow. She suggested that the "smart girls" belong to the BSA and said the club is a forum for her to share ideas and get advice about how to turn her talent and passion into a profession and livelihood. Her sense was that the BSA was an important step toward a future career.

Amira has talent, as a designer, a seamstress, and a saleswoman. Her work is good. I know, because I bought one of her "original" designs at a bazaar held on campus. I got it for a great price and was excited to put it on right away. Immediately, I was advised, or rather cautioned, that I could wear it on campus and at friends' homes, but I

should not wear it in public as it was very “unconventional.” The young women who were my fashion advisors in that moment said that the “trendy” abaya might be confusing to people on the streets or in restaurants, who would say, “What is that? Is it an abaya?” Absent of humor, they added with certainty that “the Mutawa will not like it.”

I wore my new abaya to class the day after I bought it. When I walked into the classroom at 8:00 a.m., I actually received applause from the students who were already there. The sound of clapping and laughing was a shock from the way I usually started my day, which was quite quietly, and the applause and conversation that followed sparked a burst of energy that we all harnessed and turned into an actively engaged lesson. Almost every student commented on my abaya. It was not unusual to see colorful, trendy abayas on campus. In fact, most students wore them. The novelty, I think, was that I was wearing one. I’d worn a black abaya every other day. I mixed it up with colorful scarves and some had stylish features like flared sleeves and embroidering, but all of them were black. In my mock-salesperson voice, I told the class that my abaya was an Amira original and that they, too, could own one at a reasonable price. I wrote Amira’s name and email address on the white board for them if they were interested. Several immediately took out their phones and entered her contact information. A few just snapped a picture of the whiteboard rather than typing in the information. One student asked if she could take a picture of my abaya, and I stood still while she captured the picture with her smartphone. Another asked me to turn around so she could get a picture of the back, too, because the back was the really cool part.

Conclusion

In spite of unfortunate pedagogical failures in the classrooms of al-Noor, a lot of learning takes place on its campus. Much of this learning occurs through students' personal adaptations to the circumstances. They either break the boundaries, as is the case with some members of the Psychology Club, or they find ways to flourish within them as do the BSA members who grow successful businesses online, carefully appraising social and cultural possibilities and seeking out spaces to explore them. Students' behavior on the university campus, such as securing an office space and on the Internet, such as operating their own business, open up spaces for the emergence of new social and cultural roles for the women in Saudi Arabia that are visible to their peers and members of local and global society beyond the university walls. Individual students make this happen. To return to the wise words and hopeful vision of Queen Myriam, change is happening "one girl at a time." However, affiliation with a prestigious university endows these students with the status and sense of security they need in order to begin to imagine boundary transgressions. Through their everyday acts as students on campus and on the Internet, students are re-imagining space and time in relation to their bodies and selves. They realize new productive potential and develop perceptions of self that extend newly learned beliefs, creative visions, and technology skills beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries of the university campus—and connect, through them, to online friends, families, and people in networked communities around the world whom they might never meet face-to-face. They might, however, end up wearing one of their t-shirt or abaya designs, or eating one of their cupcakes.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

New Knowledge about Networked Lives

This dissertation contributes to interdisciplinary research, particularly in anthropology and education. It brings together the arts, literacies and emerging technologies, spatial and border theories and concepts of identity, gender, power, and interculturality. By opening ethnographic windows on the lives of young women at al-Noor University, I have presented arguments and examples that engage current scholarly debates about the nature and trajectory of contemporary educational transformation. These women use ICT and SNS ubiquitously, yet wisely and precisely, to access the Internet and create new selves and spaces for teaching, learning and networking.

As lurkers, players, learners, activists, and information architects, they create lives of agency and meaning that are determined by their personal desires and are articulated through their ICT and SNS use, which extends their ability to share ideas and achieve goals. Through the use of computers, mobile phones, and online social networking sites, they systematically decentralize traditional educational practices and thoughtfully express their social, political, and moral selves on campus and on the Internet. Moreover, they complicate fixed notions of community, diversity, competition, and rule-breaking. While I have privileged their personal stories, I speak here to the larger question of how people *really* use technology, as opposed to how they are

supposed to use it. As part of her research on mobile phones and healthcare in India, Indira Ganesh (2010) asks, “Do farmers surf for pornography when they are supposed to be comparing crop prices?” Similarly, I have shown instances of what students are doing on the Internet when they are supposed to be “learning” or “working.” As members of the elite, educated class of women in Saudi Arabia, they enjoy seemingly unbridled access to the Internet “for school” or educational purposes—and, once online, they play with their identities, from assuming the identity of a troll in World of Warcraft to selecting a profile picture of a kitten or a British rock band on Facebook¹⁹. They also dislocate ideas of place and time, moving seamlessly between offline and online conditions, communicating, learning, and adapting in multiple worlds. Thus, they are transforming educational practice in Dewey’s sense of education, that “Education is life itself.” Through their cyberactivities, they enact new forms of transgressive and progressive education, mainly self-education and peer-to-peer education (P2P) that violate previous boundaries and establish supple norms of what it means to be an educated woman in the world today. One might argue that all she needs is an Internet connection. As Dr. Khoury, a professor at al-Noor, wrote in a letter to her students, “I myself am the kind of person who can survive on a secluded mountain-top with nothing but the internet.” (The lowercased i in Internet is hers.) The thing about the Internet is that it requires a body in order to be engaged, which can take the form of a phone or tablet or computer.

¹⁹ A is a troll on WoW. Fatima’s posted many profile pictures of kittens. Noor posted Coldplay images as her FB profile picture.

The fear of being without one's phone, or "nomophobia"²⁰ is something I witnessed as having an impact on students' performance in the classroom, and many students struggled to manage the psychological and physical effects of what they referred to as "addiction" to technology, as discussed in Chapter 6. The smartphone has not only been adopted at al-Noor—it has, among the students there, been brought into the family, and loved, listened to, dressed up, coddled like a child, trusted, adored, and kissed. There are few spaces in the students' lives that have not been penetrated by smartphones and other Internet-accessing devices, also known as Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). I grabbed my notebook and scribbled feverishly after I heard one student say, "My iPhone is my boyfriend." Her statement turned out not to be uncommon. Students professed their affection for their phones openly and often: "I love my phone." and "I love my BB." BB is an abbreviation for Blackberry and is sometimes pronounced intentionally like "baby." Use of smartphones is ubiquitous, and the affection that these students openly displayed for them is indicative of their importance. The following excerpt from my field notes illustrates students' sense of "enchantment" (McCarthy, Wright, Wallace, Dearden, 2006) with their mobile devices. Phones provide moments of fun among friends. They also serve educational purposes: teaching and learning in terms of students' sense of self-awareness and their academic work.

One might suggest, with a touch of humor to ease the unsettling implications, that an iPhone could be a virtual university unto itself, with perhaps less tuition and lower book fees. No entrance exam is needed and no diploma is given; however, much would

²⁰ Nomophobia or fear of "no mobile phone" is a term I coined in reference to a phenomenon I observed among al-Noor students; I discuss it in other scholarly work I am doing that draws from my dissertation data.

be lost if the brick-and-mortar institutions disappeared. Therefore, this dissertation should not be misinterpreted as advocating a shift from offline to online learning. Rather, I hope to have highlighted the bridging and blending practices that students create to connect the online and offline worlds in which they coexist.

Routine is part of everyday life for students on campus and online. Disruption also exists in both spaces, and creativity often emerges at those unexpected moments. Students at al-Noor have both routine and disruption in abundance as they skip between the online and offline worlds. I have explained how student-led clubs extend beyond the confines of the campus to create conditions and relationships that nurture learner agency. I have also shown how students use leisure space on campus to interact with ICTs, such as mobile phones and laptops, which enable Internet access and give students opportunities to teach and learn in ways that unplugged classrooms or technophobe teachers cannot. There is a sense of predictability in routine that we find safe and comforting; thumb-scanning or jumping the turnstile every morning might be one example. The majority of students engage in this familiar ritual as a way to confirm that they are where they are supposed to be, in a space where they belong. Others see it as a hurdle and circumvent it. During the course of my fieldwork, I observed instances of the same thing over and over again, but there was always at least a glimmer of variation that caught my eye and led me to the diversity beneath the facade of similarity, the whisper of dissent beneath the discourse of conformity. I sat next to students and looked at screens on phones, screens on laptops, screens on iPads, and I came to understand these screens as windows into multiple worlds, not worlds that the students stumbled into, but worlds they designed and shaped through skill and desire.

Cybercultured Bodies and (Dis)Connected Classrooms

Classes begin at 8:00 a.m. every day. Bodies with laptops cradled to chests gather in groups and move down hallways, students splintering off as they pass classrooms. The students walk briskly, often carrying a phone (or two) in one hand and lattes or chocolate hazelnut frappuccino in the other. Before class, the hallways buzz like beehives, but chatter stops as students slip into classrooms. Some linger at the threshold, wrapping up conversations, embracing, or engaged in some other activity, such as gossip. Some are connected by earbuds, listening to a song, and can't bring themselves to disconnect. There is rarely a sense of urgency to get to class on time. In fact, I appreciated it when they'd made it as far as the classroom door and usually told them to finish up and join class when they were ready. It usually worked: They took a few minutes before joining the class and entered the room with their earbuds out and their phones in their hands, rather than pressed against their ears.

This happened often enough that I remained mindful of my students' emotional and physical attachment to their technological devices and the effect it had on their ability to concentrate or "be present." They were clearly under stress and I did not take for granted the effort it took them to get to campus and be in class on time. The more I learned about their lives and the kind of learning they sought, the more I appreciated the fact that they even showed up for classes. Many of them, I knew, had budding entrepreneurial careers waiting for them on their laptops, and they could certainly conceive of sitting in a lecture for an hour as an interference that kept them from getting their business done. I told them on the first day of class that I considered them to be co-

facilitators of a shared learning experience, and asked them to suspend preconceived ideas of student-teacher power relations in our classroom. While I ran the show, so to speak, we were all participants. I also told them that I welcomed ICTs and asked them to include their laptops and phones as participants, as well. The technological devices we all carried on our bodies and in our bags could be helpful to us. Together, we were a networked learning community. We were a group of women sitting in a classroom, but we were also often connected online. Our minds and bodies, voices, images, and ideas converged in myriad ways through ICTs.

Some of the students in my classes put their smartphones on the lectern during their speeches, so they could record themselves. I tend to be a talker, and when I get going in a lecture, I can lose track of time, so I used my iPhone as a timer in every class. I set it to chime 10 minutes before the end of class as a signal to wrap up and leave time for questions—and I did not silence the alarm; I let the students hear it. The first time it went off, I explained why I did it, and from then on, we were all in it together: my iPhone was the boss. It told us to wrap it up, and we obeyed.

I hoped my own use of ICTs would interest students and encourage them to bring their devices into our classroom as participants. I allowed phones on desks during class, knowing that students took notes on them and used dictionary features, but I also knew that some were texting with friends. I tested the waters and took my chances—and I vividly recall an image I saw in my classroom one day after assigning a group project in one of my classes that got me thinking about the way our relationships with our phones literally shape our bodies. On average, I had somewhat over 20 students per class, and we were working on persuasive-essay writing skills. They broke into groups of four or

five and set to work on the project I assigned: choosing a social issue and writing a mission statement for an imaginary non-governmental organization (NGO) working to address that issue. The NGO could be based anywhere in the world and deal with any social issue anywhere in the world that the group members agreed upon. I left the field wide open and told them they could go online to get information.

A few groups put their desks in circles. Some sat on the floor in clusters. Most brought out a laptop or two and crowded around it. One group stood out, though. Their desks were in a tight circle. Each student was hunched over her iPhone on her desktop. Their faces were practically touching the tiny screen and their backs were bent over like bridges. Members of the group were some of my most dedicated students, and I assumed they were working, but thought I'd better make sure. I walked over and commented on how uncomfortable they looked. In fact, they were online, collecting data for an NGO meant to work with street children in Cairo. They had divided tasks and set out to find their assigned bit of information online. Each student showed me the site she had found and they excitedly explained their idea.

Screens on phones are smaller than they are on laptops, so we need to bring our faces closer to them to read the text. I realized that these students had placed their phones on their desks like books and were leaning over to read them. To see the words, their faces were practically on top of the screen, on top of the desk. Every one of them did this and every one of their bodies looked contorted. I had never seen this phenomenon before. By then, I had been observing student-phone interaction for months students usually held their phones in their hands or tucked it under their hijab against their ear. This distance was unusual. When I suggested that these students pick up their phones

and bring them to their faces so they could read them better, they giggled with embarrassment. I asked what was so funny and they said they forgot they were allowed to use their phones in class. I noted that their friends were all using laptops and they said, “Laptops are okay sometimes, but not phones.”

A member of the group told us how another professor had taken her phone away from her in class and she explained what a traumatic experience it was. She told the professor she was using the calculator on it, but the professor did not care. She had a no-phone policy, period. The student told me she cried through the entire lesson and could not pay attention at all. As she retold the story, her friends expressed sympathy, patting her on her back and hand. I told them to be sure they know the rules before they take out their devices. While I allowed it and I knew some other teachers did, too, it was every teacher’s right to set the rules in her classroom. As I walked away, they all had their phones in front of their faces, doing their research.

I feel that encouraging ICT use in my classroom worked most of the time, but, as this anecdote shows, students are still unsure about how to negotiate boundaries in the classroom, especially how and when ICTs are welcome. There were times when I knew that students were shopping rather than following the lesson. However, long before ICTs came on the scene, students found ways to be physically present and mentally elsewhere during class. Before laptops and smart phones and iPads, students daydreamed on the screens in their minds.

The range of connective and collaborative experiences that young people around the world have in relation to their membership in specific learning communities seems to reflect the presence of innovation within the community, as well as institutional attitudes

toward technology in the classroom. There is a sense at al-Noor that technology is a companion to progress, and that change is good and natural, but that does not mean it is easy for faculty to accept. Hervé Varenne poses an unsettling question:

What if teaching and learning are not specialized activities? What if they are ubiquitous processes regularly activated when conditions require them? Dewey intuited this, but we must investigate a more radical set of opportunities. Could schools simulate the conditions under which newcomers realize that they must learn a skill and find the people who will help them? Perhaps by specifying curricula, pedagogies and the experts one must go through to be certified as knowing something, schools have been unwittingly limiting educational activities and the rewards they produce. Perhaps we should try to imagine schools where teachers really are facilitators of learning, even in areas about which they know little. Like a truly intelligent Google or Wikipedia, teachers could “just” lead students to resources while making sure they are applying themselves.²¹

Al-Noor students are using their student status to connect with each other and teach each other. They are using their bodies to command space and time on campus and online, as cyberbodies. We have seen in this dissertation how they are using technological innovations such as smartphones, computers, and iPads to get out and about in the offline and online world they inhabit. With the help of the ICTs that are their machine companions, they are pushing barriers and claiming their right to be participants in social, economic, and political spheres of life. The university’s role in this process is increasingly complex and uncertain, just as the lines between the online and offline realms are blurred. In the 1960s, Thrall and Starr wrote:

The college campus is a place that has traditionally provided leisure and luxury for the contemplation of new ideas...and sanctuary from the consequences of acting on these new notions. It provides an ideal environment for the incubation and the preliminary trying out of new ideas and social behavior and makes it more possible, in a microscopic way, for students to bring their actual behavior into much closer conformity with their ideal values than would be true in the outside world. (p. 62).

One may argue that Thrall and Starr's description is not far off the mark, if the term "college campus" were to be replaced with the word "Internet." The statement would be just as true or false, depending on your ideological orientation in terms of ICTs' place in human evolution as well as educational transformation. A fixed answer as to when, where, how, and why education happens may be forever elusive, but it is critical that we continue to pursue these questions, as anthropologists, educators, as lifelong learners, and as members of a global community.

In his provocative essay, "Technology's Lessons for Learning," Varenne playfully challenges the purpose and identity of university professors, as well as poking their egos, by proposing that they be recast as "facilitators." His point is intriguing, considering the predominance of learner agency and computer-mediated peer education that I observed on campus among the students.

Significance of Study for Advancing an Anthropology and Education

In this dissertation, I have sought to contribute to educational anthropology, feminist theory, and the ongoing anthropological examinations of the intersection of modernity, knowledge production, and globalization studies. Although anthropologists of education have highlighted the importance of studying education as it relates to class, race, and national development, anthropology of education has largely neglected the study of what is happening at the convergence of gender, higher education, and globalization, except perhaps in the context of gender roles and the division of labor in

modern capitalist societies. By bridging the fields of anthropology and education, this study presents an important challenge to monolithic and naturalized representations of globalization by focusing on local particularities and the effects of globalization in women's everyday lives. It also generates new information about international educational trends, the use of media and technology, and socio-political transformation in the Arab world. The ways that al-Noor students use ICT and SNS in everyday life might also reveal attitudes, particularly among this demographic of women, toward related liberal-modernist discourses, such as developmentalism, environmentalism, democratization, and universal human rights. Such net information has practical use and may be impactful in the policy realm.

I argue in this dissertation that the formative educational moments in students' everyday lives are directed predominantly by their desires and imagination. Ultimately, their agency makes them "poets of their own acts" (DeCerteau, 1984). I believe that an anthropology of education, informed by current data gathered through both offline and online research, will point scholars and international education practitioners toward contextualized nuances within the field, and illuminate shared values and experiences. This possibility gives me hope for the applicability and usefulness of anthropology and online ethnography in the digital age.

Based on my experiences during and since my dissertation fieldwork, I believe that online ethnography promises to be a tool that anthropologists of education might use to uncover such contemporary lived experience and the artifacts we use, learn from, and leave behind. Through extensive, habitual online interaction, the young women at al-Noor experimented with spatial constraints, pushed ideological limits, and tested political

ideations of what it means to belong, learn, and flourish. They did so through strategic noncompliance with university policies, relatively unfettered access to ICTs, and an innovative use of campus and online leisure space. Approaching globalization and diversity as expressions of converging multiplicity, rather than increasing difference, I discuss how students move seamlessly between parallel online and offline contexts, as well as within the pluralism that shapes the Internet. Since I am not a legal scholar, computer scientist, or network architect, I cannot make claims about a range of important issues related to Internet design and regulation. I can, however, attest to the reality that conditions and structures once generally accepted as ideal for human flourishing—including the family, school, and state—are under vigorous scrutiny in the digital age. The fixed and exclusionary boundaries of traditional social and political organizations are loosening and opening up in cyberspace, because the Internet enables individuals to explore, join, and create groups previously unimagined. One's acceptance, participation, and inclusion in such groups are negotiated in schools, whereas they might be argued as a natural phenomenon in families, an idea I would also contest. Rather, I suggest that social interaction is negotiated, whether the ties that bind are made of blood that runs through one's body or an Ethernet or wi-fi connection.

Directions for Future Research

Young women at Al-Noor, and other previously marginalized or disenfranchised groups around the world, are developing new skills and identities as cyberselves, and they are at work and play online. The Internet is the fieldsite where an anthropologist

should look to find these groups and conduct research, with the aim of understanding the values and practices that unify individuals as members of various cybercultures.

Women, in particular, have challenged longstanding exclusion from state politics through the production of a vibrant body of online discourse. Social network sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube may be understood as curated public spaces and online discourse on these sites may therefore be approached as artifacts on display. Online discourse as an artifact embodies a mash-up of linguistic, visual, temporal, and cultural meanings. It may therefore be viewed as a product of interaction within larger historical and material culture frameworks.

If we situate a Facebook post or a tweet as an artifact that exists somewhere between object and performance, we can examine it on multiple levels. Different analytical approaches might help us make sense of the Internet's dynamic ecology as a locus of contemporary social life, where cultural imagination is at play and political expression happens. By crafting new lenses of inquiry and challenging classic notions of “being there” and “doing fieldwork,” this study repositions ethnographic research in the digital age.

Through the lens of citizen media, we can begin to understand students' online activity as online political expression and narratives of emancipation. Social networking sites, microblogs, and video-sharing may be understood as curated public spaces, so that students' posts, tweets, and videos therein are artifacts on display.

As I stated earlier, Saudi Arabia has the highest penetration of active Twitter users in the world, accounting for 4.1 percent of global use in 2013. Twitter may therefore be

understood as a veritable gallery of commentary on contemporary Saudi social, cultural, and political issues. This is a rich and promising area for future research.

Yalla Yalla!

Yalla yalla! is an Arabic phrase meaning, “Come on, let’s get going” or “Hurry up; Let’s go!” It is an apt phrase to use here, as women in Saudi Arabia are indeed on the move in new directions. Since I completed data collection for this dissertation, several cases have come to light that illustrate the intersection of students’ online activity and citizen media. Two case studies, in particular, are worth mentioning: the customary ban on women’s driving, and the lack of emergency preparedness on women’s university campuses.

In October 2013, a protest played out between online and offline contexts as women took to the road in defiance of the customary ban on women’s driving. Participants tweeted comments and videos of themselves behind the wheel, and several women were detained and arrested. These events drew international attention and support from human-rights organizations. However, few connections have been made between Twitter’s political significance and shifting legal and social contexts in Saudi Arabia. Future studies that make these connections, by analyzing bodies of tweets—from the day of that the first female members of the Shura Council were appointed in January 2013 to the October 26, 2013 women’s driving campaign and the follow-up protest that was set for November 31, 2013—might provide valuable insight into new forms of online public education. I have argued that tweets are expressions of cyberactivism, and can be

explored as such: Within a theoretical framework of human and political rights, they interrogate issues of mobility and sovereignty in the digital age.

In the second case, the Internet campaign, “Save My Life...Then My Modesty” went live after the death of Amna Bawazeer in 2014. Bawazeer suffered a heart attack and died on the campus of a women’s university in Riyadh when university officials allegedly barred male medics from entering the campus because some female students were not wearing hijabs and abayas. The model of online ethnography employed in data collection for this dissertation could be a promising methodology for following developments in the “Save My Life...Then My Modesty” campaign. Throughout this dissertation, I have proposed the merits of a mixed- methods approach that combines online and offline data collection. By problematizing classic anthropological notions of “being there” and “doing fieldwork,” this contribution exposes the educative value of women’s personal narratives and repositions ethnographic research in the digital age.

No definitive answer is currently at hand in terms of what this means for Saudi women in the future, but parallel examples of other novel expressions of community and diversity are plentiful. The Internet, law, and society are converging in Saudi Arabia, as they are elsewhere around the world. Uniquely in Saudi Arabia, however, this confluence of dynamic terrains is embodied in the group of female scholars, engineers, economists, and scientists who were recently appointed to the Consultative Council of Saudi Arabia, referred to colloquially as the Shura Council. As the only legal body in the kingdom that advises the king, the Shura Council has the power to draft and propose laws.

For the first time in Saudi Arabia’s history, this means that women are lawmakers. They have held law degrees in Saudi Arabia for decades and have been able to offer legal

counsel. Until 2013, however, they were not allowed to legally practice law. As this dissertation has shown, the underrepresentation of women in the Saudi public sphere is not an indication of lack of women's access to education or an absence of educated women. Rather, it indicates the presence of customary, legal, political, and other ideological barriers to women's participation. This dissertation has also shown that students' activity on the Internet is challenging these barriers.

However, it is not my intention here to suggest that the Internet is a panacea. It is a space and a tool and much more that remains to be understood. As such, the Internet has been useful in addressing some of the challenges facing Saudi Arabia's population of 29 million, specifically restrictions on women's physical mobility and the lack of freedom of expression and public assembly. When discussing social, political, and economic issues in Saudi Arabia, one should bear in mind the kingdom's demographics—especially the fact that the kingdom has a very young population, with 43% under the age of 15 and only 3% over the age of 65. This impacts education and the use of technology in the kingdom, as nearly half of the Saudi citizens are digital natives.

Also, we cannot conflate ICT use in Saudi Arabia with ICT use in rest of the Arab world, as Saudi Arabia has the highest Internet penetration of any Arab country, and its experiences are unique in certain ways. Compared to other countries in the Arab world, Saudi Arabia was late in adopting the Internet, introducing it after most of its neighbors were already online. However, the confluence of concerted financial investment, technological skill, and user enthusiasm has quickly set Saudi Arabia above its Arab neighbors as a leader in regional and global Internet activity. As I mentioned in Chapter 2 and elaborated upon in this chapter, Saudi Arabia has the highest users of Twitter per-

capita in the world, as of 2014, and the highest Internet penetration of any Arab country. We should also not forget that as of 2013, 51% of Saudis maintained a Twitter account. Anthropological research that explores Twitter use in Saudi Arabia as a form of public education and a novel iteration of online learning is necessary and is currently underrepresented in scholarly literature.

In 2011, the announcement was made that women would be allowed on the Shura Council, just as I was transitioning from campus-based data to Internet-based data collection. Protests by ultraconservative clerics followed in local newspapers, as well as online. From my fieldsite online, I read and watched as it all unfolded. Given Twitter's popularity in the kingdom, it is not surprising that critics expressed their dissent on social media platforms, nor that there was pushback from supporters. The celebrated and contested announcement of female lawmakers in Saudi Arabia was drowned out in the global media by its focus on the voices that rightfully highlighted the Internet as a tool for expressing collective discontent and organizing political revolutions in other countries. Saudi Arabia had its own less-dramatic revolution in 2011, when women were allowed into the previously male-dominated sphere of lawmaking.

I had left the kingdom by the end of January 2011, so I missed the local reaction, but I learned about the announcement from students' discussion online and have followed ongoing, online discourse about the appointment of the female council members and the importance of women's participation in law and legal culture in Saudi Arabia since that time; I have data in the form of Facebook and Twitter posts from a nearly three-year period.

Despite opposition from ultraconservatives, the female council members had robust public support and were sworn in at a confirmation ceremony on February 19, 2013. Women now comprise one-fifth of the 150-member council. Again, in light of the Internet's prominent role in Saudi citizens' everyday lives, it should not be surprising that the online world has a role to play in relation to this significant new development in the material world. It is *haram* (forbidden) for unrelated women and men to share public space. Thus, physical partitions will need to be erected in the council's chambers. In addition to partitioning physical space, the Internet offers another architectural option for female and male council members to work together in *halal*, or "lawful" conditions. The Internet enables real-time communication, collaboration, and idea-sharing, without physical contact, and has been used in educational and business contexts in Saudi Arabia for decades. Thus, we can expect it to be an option for the council as well. Evidence of interoffice Internet use is not yet available, but we do know that members of the council are active on Twitter.

Lest we be tempted to think that the Internet is a panacea, its Janus-faced nature was pointed out in an incident at the female council members' confirmation ceremony. As the newly appointed female council members entered the room, an ultraconservative male cleric sent a tweet referring to them as "prostitutes." There are rules for using mobile phones in most classrooms, but apparently not in the chambers of the Shura Council.

The incident supports theories of ubiquitous Internet penetration across multiple facets of Saudi life. It also suggests blurry barriers between private and public space,

specifically between the Shura Council's private chambers and the kingdom's most active social media platform.

Coverage of the cleric's sexist act quickly went viral, causing public outrage in the kingdom. The newspaper *Al Arabiya* reported it online, and within minutes it spread over international news sites. Human-rights organizations spoke out against the cleric's tweet, calling it gendered harassment, and suggested that referring to educated female public servants as prostitutes on Twitter might be the cyber equivalent of throwing stones at them. Whether the weapon of assault was a misogynist tweet or a stone, both acts constitute violence against women. However, the cleric's tweet provoked no reaction from the government, while Saudi citizen bloggers have, on the other hand, been harshly sanctioned and imprisoned by the Shura Council for insulting members of the Saudi government. The only punitive response in this case has been from Saudi citizens and the international public. This and other high-profile cases of sexist online speech raise questions of the limits of freedom of expression online. The Saudi government has not engaged the issue of online misogyny. A considerable response, however, has been seen in counter-tweets and citizen blogs shaming the cleric on the Internet.

Despite the drama that unfolded in the Twittersphere during the swearing-in ceremony, King Abdullah addressed the new members with respect and historical sagacity. "Your place in the Shura Council is not as those who have been honored, but as those who have been charged with a duty, as you represent part of society." The king did not flatter or patronize them because they are women. He appealed to them as educated persons and members of Saudi society, challenging them to contribute as equals on behalf of their constituents.

The current curriculum at Al-Noor does not include courses in law and politics, but when the university does start educating women in these fields, I would not be surprised to see an al-Noor graduate sit on the Shura Council. I heard students talk about the need for change on a daily basis. They are poised to seize opportunities when they open up, and I expect that we will see more and more women becoming leaders and transitioning into positions of power in Saudi Arabia as the barriers to women's economic and political participation in the offline world continue to fall. .

King Abdullah's message to the women on the Shura Council calls to mind the mission of Queen Myriam to educate women and involve them in crafting the vision of the Saudi society. His words also echo Haraway's provocative maxim that suggests a futuristic vision of society in which humans and machines coexist and co-create a new global order that pushes physical and ideological borders in new directions, challenging existing paradigms of dominance. The sentiment that "I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess" (Haraway, 1991) rings true in many of the habits and daily decisions that al-Noor students make, and in the ways they embrace and express new forms of womanhood as the cyber-daughters of Eve. University women in Saudi Arabia are engaging with ICTs in intimate ways, and use the Internet to gain access to previously restricted social spheres and domains of knowledge that they need to not only survive, but to flourish. Their online practices and relationships with ICTs, and their use of SNS, parallel popular perceptions of the ubiquity of technology people daily lives. However, their personal stories of desire, passion, and dissent extend normative understandings of women's embodiment with new technologies. Their creative use of time and space on campus help us understand work and play as complementary rather than competitive acts.

As such, the al-Noor students in this study are elegant examples of 21st century students engaging in contemporary educational practices that enhance our understanding of the increasingly pluralistic spaces in which we live, and the complex ways in which we learn.

Conclusion

I have presented arguments and examples of a multiplicity of intimate and creative ways in which young people casually and intentionally interact with technological artifacts online as part of their everyday lived experience, particularly at al-Noor. In addition, as an educator, I observed learning practices within multiple contexts, and I have asserted that they are expressions of educational transformation in the 21st century. Based on my observations and experiences at al-Noor, I argue that it is critical to acknowledge today's learner as a functional multi-tasker who possesses imagination and agency both online and offline. I emphasize, however, that the learner's self is not fractured. She participates simultaneously, at all times, and as a whole person, in multiple contexts marked by diversity and community. Her adaptability and fluency online and offline define her as contemporary and are the features of herself through which she engages as a social being in the world today. Today's learner is comfortable with novelty and diversity because such challenges to her adaptability and negotiation allow her to implement her highly developed skills of creativity and engagement. She is grounded and at ease in the online, networked spaces that German chancellor Angela Merkel so wrongly called "virgin territory."

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