

Published in **Al-Raida** (The Pioneer: Quarterly Journal of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World – Lebanese American University), vol 21, no. 104-105, Winter/Spring.

**The Preferred Partner**  
**An Investigative Field Study of Lebanese Youth**

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“A girl from a good family, pretty and rich” – these are the three main criteria that have been cast in the extended family where I grew up – for evaluating its men's choice of bride. On themes involving these three characteristics and their variations, I witnessed endless conversations in mutual visits between my maternal aunts, their relatives, and their friends. However, as far as the prospective husband for the family's young women was concerned, I noticed a disregard of his family's status and of his physical appearance, a disregard sometimes followed by the saying: “There's nothing shameful for a man except his empty pocket”. Though these conversations addressed existing couples, they also referred to other prospective ones in which the man and woman seemed, to the conversationalists during these visits, to satisfy the above-mentioned prescriptions. These prescriptions and those criteria lived on in my value frame of reference and in my cognitive repertoire as fixed *hypostases* of unquestionable necessity.

The link with my family was broken when I joined a multi-sectorial coeducational boarding school (in which I spent my adolescence) and later enrolled in a university whose student majority was non-Lebanese. Perhaps the diversity and heterogeneity of people in these two institutions offered me a unique opportunity to reconsider my family's values and criteria – among them the three *hypostases* – and to replace them by other, seemingly more attractive ones. These new *hypostases* enabled one “to be” many things in order to contract a partnership rather than needing “to have” a family with high status, money, or beauty, whether one or all three.

If I have attributed that quality leap in values and criteria to my own secondary school and university environment, this is because I had not perceived at that time that my higher education period (most of which happened to fall during the first half of the 1960's) would be a preface to a time abounding with promises of all types of revolutions – among them

women's liberation movement – and that the prevailing values regarding us women had begun to decline to make way for values more compatible with the latest transformations. Later, I had the opportunity to read what researchers had written to affirm that there is a strong link between social history and people's private lives<sup>1</sup> and that the occurrence of historic events in the lives of age cohorts of people can produce a “political generation” of people who share the experiences and opportunities offered by their world. This “political generation” enables them to define their potential, qualifies them to embrace modes of thought, and offers them (in harmony with their potential and modes of thought) the experiences needed to carry out certain behaviors – among them selecting a partner and endorsing that partnership – behaviors which seem to characterize people from that era of historic events<sup>2</sup>.

The Second Wave of Women's Liberation Movement, in the 1960's and 70's was such a “historic event” that stamped, with its own imprint, the personalities of a whole generation of women and men. Diverse types of writings and studies, most of which were anecdotal, have documented this era. Most feminist writings<sup>3</sup> that covered this era affirmed the pivotal importance of feminist consciousness (acquired by both women and men through their affiliation to consciousness-raising groups<sup>4</sup>) in the formation of their respective individual identities.

However, this feminist consciousness was not restricted to individuals or groups but rather went beyond that to infiltrate all scientific and academic fields. In Gender Psychology (the field of concern here), the works of Feminist pioneers such as Bem, Spence, and Helmreich<sup>5</sup> were published, in search of assessing the presence of the new feminine identity compatible with the above-mentioned transformations, that identity's forms, and its psychological and psychosocial features, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Manheim, K., (1972), “The Problem of Generations” in P.G. Albatch et al., **The New Pilgrims: Youth Protest in Transition**, David McKay, N.Y., pp. 276-322 (first published in 1928).

<sup>2</sup> Stewart, A.J. and Healy, J.M., jr., (1989), “Linking Individual development and Social Change”, **American Psychologist**, 44, 30-42.

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> Tolson, A., (1977), **The Limits of Masculinity: Male Identity and the Liberated Women**, Harper and Row, N.Y.

<sup>5</sup> See summary, in Arabic, for the works of these in: Baydoun, Azzah Shararah, (1988), **Alhuwiyyah Annisaiyya Aljadidah: Dirasah Midaniah Fi Attanmit Aljinsi Arrubaii Inda Ashabbat Allubnaniat**, Unpublished Masters Thesis, The Lebanese University. (The New Women's Identity: A Field Study in Four Fold Gender Stereotyping in Female Youth).

In the mid-1980's, directly inspired by the works of Bem, Spence, and Helmreich, and relying on their research tools, we undertook an attempt to identify the new identity of female undergraduates in Lebanon<sup>6</sup>. We had sensed the expanded presence of that identity in the context of a major transformation, unlike any other experienced by our society.

We assumed that the 18-21 age cohort (which constituted the population of our above-mentioned study) had spent its early formative years in a revolutionary era fraught with liberation movements; that this age cohort "inherited" the achievements and opportunities for which the former generation had struggled to acquire and which had now become (for this age cohort) a task already completed and a given; and finally, we assumed that the impact of the achievements and opportunities acquired takes a certain time period to fade.

In Lebanese society today, one observes a cohabitation of contradictory phenomena and a "peaceful" coexistence of discordant ideologies. Despite this, one observes some stability in the expanded presence of Lebanese women's new identity<sup>7</sup>. This identity, whose prevalence we detected among female university students in the 1980's, was expressed in a self-concept not limited by the traditional feminine model. In fact, this faction of Lebanese women attempts to transcend that model by integrating into their self-concept, masculine psychological features in addition to traditional feminine ones. These masculine features have been cast in the minds of both female and male undergraduates as more desirable for men than they are for women in Lebanese society<sup>8</sup>.

### **The Issue and the Questions**

The fundamental question that this paper will attempt to answer is:  
Do the features of the image that young Lebanese men seek in their future partners resemble the actual identity of their female coeds?

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<sup>6</sup> Baydoun, Azzah Shararah, (1991), "Alhuwiyyah Annisaiyya Aljadidah: Dirasah Midaniah Fi Tajawuz Attanmit Aljinsi Lada Fiah Min Ashabbat Allubnaniat, (Dirasah Midaniah)", **Alulum alijtimaiah**, Aljamiaa Allubnaniah, 1, pp. 153-186. ("The New Women's Identity: A Field Study in Transcending Gender Stereotyping in a Group of Female Youth", **Social Studies**, Lebanese University).

<sup>7</sup> "Persistence and Change in Gender identities and Gender Attitudes: The Case of Lebanese University Students", in a Book of Joint Authors: Proceedings of the Sexuality Conference, Dec, 2003, AUB and Middle East Research Center – St. Antony's College – Oxford (UK), Edited by Samir Khalaf and Eugene Rogan.

<sup>8</sup> Baydoun, Azzah Shararah, (1988), same as Footnote 5, pp. 111-118.

That is, what is the prevalent gender type of the preferred partner as perceived by those young men? Does it resemble, or transcend, the traditional feminine profile?

Is there a link between the gender type of the preferred female partner's image and the gender attitudes of male undergraduates?

If the young man's image of his preferred female partner, for example, resembles the "New Woman" as she perceives herself, is his preference accompanied by unconventional gender attitudes? Would the opposite be true? Or are the two unrelated?

What about the female undergraduate? Has her transcendence of the traditional gender type affected her preference when selecting a male partner? Does her image of that partner resemble the self-image of the male coed?

### **The Sample**

This paper offers an analytical discussion of some of the results of a preliminary survey conducted in Spring 2003 on a convenient sample of male and female Lebanese University students (First Branch). This preliminary survey was conducted as part of a field study in process. One of the study's preoccupations is a search for the features of the profile male Lebanese University students have of their prospective partners; and a search, as well, for the facets of similarity and dissimilarity between that profile and between the actual self-image of the corresponding group of youths. The study also aims at identifying the nature of the existing relationship between the profile of the preferred male/female partner and the gender attitude of university youth.

Thus, 84 male and female undergraduates completed an inventory designed to determine the extent to which they are characterized (according to their own estimation) by traits previously classified across four scales: 1) the masculinity scale (M); 2) the femininity scale (F), 3) the neutral scale (N); and 4) the masculinity-femininity (M-F) scale.

Also, 80 male and female undergraduates completed an identical inventory consisting of the same traits/scales but designed to determine the

degree to which the students seek these features in their preferred future partners.

All the above – totaling 164 male and female undergraduates – completed a questionnaire designed to measure their gender attitudes.

### **Research Tool:**

At this point in the discussion, and in an attempt to give the reader a better understanding of the discussion and the opportunity to assess the reliability of the results we obtained, we shall present, in what follows, the mentioned inventories (our research tools) and their components.

**The Gender Identity Inventory:** This consists of four scales, the first for masculinity, the second for femininity<sup>9</sup>, the third designated as “neutral”, and the fourth designated as “masculinity-femininity”. In this study, “femininity” and “masculinity” are empirical concepts, each consisting of a number of traits. We have obtained the traits that constitute “masculinity” and “femininity” by way of a preliminary survey. In this survey, two independent groups of male and female undergraduates selected socially desirable traits but ones that are more desirable for women than for men, thus creating the “femininity” scale. These traits revolve around nurture (tenderness, love of children, sacrifice, understanding, sentimentality) and relationality (tolerance, patience, kindness); others cast the person in a passive role (calmness, contentment, preserving tradition, modesty) while still other traits bear an ethical connotation (loyalty, etc.).

Similarly, two groups selected the “masculinity” scale, consisting of traits more desirable for men than for women. This scale consists of cognitive traits (analytical ability, organized thought, intelligence, creativity, eloquence), active traits (courage, ambition, strength, confrontational ability,

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<sup>9</sup> This inventory does not resemble traditional ones. Its masculinity and femininity scales, in contrast to traditional measures in psychology, are perpendicular, whereby their components do not lie on one bipolar continuum. Femininity, according to this inventory, is not the opposite of masculinity, nor is masculinity the opposite of femininity; instead, they are constructs independent of one another. Accordingly, a person - whether a man or a woman - can exhibit both masculine and feminine traits. Aggressive people can also be nurturing, and the same person can be equally active or passive. As such, gender identities have multiplied, and their correlated characteristics have become more complex: where previous inventories produced one stereotypical identity for each sex (feminine for women and masculine for men) and one non-stereotypical identity (feminine for men and masculine for women), identities have become, based on the proposed form of classifications, non-stereotypical in two additional ways: androgyny (high masculinity and high femininity) and undifferentiated (low masculinity and low femininity).

readiness to help in a crisis situation, inclination to challenge difficulties), and a third set of traits that characterize the person in charge (productivity, bearing responsibility, etc.).

As for the neutral scale, its features are socially desirable, equally, for both genders. Among its constituent traits are: the readiness to help, generosity, adjustment, religiosity, etc.

The masculinity-femininity scale consists of traits considered socially desirable for one of the two genders but not for the other. These traits include: the readiness to take risks and love of adventure (for men rather than women) and innocence and obedience (for women rather than men), etc.

To complete the gender identity inventory, the respondent is asked to assign, on a five-point scale, the degree to which each of these traits describes his/her personality. As such, each respondent receives a score on each of these scales, making it possible to classify him/her, in accordance with selected statistical principles<sup>10</sup>, on the gender identity map. Regardless of his biological sex, the respondent is classified as either androgynous (characterized by both high masculinity and high femininity), feminine (characterized by high femininity and low masculinity), masculine (characterized by high masculinity and low femininity), or undifferentiated (characterized by low femininity and low masculinity).

As for the male/female partner inventory, it is exactly the same as the gender identity inventory, with the exception of the instructions in the beginning, which request the respondent to assign the degree to which each of the listed traits describe the preferred female/the preferred male partner respectively.

Gender attitude (or gender prejudice) measure is no different from other attitudes' measures. In it, we adopt a five-point scale to assess respondents' agreement with the listed items. These items consist of statements about popular sayings that judge women's and men's status, roles, traits, relationships, and relationship-related values and connotations<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> We used the median for the total of scores collated by both women and men as a separator between « high » and « low » in each of the masculinity and femininity scales.

<sup>11</sup> Among this inventory's items, we mention the following first six statements:  
( ) 1. Woman's nature is not compatible with political work.

## Results

### First: Partner and Co-ed: Similarity and Difference

Examining the features male undergraduates seek in their female partners and comparing them with those that female undergraduates attribute to themselves, one encounters many similarities. These similarities are not restricted to feminine traits but apply to masculine ones too (i.e., traits more socially desirable for men in our society than they are for women). It is true that young men seek prospective female partners who are nurturing and relational and who have expressive skills. These young men even wish these partners to be sometimes passive, but they always wish them to be agentic and instrumental as well.

Despite this, the male undergraduate in our sample tends to attribute feminine traits to his preferred prospective partner to a higher degree than young women attribute such features to themselves. The most important of these features are beauty and attractiveness. With regard to this finding, young men in our sample are no different from men around the world! Men's desire for a beautiful and attractive woman is one of the most persistent desires<sup>12</sup> in western and cross-cultural studies conducted by western researchers on men's mate selection preferences. This persistence has prompted researchers to seek possible associations between those two features and between the instincts needed for the survival of the human race and its evolution, among them women's ability to procreate; researchers suggested that men perceive a woman's beauty as related to procreation in view of its traditional association with youth. What is noteworthy in our sample is that men and women equally give themselves moderate scores on beauty and attractiveness.

The Lebanese male undergraduate seeks an innocent and obedient partner. Young men want their female partners to be innocent to the same

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- ( ) 2. A man feels inferior if a woman shares in providing for the family.
  - ( ) 3. The relationship set by religious laws between men and women is correct in all cases and at all times.
  - ( ) 4. A man's manhood is not compromised if he does household work.
  - ( ) 5. Woman's nature is suitable for particular vocations and unsuitable for others.
  - ( ) 6. A girl must guard her virginity until marriage.

<sup>12</sup> Buss, D.M. and Barnes, M., (1986), "Preferences in Human Mate Selection", **Jour. of Personal. and Social Psychology** , 56(3), 559-570.

Eagly, A.H., and Wood, W., (1999), "The Origins of Sex Differences in Human behavior: Evolved Dispositions Versus Social Roles", **Am. Psychologist**, 54(6), 408-423.

extent that young women (their co-eds) attribute innocence to themselves. The paradox is that young men in our sample have a self-image that is less innocent than both their preferred partners and their co-eds. In any case, innocence is not desirable for men in Lebanese society. As such, the young man identifies with his masculine stereotype and does not violate its requirements. But the case differs with “obedience”. Young men require more obedience from their partners than their female coeds attribute to themselves. Instead, young women and young men were equal in indicating “obedience” as the feature least descriptive of their personality. This feature, exactly like innocence, is desirable for women but not for men. But both distance it when describing themselves, although men retain this feature as desirable for their preferred prospective partners.

This double standard reveals itself, as well, in neutral traits desirable to the same degree for both genders in Lebanese society. Among these, for example, are those that carry conformist connotations (such as preserving tradition and religiosity) and other ethical connotations (such as frankness and adherence to morals). All these features are sought in the female partner to the same extent that the college female student attributes them to herself, but much more so than the male attributes them to himself.

Finally, we consider traits that are rejected by the young man in his preferred prospective partner. These are divided into two groups:

The first group of traits is socially desirable for women and not for men, and they are: accepting fate as well as sentimentality and sensitivity; young men do not attribute traits in this group, neither to themselves nor to their partners. The second group of traits, in contrast, is socially desirable for men and not for women. Male undergraduates attribute to themselves love of adventure and readiness to take risks but reject them in their partner; do these two features carry in their cognitive/cultural repertoire a sex-based connotation and as such conflict with their strong desire for innocence in their prospective partners? As for love of competition and sense of superiority, can we assume, in accordance with different theories in psychology<sup>13</sup>, that perhaps these traits - when attributed to a female partner - pose a threat to men’s supposed superior status over the female sex? These theories contend that the superiority threatened in this case is that guaranteed

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<sup>13</sup> Clatterbaugh, K., (1990), *Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity: Men Women and Politics in Modern Society*, Westview Press, Oxford.



by men’s status in the existing patriarchal system and as such provides one of the psychological as well as cultural preconditions of manhood.

Among the interesting traits are self-reliance and independence. According to the classifications based on the statements of Lebanese university youth in the mid-eighties<sup>14</sup>, self-reliance is a masculine feature while independence is desirable for men and not for women (classified thus on the masculinity-femininity scale). Although male undergraduates attributed 16 masculine features to their preferred female partner, they rejected attributing “self-reliance” to her; the degree to which they wanted her to be “self-reliant” was less than their co-ed actually was. Is this because independence and self-reliance, in contrast to other masculine features, deprive the persistent image of Woman in our cultural repertoire of one of its most important components; i.e., her dependence on and “belongingness” to a certain man (the male partner in this case)?; it seems that neither independence nor self-reliance are pertinent traits when discussing preferences for female partners’ features.

At this point, the discussion of the preferred female partner’s features and their relationship to the co-ed’s self-image is discontinued; we proceed to examine the gender profile in its entirety, as follows:

	<b>Andro</b> ↑ (F) & ↑ (M)	<b>Fem</b> ↑ (F) & ↓ (M)	<b>Masc</b> ↑ (M) & ↓ (F)	<b>Undiff</b> ↓ (M) & ↓ (F)	<b>High Masc*</b> ↑ (M)	<b>High Fem*</b> ↑ (F)
<b>% of male students preferring a female partner of gender type:</b>	<b>24.2</b>	<b>42.2</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>24.2</b>	<b>33.5</b>	<b>66.6</b>
<b>% distribution of female students according to self image gender type</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>67</b>

\* We note that the median adopted in order to classify high masculinity and high femininity in all the sample was calculated by the male and female undergraduates who completed the female partner/male partner questionnaire respectively. Its value is different, then, from the median mentioned in Footnote 11.

A study of the above table reveals that the percentage of feminine young women – those that attribute to themselves feminine traits to a high

<sup>14</sup> Same as the study mentioned in (6).

degree and distance masculine traits – are a minority; their percentage is prone to decline with time<sup>15</sup>. However, the percentage of male undergraduates (their colleagues) who prefer a feminine partner is higher. The “feminine” woman is the most preferred, statistically, among the four gender types.

Among these four gender types, the androgynous group totally prevails over the other groups (50% of female students have an androgynous self-image) while only 24% of men desire such androgynous female partners.

Does this gap between “supply” and “demand” in women’s gender types imply potential emotional miscommunication between the two sexes in university youth?

The attempt to answer this question requires reference to the studies that took psychological adjustment as one of their topics. Researchers have demonstrated that the androgynous young woman can, for example, adapt to different situations: she can respond to a feminine situation in a feminine way, and with equal competence, to approach a masculine situation with an appropriate masculine behavior<sup>16</sup>.

If we assume that the mate selection situation stimulates a behavior or inherent feminine disposition in women, we can also assume, based on the findings of the studies mentioned above, that the feminine dimension in an androgynous young woman will be the most prominent dimension in that situation, while the masculine dimension will decline for the same reason, particularly if that young woman receives unspoken or spoken signals of the young man’s psychological demand. These studies have always indicated the superiority of this gender stereotype<sup>17</sup>, as opposed to others, in different indicators of psychological adjustment. Hence, the young man’s desires would be a constituent of the mate selection situation, calling for the prominence of her “femininity” and the decline of her “masculinity” at the same time. This tendency to adapt to a “coupling” situation is - as documented by gender differences researchers - a women’s feature par excellence, a feature for which a female begins training during adolescence

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<sup>15</sup> Same as (8).

<sup>16</sup> Bem, S., (1975), “Sex Role Adaptability: One Consequence of Psychological Androgyny”, **Jour. of Personality and Social Psychology**, 31(4), 634-643.

<sup>17</sup> Whitely, B.E. jr., (1983), “Sex Role Orientation and Self Esteem: A Critical Meta- Analysis Review”, **Jour. of Personality and Social Psychology**, 144(4), pp. 765-778.

and one that accompanies her into adulthood, particularly into the time of mate selection<sup>18</sup>.

Yet 66% of the male undergraduates in our sample selected a future female partner with low masculinity while 60% of their female colleagues are characterized by high masculinity; i.e., the percentage of women of high masculinity is almost twice that of men desiring high masculinity in their preferred partners. We have demonstrated above that the male undergraduate did not distance masculine features from his preferred partner's profile. However, the reason these percentages differ is the degree of attribution. ????

Some studies have documented<sup>19</sup> female undergraduates' tendency to exaggerate in attributing masculine features to themselves, compared to other women's groups or compared to male undergraduates. These studies indicate that these students tend to exaggerate as such because their roles as female undergraduates require instrumentality and agency, and even dominance and competition (these last two features are considered socially undesirable for women), in addition to other features attributed to males more than they are to females. These studies also indicate that masculine behavior in this situation does not detract from these women's sexual attractiveness. These results are particular to female undergraduates because previous studies – particularly those that adopted an evolutionary perspective<sup>20</sup> – demonstrated that women characterized by masculine features were undesirable partners.

One of the reasons for the high masculinity in female undergraduates in our sample, in addition to the above-mentioned reasons, is that the reference group<sup>21</sup> (most probably consisting of women in traditional roles) on which they rely to determine their gender identities is perceived as less masculine than them; this is what perhaps leads to the above-mentioned exaggeration.

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<sup>18</sup> Maccoby, E.E., (1998), **The Two Sexes: Growing Apart, Coming Together**, The Belcap Press, London, pp. 195-200.

<sup>19</sup> Sadallah, E.D., Kemrick, D.T., Vershure, B., (1987), "Dominance and Heterosexual Attraction", **Jour. of Personality and Social Psychology**, 52(4), 730-738.

<sup>20</sup> Buss, D.M., (1984), "Evolutionary Biology and Personality Psychology...", **American psychologist**, 40, 147-154.

<sup>21</sup> Same as (8).

## **Second: The Partner Is Not the College Mate**

A first glance at the features of the preferred male partner by the female undergraduate indicates that he is perceived to be more masculine than those male colleagues' actual self-image; these male colleagues seem "deficient" with respect to the female's exaggerated requirements. We do not find one feature on any of the 3 scales (masculinity, femininity, neutral) that characterizes the male undergraduate to a higher degree than that assigned by his prospective female partner! Instead, we find her desiring a partner perfect in all respects, for he must be: brave, capable of confrontation, strong, self-confident, defiant in facing difficulties and pressures, and capable of decision-making and of high endurance; i.e., fearless and audacious, much more so (statistically) than he attributes fearlessness to himself. Female undergraduates also attribute to their preferred male partner the qualities of intelligence, creativity, orderly thought, and eloquence in self-expression – these are advanced cognitive features that the male undergraduate does not claim to possess to the expected degree.

Although the female undergraduate is preparing herself for a certain vocation and for economic independence, she is no different from women in all cultures<sup>22</sup> studied by western researchers, for she desires an independent partner who is responsible and self-reliant (these two features do not characterize the male undergraduate to the expected degree). Can we conclude that the female undergraduate ( who is to be economically independent) seeks in a male partner the features that enable him to be a family provider, the characteristic that seems synonymous with masculinity in all societies, particularly Mediterranean ones<sup>23</sup>?

On the undifferentiated scale, we find a balance between "supply" and "demand" with the exception of only a few features, such as "live conscience" and "honesty". If we add to these modesty and loyalty (feminine features), and this last feature (loyalty) is more in demand than it is in supply, does this set of features indicate from a hidden end (and sometimes a frank one by supporters of polygamous multi-wife marriages) an attitude attributed to men in Lebanese society – that of tending to desire(

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<sup>22</sup> Eagly, A., and Wood, W., (1999), "The Origin of Sex differences in Human Behavior....", **American Psychologist**, 54(6), pp. 408-423.

<sup>23</sup> Gilmore, D.D., (1990), **Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity**, Yale University Press, New Haven and London.

and in some very few cases actually possesses) more than one partner? Does the female undergraduate desire a male partner whose psychological features clash with the prerequisites of sharing him with another woman?

Among the features the female undergraduate does not seek in her male partner are the tendency for aggression, dominance, and the readiness to take risks (all of which are considered socially desirable for men but not for women), obedience, sensitivity, shyness, sentimentality, and acknowledgement of weakness (all of which are considered socially desirable for women but not for men). Male undergraduates attribute all these features (with the exception of the readiness to take risks), to a low degree, to themselves as well. It seems that both male and female undergraduates agree that extreme deviation from traditional gender types is undesirable; they both severely distance from their respective partners those features socially rejected for those partners' given sex.

We point out to another group of features desired by each of the genders in the partner more than the young men and women actually view themselves as possessing such features. These include "tolerance", "patience", and "modesty"...The male undergraduate, just like the female one, attributed to himself low scores on these traits (although he attributed to himself lower scores on these traits than the female did to herself). These features involve a rhythm that does not suit, in our opinion, the expected roles of the university context, and this is what makes both male and female students unconcerned, perhaps, with "possessing" these features. Perhaps these features are considered complementary, viewed as necessary by each gender but mutually left for the other gender to possess!

A descriptive analysis for the set of features discussed above leads to the following preliminary remark: a male undergraduate's preference for his partner is stereotyped to a considerable extent. Yet further consideration of the four gender types reveals a more complicated picture:

	Andro ↑ (F ) & ↑ (M)	Fem ↑ (F) & ↓ (M)	Masc ↑ (M) & ↓ (F)	Undiff ↓(M) & ↓(F)	High Masc ↑ (M)	High Fem ↑ (F)
<b>% of female students preferring a male partner of gender type:</b>	30	7.5	35	27.5	65	37.5
<b>% distribution of male students according to self image gender type</b>	23	12	21	44	45	33

The exaggeration with which the female university undergraduate describes her preferred partner's masculinity – as identified above in the analytical description of masculine traits - reappears in the table that reveals the distribution of female undergraduates (according to preferences of partners' gender type) and that of male undergraduates (according to their gender identity as revealed by self-image). Two-thirds of the young women selected partners of high masculinity while less than half their co-eds describe themselves as having high masculinity.

One wonders: what are the reasons for this exaggeration?

Does this exaggeration result from the response method provoked by the inventory? We are referring to the known tendency for 'Social Desirability' to which respondents are inclined to fall prey to in similar inventories, a tendency whose influence researchers attempt to neutralize. If the inventory is responsible for provoking this tendency, its effect would have been generalized; i.e., it would have applied to both female and male respondents. The same would have applied to the high femininity desired in the male partner, particularly since a high percentage of women attributed high scores to themselves on that scale. But the female undergraduate did not exaggerate in attributing feminine features to her male partner, as becomes evident from scrutinizing the scores of traits on the Femininity scale; the percentage of male undergraduates of high femininity is close to the percentage of young women who desire that high femininity in their male partners.

Perhaps the exaggeration phenomenon results from the following factors:

- We noted above that young women's self-image tends to be saturated with high masculinity. If the young woman seeks a masculine partner, as do women generally<sup>24</sup>, she will attribute to that partner high scores on the masculinity scale, in whole and in part, so as to make him masculine to a degree at least equal<sup>25</sup> to her own masculinity. It is true that the sample of female undergraduates who selected their preferred male partner is different from the sample that completed the gender self-image questionnaire. Yet attributing high masculinity to oneself is, as mentioned above, a phenomenon in women, one whose recurrence has been documented by western researchers and which describes female youths in Lebanese society according to several studies<sup>26</sup>. Hence, exaggeration – when compared to the woman's self-image – does not really turn out to be exaggeration after all.
- Studies concerned with the topic of human mate selection indicate factors that are almost fixed in most societies (developing societies in particular) under study. One of these factors is that women prefer an older man while men prefer a younger woman. Could it be that the female undergraduate was not in fact describing her counterpart (the male undergraduate)? Was she describing an older man who has gone a long way in consolidating his masculinity, so that the male undergraduate, compared to the preferred male partner, seems deficient with respect to that masculinity?
- The components of masculinity refer to a situation where the male role was complementary to the female one. Eagly and Wood<sup>27</sup> have found, upon conducting a meta-analysis of studies on this topic, a decline in the importance of the male partner as provider or as the older partner. This decline is consistent with the rise in the “Gender-Related Development Index” and the “Gender Empowerment Measure” adopted by researchers in UN organizations. If the survival of the Human Race involves a division of roles among women and men for maximizing the conditions necessary for that survival (being an economic provider and its conditions for men, health and fertility

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<sup>24</sup> Ickes, W., (1993),” Traditional Gender Role: Do They Make, and Then Break, our Relationships?”, **Journal of Social Issues**, 49(3), pp. 71-85.

<sup>25</sup> Simone de Beauvoir had indicated in her book *The Other Sex* women's tendency to raise her partner's status, reducing herself at the same time because she assumes that this raising, and that reduction, are necessary to enhance his sexual prowess.

<sup>26</sup> Same as the reference in (5) and (6).

<sup>27</sup> Eagly, W. and Wood, W. (1999), “The Origin of Sex Differences in Human Behavior: Evolved Dispositions Versus Social Roles”, **American Psychologist**, 54(6), pp. 408-423.

related to youth in women), then the continuity of those conditions, despite the decline in their necessity, is nothing more than the persistence of an ideology that loses, gradually, its material basis but that survives, as do all ideologies, much longer than its *raison d'être*.

Finally, we would like to point out that 35% of female undergraduates prefer a male partner of high Femininity. Some studies conducted in the 1980's<sup>28</sup> demonstrated that the high degree of femininity in men (and women) is positively correlated with high marital satisfaction. One explanation offered by researchers is that the state of emotional partnership stimulates, in both sexes, romantic connections. These connections, in turn, are linked more to the feminine tendencies of both men and women (such as emotional expressiveness, relationality, nurture) than the masculine ones.

Does asking the female undergraduate to describe her preferred male partner make her tend to refer to that romantic partnership and set off associations related to those feminine components? This holds true for 35% of female undergraduates.

Perhaps the most influential factor, in the context of well-known economic and demographic conditions in Lebanese society<sup>29</sup>, is that a life partnership for university students has come to connote a life arrangement next to which romance becomes a luxury. As such, preference for masculinity – instrumentality and agency – is rising; in contrast, “demand” for femininity is declining. This applies even when both Masculinity and Femininity are independent and non-conflicting constructs, as is the case in the conceptual background and operational expressions that govern the research tool used here.

### **Conclusions:**

Lebanese university youth no longer has a stereotyped identity. However, women's style in transcending gender stereotyping differs from that of men. While the gender identity of female undergraduates expands to embrace socially desirable features for women and men in Lebanese society, their male colleagues tend to avoid resembling either of them.

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<sup>28</sup> Lambke, L., (1989), “Marital Adjustment Among Rural Couples: the Role of Expressiveness”, **Sex Roles**, 21,579-590.

<sup>29</sup> The ratio of men-to-women of marrying age (25-35) existing in Lebanese society, according to demographers, ranges from “a man for every three women” to “a man for every six women”!



However, the above-mentioned transcendence does not reflect on mate selection neither in female nor in male undergraduates: most men tend to prefer a feminine partner, and most women tend to prefer a masculine partner.

That is, the socially desirable profile for women remains the most suitable when describing the female partner, and the socially desirable profile for men remains the most suitable when describing the male partner.

We would like to point out that we are describing a preference and not actual mate selection. Studies concerned with determining preferences in the domain of romantic partnerships have documented a type that does not differ much from the results indicated by our preliminary survey. Some researchers believe that the mutual attraction between the feminine woman and the masculine man is the most widely occurring, despite the prediction of some of these researchers that this type of attraction will necessarily decline with the decline in the traditional division of gender roles. In fact, according to some studies, the actual partnership between the masculine man and the feminine woman - and not merely the preference for it - is the one that occurs most, compared to that involving other gender types. However, what the researchers regret (those who have conducted longitudinal studies that traced the course of that type of partnership) is that it is more prone to breakup than other gender type partnerships<sup>30</sup>.

Why is this so? Ickes<sup>31</sup>, for example, believes that attraction between the two stereotyped couples is the partnership model most suitable for the prerequisites of survival of the human race. Since partnership between the sexes in this era is motivated by desires and factors more complicated than survival needs and prerequisites, then the more primal type of attraction is likely to decline once the instinctual reasons for its occurrence are “consumed”: fertility prerequisites and their related psychological factors (sexual attraction, in particular). These have come to occupy only a part of the lives of women and men and constitute no more a life-consuming project. The paradox that people currently live is manifested by the clash between the culture of the past and the disposition provided by our genes on one hand, and between our actual reality and what contemporary culture prescribes and provides, on the other hand.

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<sup>30</sup> Same as (24).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

These preliminary survey results are restricted to the convenient sample that was available to us and limited by the research tools used. Nevertheless, these results indicate that the group most sensitive to material and human changes – university students – is for the most part fixated in past times. As far as their romantic partnership preferences are concerned, their expectations of the partner are not concordant with actual reality, particularly the human reality. These changes, as indicated by our study results, consist in transcending gender stereotypes for both sexes. This transcendence, exhibited by the majority of university students both male and female, why did it not reflect on partnership preferences for university students?

Researchers in the field of Social Psychology affirm that contracting romantic partnerships does not occur outside the cultural/ideological, political, or economic context. Psychologists, particularly those inspired by Psychoanalysis, tend to attribute to the above-mentioned partnership unconscious tendencies and representations most likely related to the personal history of the individual and cannot be accounted for by changes of any kind in the real world. This renders generalizations derived from changes in social reality about partnership simplistic, partial and hence incorrect.

We did not have the opportunity to explore Arab studies that indicate a quality change in the methods of mate selection. We refer, in this context, to the study by Mona Fayyad<sup>32</sup> in which she documented men-women partnerships in a period when university youth in Lebanon witnessed national/liberation movements (the 1960's and 1970's), an era when university students felt capable of actualizing their personal as well as their political dreams, when they experienced the possibility of having control over matters in both the private and the public spheres of life. At that time, men and women selected romantic partners that were equal to them and “uncommitted” to gender stereotypes, capable of building equitable tradition-free relationships. If we go back further in time to the beginning of the twentieth century, to a revolutionary era similar to the sixties and seventies in its promises, we note what Qassem Amin wrote in his book *Woman's Liberation*, describing the female partner as equal to men in her

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<sup>32</sup> Mona Fayyad (1994-1995): « The Couple: A Different Type of Marriages in the Early Seventies : A Different View of Self- and Tradition ». **BAHITHAT** (Female Researchers), First Book, pp. 47-74.

concerns and education and in handling social responsibility and not merely as a female passively responding to her mate's desires and breeding his progeny. In this respect, the description given by Fayyad makes it possible to identify a quality transformation proportional to the time period that separates the two eras.

We wonder: why don't we find in the current time period a quality change similar to that witnessed from the revolutionary period in the beginning of last century and the 1960's and 70's? Why does the tendency of selecting a stereotyped partner resembling the traditional image of women or men more than it resembles actual women and men dominate? Is this tendency, found in a group of university students, and according to the above discussion, one of the signs of frustration in youth, a phenomenon much discussed in public discourse?

Is this tendency an indicator (among others such as the revival of religious fundamentalism) of that youth's regression into the controllable world of reassuring, established tradition, a replacement for the real world that imposes a unitary universal reference, thus marginalizing most of our youth on more than one level?

Or is this no more than an expression of expected lingering of attitudes behind reality's transformation...in accordance with the fact that all that relates to our attitudes, beliefs, and feelings – mate preferences at the heart of that – is likely to persist and remain much longer than its reality-based rationales?

The orientation of gender attitudes for this group of youth can answer some of these questions. This is because the adoption of conventional stands regarding men's and women's roles in society; the strong adherence to traditional beliefs about these roles; and combating behaviors leading to amending policies, laws, and institutional measures in accordance with transformations that affected these institutions – all of these are related, according to some researchers<sup>33</sup>, to defensive authoritarian personalities, ones "defeated" in their actual reality, and vice versa. This is because gender prejudice belongs to the set of all biases: racism, sectarianism, religious fanaticism, and ageism. This is what some of our results have indicated upon

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<sup>33</sup> Peterson, B.E., Doty, R. M., Whitner, D., (1993), "Authoritarianism and Attitudes Toward Contemporary Issues", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 19, 174-184, (p136).

analyzing the existing relationship between gender identity and gender attitudes in this group of Lebanese youth<sup>34</sup>. Is mate selection subject to the same consideration? Is a gender stereotyped mate preference linked to conventional stands toward women's and men's roles? Is the opposite true?

Analysis of the results of this study's Gender Attitudes Inventory does not indicate a clear direction in this regard: With respect to this issue, men and women were divided according to their sex and not according to the gender type of the mate they selected. Female undergraduates, irrespective of the gender type of preferred partner, are much more liberated from gender stereotype constraints, than their male counterparts and less accepting of men's and women's traditional roles and the legal and status-based consequences that follow from these roles.

We note that the group of male undergraduates who preferred undifferentiated female mates seemed moderately less prejudiced than the other gender type groups of male students (yet they are much more prejudiced than female students in this sample). It is noteworthy that men who hold an undifferentiated self-image have been found<sup>35</sup> to be the most prejudiced among all four self-image gender types. This indicates that the act of attributing traits to oneself is subject to a different mechanism than that of attributing traits to a female mate. This group is small in number (it totals 8), so one must accept this result with caution.

The aim of conducting this preliminary survey on partner profile preferences and its relation to the self-image of the corresponding members of the other sex among university students was to formulate possible answers (hypotheses) to the questions asked in the course of our search for manifestations of masculinity in Lebanese society. The results of this survey are indicators or keys that enable us to offer some answers...but the results we have reached raise additional questions.

Isn't this what studies on humanity most often reap: finding a few answers embedded with further questions awaiting answers?

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<sup>34</sup> Same as Footnote 8.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.