Revolutionaries: The Women of the Egyptian Uprising

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Abstract

What motivates a woman to participate in a revolution, such as the Egyptian uprising of January 2011? This study explored the experience of the revolution in Cairo from the perspective of the women who took part in it. Existing interviews were examined, and then a case study was conducted in order to establish a set number of factors influencing active participation in the uprising. Results indicated that a sense of connection to one’s community and a strong reaction to the idea of “feminism” were present in participants who took on more active roles. The wave of revolutions now referred to as the “Arab Spring” continues to disrupt the Middle East, and the atmosphere of civil resistance has reached New York City in movements such as “Occupy Wall Street.” These results underscore the fact that an understanding of the mentality of the modern revolutionary has never been more critical.
On January 25th, 2011, waves of protestors gathered in Cairo’s central Tahrir Square. They were demanding that President Hosni Mubarak relinquish control of the Egyptian government. Mubarak had been President for twenty-nine years, and tens of thousands of protestors across the country called for his immediate resignation. Around one in the morning, police managed to clear Tahrir Square using tear gas and rubber bullets, and three people were killed. Demonstrators fled, many seeking shelter on the opposite side of the Nile. But they soon returned, shouting that the “spark of intifada,” an Arabic word meaning uprising or revolution, had been lit in Cairo, as it had ignited Tunisia. Today, two years after Mubarak has stepped down, the government is still in a period of transition.

The state of women in Egypt is similarly precarious. Women participated in the Egyptian revolution of 2011 in unprecedented numbers. They assumed roles of leadership and at times outnumbered male participants (Biggs, 2011). Despite this contribution, the key role of women has been downplayed in much of the literature of the period (Al-Natour, 2012). The objective of this study is to examine the experience of the uprising from the perspective of the women who participated in it, in order to explore what motivated them to get involved.

Literature Review

In order to examine the role of women in that uprising, it is crucial to place the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 in its historical context. In a review of the period, Rogan (2012) found that the roots of Cairo’s revolutionary history can be traced back to 1834. That was the year Egyptian scholar Rifa’a Al-Tahtawi founded the Islamic Modernism movement. Al-Tahtawi attempted to reconcile Islamic practices and the law of the Qur’an with the social practices of Europe, and advocated for the adaptation of the French constitutional system to Egyptian politics (Sawaie, 2000). Spurred on by his philosophy, revolutions rocked the Middle East and North Africa in the
1800’s. As more Arab states achieved independence from their colonial governments, revolutionary fervor turned inward, which fostered internal strife. Within Egypt, citizens grew dissatisfied with the uncontested power of government, rampant political corruption, and level of poverty. During this period, political dissidents and activists were frequently imprisoned without trial, and numerous undocumented detention facilities were constructed. A watershed moment for women’s rights came in 1923, when in a famous symbolic act Huda Sha’arwi, founder of the Egyptian Feminist Union, undid her veil in the middle of a train station (Badran, 1993).

Throughout the early 1900’s, the income gap between classes worsened, and the level of corruption during this period resulted in Egypt’s placing ninety-eighth in a ranking of one hundred seventy-eight countries on scales of corruption (Transparency International, 2010). An article in the New Criminal Law Review (2007) traced the course of the Emergency Law that was enacted in 1967, under which censorship was legalized and an estimated 30,000 Egyptians were imprisoned. With one interruption, Egypt was under Emergency Law for thirty years (Reza, 2007).

Tensions within the country came to a head when Egyptian President Anwar Sadat signed the Camp David peace accords with Israel, a hotly contested decision (Baker, 1981). While Anwar Sadat was crowned 1977’s Man of the Year in the United States by Time Magazine, Egyptian public opinion of him was deeply divided (Time, 1978). Following Sadat’s assassination, Vice President Hosni Mubarak took control of the government. An article by Korotayev & Zinkina (2011) highlighted the development of two major political forces during this time: the Egyptian labor movement and the Muslim fundamentalist movement. From 1981 to 2004, Mubarak was reelected to the Presidency four times via referendums in which he had no opponents (Reza, 2011). Ayman Nour, chairman of the Ghad El-Thawra Party, challenged him
for the Presidency in 2005. Nour was arrested and reportedly brutally interrogated, according to an article in the “Cairo Papers of Social Science” (Al-Sayyid, 2009). Following a hunger strike, Nour was sentenced to five years in prison. The imprisonment of this popular figure, combined with the obvious grooming of Mubarak’s son Gamal to inherit power after his father stepped down, increased tensions in the region (Al-Sayyid, 2009).

In a study for “Europe’s World,” Arabe (2011) found that demographic changes within Egypt throughout the 1970’s produced a population that was “young, educated, urban… and also tremendously politicized” (p.130). This politically active youth sector commonly took to the internet to address their grievances with their government. Although there were riots and strikes in the streets of Egypt, a study conducted by Lotan et al (2011) found that much of the political activism of the period took place online. Newsom & Lengel (2011) proposed a research model that analyzes the effects of information production and consumption by digital technology like the internet, with particular regard for communication “by various agents through multiple stages of transmission and dissemination” (p.33). A similar model to theirs was used to examine one of the most popular online campaigns, called the National Initiative against Power Inheritance, which gained over two thousand signatures (Al-A’sar, 2006). Another study published in the International Journal of Communications (Wilson & Dunn, 2011) found that social media and digital technologies had an important role in the uprising. Digital technologies in particular were used to report acts of police brutality, which the government continued to deny (Nunns & Idle, 2011). Observers and activists took videos of beatings and torture with their cell phones and emailed or messaged them to groups like The Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (Wilson & Dunn, 2011). This amateur documentation was widely circulated, in particular the video of
Egyptian citizen Ahmed Abdel Fattah Ali, bound and naked, being humiliated and tortured at a police station in Cairo (Shenker, 2011).

While bloggers and news organizations were going online to report hundreds of cases of torture at the hands of the police, Mubarak’s government was also trying to capitalize on the new technology (Numms & Idle, 2011). Gamal Mubarak, the son preparing to take over control of the government, had an official Facebook page (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011). So did Khaled Said, an Egyptian citizen who was beaten to death by police outside of a café in 2010. Snapshots of his mutilated corpse were widely circulated, and a “We Are All Khaled Said” website helped to turn public opinion against Mubarak within Egypt and abroad (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011). By mid-June, 130,000 people had joined his commemorative Facebook group, and protestors held a rally in Alexandria in Said’s name (Preston, 2011). Another major force in the politics of this period was the April 6th Youth Movement, a group organized online and estimated to have had 70,000 members by 2009 (Kirkpatrick, 2011). Their emphasis on non-violent protest, based on the Serbian revolution of 2000, had a strong effect on demonstrators in Cairo.

In the months leading up to the Egyptian Revolution, protestors in Tunisia succeeded in ousting President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali through the largest act of civil resistance in thirty years. In an article for the National Public Radio, Beardsley (2011) stated that women played a central role in that revolution, equal to the men. In the article, Beardsley quoted Tunisian lawyer Bilel Larbi as saying “Tunisian women stood side-by-side with Tunisian men. They came out to the streets to protest in headscarves. They came out in miniskirts. It doesn't matter. They were there” (2011). British news agency The Guardian reported that women “have been actively participating in all stages, levels and fields of the revolution” in Tunisia (Labidi, 2012).
A study at Nottingham University (Harb, 2011) found that one of the most popular ways women got involved in the revolution in Tunisia was online. These findings were echoed in Egypt in a study conducted by Khamis & Vaughn (2011), which found that “the prolific online and offline political activities of Arab women over the last several months have contributed a new chapter to the history of both Arab feminism and the region.” An article in the *Journal of Professional Communication* (Saddy, 2011) identified Asmaa Mahfouz, one of the founding members of the April 6th movement, as a major figure in online activism. She posted a series of videos calling for Egyptians to join her in Tahrir Square on January 25, in protest of National Police Day (Saddy, 2011). Originally intended to commemorate the fifty police officers who lost their lives in the 1952 revolution, the protestors of 2011 chose National Police Day in order to highlight police brutality. The April 6th Youth Movement, the organization Mahfouz helped to found, was central in helping bring people to the Square (Zoepf, 2011). They printed 20,000 flyers reading “I will protest on January 25 to get my rights,” which were disseminated around Cairo (Saddy, 2011, p.32).

In order to establish a picture of who was participating in that revolution, a study conducted by Moaddel for East Michigan University surveyed 3,000 adults living across Egypt, who self-reported their level of participation in the revolution on a scale from one to ten (2012). Moaddel (2012) identified three sets of variables determining likelihood of participation: political attitudes opposed to government or in favor of “alternative sociopolitical orders,” access to communication mediums like the internet, and specific demographic factors such as being male (p.305). This multifaceted approach emphasized Moaddel’s conceptualization of “revolution makers” as individuals; he did not fall prey to the idea of the participants as members of a monolithic, static group of revolutionaries motivated by the same factors universal to all
members (2012, p.310). That said, his study did find several factors which predicted participation, most notably self-efficacy, the trait which Bandura (1977) defined as the belief in one’s capabilities to execute actions. In addition to possessing self-efficacy, the majority of Egyptians surveyed had unfavorable attitudes to gender equality (Moaddel, 2012).

The fact that most of the participants in the revolution were male, along with the idea that most had favorable attitudes towards gender inequality, would seem to support the idea that the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 was predominantly driven by males. The influence of women in the demonstrations and in the revolution has been widely underreported, granting credence to this notion (Newsom & Lengel, 2011). In an article for the Journal of International Women’s Studies, Al-Natour (2012) argued against this point. Al-Natour examined two works of fiction concerning the January 25th uprising, noting that although both works name individual men, women are identified by their age group or their physical appearance (2012). Al-Natour posited that by taking active roles in the uprising, the female protestors “marks her emerging subjectivity within its new complex context” (2012, p.69). Furthermore, she stated that the uprising was entirely dependent on the women of Cairo, saying “their active roles inside Tahrir Square made the survival of the revolution possible and problematized gendered issues” (Al-Natour, 2012, p.75).

But the reality of the uprising is still more complex. In an article on revolutionary privilege, Winegar (2012) asserted that of all the factors that determined the likelihood of participation, economic concerns were some of the most influential. Winegar found that the people who were able to go to Tahrir Square “usually did not have children to provide for… or was not tasked with caring for them… one had to have a salaried job, preferably one that was closed because of the revolution” (2012, p.69). Unless one was the eldest male in the family, one
also required family permission, which was much more likely to be given to the men (Winegar, 2012, p.69). Due to the decline of the public health care system, the majority of the people with the stamina to march or stand in crowds for hours was young or could afford quality healthcare (Winegar, 2012, p.70). Winegar (2012) made the case that the popular image in the media of the iconic figure of the revolution, the single man with his fist raised or standing alone waving a banner, belies the importance of the everyday figures, the caretakers or homemakers, who supplied the revolutionaries and who made the uprising possible. For Winegar, “Focusing only on the iconic revolutionary—and, by extension, iconic notions of revolution—means missing the myriad, everyday ways that social transformation is experienced, enabled, and perhaps impeded, always in relationship to space, gender, and class” (2012, p.70).

In the Congressional Research Service’s Report for Congress, Sharp (2012) traced some of the more iconic moments of the revolution, and emphasized female participation. He reported that “while most of the protestors were young men, media accounts show a significant number of women… representing various social classes” (Sharp, 2012, p.6). According to Sharp (2012), the protestors who had gathered in Tahrir Square beginning on January 25th “created a self-sustaining momentum that culminated in ever-larger nationwide protests” (p.6). Under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the interior, riot police and central security forces tried unsuccessfully to clear the square, which by Friday the 28th saw an “influx of an estimated 100,000 protestors” (Sharp, 2012, p.7). The Wall Street Journal reported that on Friday night, thousands of demonstrators gathered on the West Bank of the Nile, at the Mustapha Mahmoud Mosque (Levinson, Coker, & Soloman, 2011). The protestors marched over the bridge to central Cairo through clouds of tear gas, throwing rocks at the police, who aimed rubber bullets at them (Levinson et al., 2011).
There was a level of “near total chaos” over the weekend of January 29th to the 30th, with looting, riots, groups banding together to protect private property and small businesses from armed gangs, and inmates escaping from prisons (Sharp, 2011, p.8). The demonstrators burned down the National Democratic Party’s building, and the army was deployed to protect the Egyptian Museum and the Central Bank. In an effort to staunch the “young and vibrant social media scene,” the internet was completely shut down nationwide, as well as mobile phone networks (Levinson et al., 2011). By February first, a quarter of a million protestors marched through downtown Cairo, and again, the diversity of the crowd was unprecedented (Sharp, 2011). The next day, huge crowds of Mubarak’s supporters stormed the square, reputedly aided by hired gangs and plainclothes policemen (Sharp, 2011).

Hand-to-hand fighting continued for several days, as Mubarak scrambled to appease the populace. By February sixth, another 100,000 Egyptians arrived in the city, and protests had spread to Alexandria and other major cities throughout the country (Sharp, 2012). When Wael Ghonim, the creator of the “We Are All Khaled Said” Facebook page, was released from prison, demonstrators flooded the square once again. Sharp (2012) reports that in a widely televised interview, Ghonim said:

This president needs to step down because this is a crime. And I’m telling you, I’m ready to die. I have a lot to lose in this life…I have the best wife and I have, I have…I love my kids…But I’m willing to lose all of that for my dream to happen. And no one is going to go against our desire. No one. And I’m telling this to [Vice President] Omar Suleiman…You’re not going to stop us. Kidnap me, kidnap all my colleagues. Put us in jail. Kill us. Do whatever you want to do. We are getting back our country… Enough. Enough. Enough. (p. 10).
Labor strikes spread across the country, and workers surrounded Parliament. And on Friday, February eleventh, on the eighteenth day of protesting, Vice President Suleiman announced that Hosni Mubarak had stepped down as President.

What roles did women take on during those eighteen days? In an article for *The National*, a Cairo news agency, Biggs (2011) reports that forty to fifty percent of the protestors in Tahrir Square in the days leading up to Mubarak’s resignation were women. Leaders of the protestors were commonly women; Asmaa Mahfouz, the founder of the April 6 Youth Movement, has been called “one of the most public faces of the uprising” by the *New York Times* (Zoepf, 2011, p. 3). In an interview, Nawal El Saddawi, another prominent Egyptian figure, said of the male and female protestors that “In fact, we were together in Tahrir Square. We were living together, men and women, under the same tent. Nobody harassed the women, and they were agreeing that we must have a secular government, a secular Parliament, that men and women should be equal” (Zoepf, 2011, p.3). This blending of the sexes emphasized a point El Saddawi made in the interview about how the main focus was on women as citizens, not as women, because a focus on “explicit feminism… just serves to isolate women further” (Zoepf, 2011, p.4).

This point was echoed in Taher’s 2011 study on public spaces of political protests. Taher found that although many people and many news agencies emphasize the different genders that were represented in the uprising, “the main emphasis was on the common identity of people in the square and the unity of their demands” (2011, p. 370). In an interview with *The National*, Mozn Hassan, the leader of the Nasra Feminist Studies Centre in Cairo, said that “No one sees you as a woman here; no one sees you as a man. We are all united in our desire for democracy and freedom” (Biggs, 2011). As per the specific jobs they took on, “Women and men organized and led the protests, guarded the entrances to the Square, gave speeches, and doctors of both
sexes attended to the injured in makeshift clinics” (Taher, 2011, p. 388). In addition, women took turns checking the IDs and bags of protesters, handing out food and manning the clinics, leading chants to fire up the protesters and running a steady stream of Facebook and Twitter posts,” right alongside male protestors (Biggs, 2011).

In order to participate in these ways, the individual women involved had to emphasize certain aspects of their identities while sublimating others (Taher, 2011). In the early days of 2011, they used slogans like “Women of Egypt unite” and “Women and Men together,” but over the course of the uprising the language changed from “women” to the less-threatening “girls” or “mothers” (Taher, 2011, p.387). This shift in language demonstrated the identity conflict of a female Egyptian revolutionary, which necessitated couching their slogans in more culturally acceptable terms (Taher, 2011). Women identified themselves as “daughters of Egypt,” localizing their protest within the patriarchal structure of modern-day Egypt (Taher, 2011, p. 387).

Geographically, during the eighteen days of the protest, Tahrir Square became a “safe space,” where women were allowed to sleep in the same tents as men and to be seen without their wali amraha, or male guardian (Taher, 2011, p. 390). The fact that there were no reported acts of sexual harassment or rape is remarkable, especially in light of a 2008 study conducted by the Egyptian Center for Women’s Rights, which found that four out of five women living in Cairo have been sexually assaulted (Shoukry & Hassan, 2011). In fact, women who planned to join in the protests in Tahrir Square were advised “to wear two layers of clothes, nothing with a zip and to double-wrap their hijabs” in case of sexual harassment by the police, who were “notorious for groping, stripping and raping women as tools of intimidation” (Biggs, 2011).
This culture of harassment, momentarily minimized by the universal sentiment of the January 25th uprising, was on display once more a month later, in time for the International Women’s Day rally (Taher, 2011). There were a number of other groups protesting on March eighth, including a group of “tens of thousands” who were rallying for Christians in Egypt, groups blockading the Prime Minister’s office in protest of the detention of a group of Coptic women, in addition to a march of students and another of hotel workers congregating for better wages (Biggs, 2011). But it was the Women’s Day march that turned bloody, when a number of men gathered around the women, heckling them, shouting verbal abuse, and then sexually attacking them (Biggs, 2011). The crowds of men “in unison…were saying batil [illegitimate] to the demands for gender equity and awra [ignominy] to women standing with their demands” (Taher, 2011, p.390). The next day, police raided their tents, arrested dozens of women and men, and subjected them to torture and beatings (Taher, 2011). The women were subjected to “virginity tests,” a procedure that involved stripping women and inspecting their hymens. Virginity tests had already been outlawed in Egypt, and are considered an act of sexual abuse by Amnesty International (Taher, 2011).

Practices like virginity tests have been widely reported in the media outlets of the United States and Europe, with the result, according to a University of Toronto study, that Western media in general commonly regards Egyptian society as oppressive to its women (Zine, 2002). Women in Egyptian culture are usually portrayed in Western media as victims of oppression, and the burqa, or full body- covering robe, and the hijab, or headscarf, have either been turned into symbols of oppression, or have been romanticized as an exotic other, according to a study conducted at the University of Florida (Shirazi, 2001). As a product of equating Egyptian culture with burqa- clad women, “Muslim women’s bodies are being positioned upon the geopolitical
stage not as actors in their own right, but as foils for modernity, civilization, and freedom” (Zine, 2002, p.2). This kind of dichotomy positions women in Egypt, and their entire culture, as inferior to women in America and in other cultures viewed as similarly “liberated” (Zine, 2002, p.3). This overly simplistic view equates non-American with oppressed, and Islam with a tyrannical power. In a 2012 review of the literature, Vintges argued that the way Egyptian women are portrayed “posits western secularism as the only road to women’s emancipation” (p.284).

Vintges’ report (2012) is based on the work of Michel Foucault, whose ethical principles have long been applied to Middle East and North Africa’s politics in general, and to Egyptian society in particular. Foucault studied the ethics of power, and how power is played out in contemporary society. His belief was that the strategy of power relationships pervades the whole of human interaction, and that there is no way to exist outside of power relationships (Foucault, 1975). Foucault proposed that these power relationships are imposed by one’s culture and social group, and he advocated for the cultivation of a personal ethos, or code of character within that larger societal context (Foucault, 1997). His ethos was a holistic concept, combining aspects of one’s mind, body, and soul in the formation of an individualized way of life. So for Foucault, “freedom practices” must be striven for at both micro and macro levels; individuals must liberate themselves and their communities in order to be truly free, “inventing new subjectivities and self [improvement] techniques by critically reworking the present ones” (Vintges, 2012, p. 290). In the movement towards “freedom practices” and away from dominance, Foucault identified numerous religious groups and cultural organizations which seek to expand freedoms, among them Christianity and Islam. His holistic model of the self went beyond the customary Cartesian duality between mind and spirit which is popular in Western philosophy. That was Vintges’
rationale for using him to examine the psychology of contemporary Egyptian society. Vintges (2012) argued that in this sense Foucault is truly “cross-cultural” (p.290).

One of the texts that Vintges (2012) explored is Saba Mahmood’s *The Politics of Piety* (2005). In this book, Mahmood (2005) critiques Western feminism as insensitive to the cultural context of Egypt. She proposed that “Western feminism, in its wish to impose the liberal model of the free, autonomous self on a global level, has not recognized that individual autonomy and self-realization are two different things” (Mahmood, 2005, p.11). According to Mahmood, many Egyptian women do not want complete autonomy, and their goal is not to exist outside of the male-dominated structure (2005, p.11). That their goals do not mimic the goals of Western or American feminism is no excuse to exclude them from the dialogue on Foucault’s formation of the self. Mahmood relies on Foucault’s conception of the self precisely because it allows for different types of agency, not simply the Westernized style. Mahmood held that women in Egyptian society, although members of an organization that prioritizes males, are not barred from being “active agents… applying corporeal techniques and spiritual exercises in a project of ethical formation” (2005, p.29).

Mahmood re-contextualized Egyptian women from oppressed victims to active agents, by identifying the variety of ways in which those cultural norms are formed. She resisted the binary of victim versus actor, advocating that “the notion of agency should be uncoupled from the progressive goal of emancipatory politics” (Mahmood, 2005, p.22). Many of the aspects of Egyptian daily life which Western media outlets are quick to characterize as oppressive, for example the wearing of a veil, are to Mahmood the result of moral agency. She supported Foucault’s premise that Islam is one of the religions seeking to minimize domination by granting moral agency to the individual. And she built on that premise, stating that ritual practices and the
style of dress proscribed in the Qur’an are the means to attaining that personal moral agency. Foucault’s *telos*, or overarching goal, was to transform the self into a moral individual, and to develop one’s self into an ethical agent, according to the customs of one’s sacred text. Within Foucault’s heuristic framework, instead of bowing down to an oppressive caste of men, veiled women are taking control of their religious lives by choosing to follow a certain path towards moral agency. In this way, Egyptian women, Muslims in particular, can be self-realized without challenging the patriarchal limits and rules (Mahmood, 2005).

After describing Mahmood’s text, Vintges (2012) progressed to stating a final goal for women’s empowerment in Egypt. She argued that “Muslim feminisms can be analyzed, in terms of Foucault, as ethical freedom practices that work on the limits of western normalizing as well as of Islamic fundamentalist regimes of Truth” (Vintges, 2012, p. 295). She identified the two forces that the women’s empowerment movement in Egypt are fighting against: “western normalizing,” or the idea of feminism as a Western oppression, and “fundamentalist regimes,” or those forces, within and outside of Islam, which seek to limit women’s moral agency. By opposing these forces, Vintges advocated for a Muslim women’s empowerment movement that “adheres to values like piety and the importance of the family, and also aims at women’s full participation in all societal domains” (2012, p. 295).

A Saudi television program about Muslim women would indicate that Vintges’ hope is already a reality. The talk show “Kalam Nawaem,” or “Sweet Talk,” features four hostesses from four different Middle Eastern nations (Wolting & Felix, 2010). Fawzia Salama, the Egyptian hostess, is a journalist and editor of the *Al A rsat* daily newspaper. The talk show has had numerous internationally recognized guests, including Hillary Clinton (Wolting & Felix, 2010). A documentary on “Sweet Talk” directed by Dutch filmmaker van der Haak reported that the
four hostesses are presented as average Muslim women, who conform to the rules of their religion and fully participate in society. They are represented as role models to their 45 million viewers in 22 countries, and offer “a reinterpretation of the Islamic heritage, from a women’s empowerment point of view” (Wolting & Felix, 2010).

A differing view on women’s empowerment in Egypt is proposed by Nawal El Saddawi, the founder of Arab Women's Solidarity Association, and reported in Graham-Brown’s study (1981). El Saddawi opposed the power men have over women, and embraced a feminism more conformed to the Western ideal. However, like Foucault, El Saddawi advocated for women forming their identities within their culture, giving particular care to resisting Western imperialism and sexual liberation. El Saddawi’s book, *The Hidden Face of Eve*, drew from her experience as Director of Public Health by documenting the ways Egyptian women have been harmed from a medical point of view. From this perspective, El Saddawi opposed the nature of education in Egypt, stating that “education is a tool of oppression also” (Graham-Brown, 1981, p. 25). Although education has been shown to correlate with social change, it does not advocate for the kind of “enlightenment” which El Saddawi asserted is necessary for the women’s empowerment movement in Egypt to move forward (Graham-Brown, 1981, p. 25). El Saddawi also advocated for women’s participation in political activism, saying “I am convinced that women should be politically powerful inside a revolution” (Graham-Brown, 1981, p. 25).

The goal of this research was to examine the goals and motivations of the women who became politically powerful inside the Egyptian Revolution of 2011. Through analyzing existing interviews and conducting our own case study, we explored the factors that helped determine the likelihood of active participation in this uprising. Specifically, we examined how identification as a feminist and connection to community influenced participation.
Methodology

The research method was twofold: an analysis of preexisting interviews available through the “I Marched Along” project, and a more in-depth case study, conducted by the researchers. The “I Marched Along” project, accessible online, features a number of documentary-style interviews with Egyptian citizens and activists, and it explores the impact of the revolution (Delshad & Itameri, 2012). Nine Egyptian citizens who were living in Cairo during the uprising were interviewed for the “I Marched Along” project. The majority of participants were women (seven female, two males). They varied in age, from adolescence to late adulthood, and in socioeconomic status. All participants were native Egyptian citizens living in Cairo. In all cases they were personally identified by their name and profession. Their identities are not revealed in the present study. Information is not available on how participants were selected, a possible limitation of the project.

The interviews, which were published on the website in a series of five to ten minute videos, are composed of participants’ responses to a series of questions given by the unseen interviewer. Three of the interviews were conducted in Arabic, and were translated into English by the interviewers. The videos available on the website have been edited, and none of the original footage from the interviews was available at the time the present study was conducted. This is another possible limitation.

For the case study portion, the subject was selected based on her participation in the January 25th uprising. She was found through contacts in the area, most notably Carmel Alyaa Delshad and Kirsti Itameri, founders of the “I Marched Along” project, and Elizabeth Herman of the “Voice and the Veil,” a project connected with the news organization The Global Post, which documented the stories of the Egyptian feminist movement (Herman, 2012).
Once participation was confirmed, an Informed Consent Form was obtained from the subject (Appendix A). The interview was held over Skype, and consisted of eleven open-ended questions concerning personal experiences during the initial eighteen days of the uprising, the life of the participant in the time leading up to the uprising, and her experiences following the uprising. The set of questions we asked her is attached in Appendix B. The set of questions was necessarily open-ended to facilitate the tailoring of the interview to the individual being questioned. The interview was conducted online, and was recorded following the explicit written permission of the subject. Following the interview, the subject was debriefed, via the form attached as Appendix C.

I Marched Along Interviews: Data and Discussion

The nine people interviewed for the “I Marched Along” project do not constitute a cross-section of the population, and their views are not generalizable to the Egyptian population, or even to the specific group of Egyptian activists who were involved in the January 25th uprising. They are not a representative sample, and they generated no statistically significant data. However, the nine interviews in this project reveal a great deal of information, about what participants experienced and about how their experiences have shaped their development.

The question of how feminism is viewed in Egypt, and of what feminism means in an Egyptian context, is one topic that can be explored through qualitative data like that gleaned from these interviews. The participants generated a range of perspectives about what feminism means in Egypt. The majority of participants did not use the phrase “feminism” or refer to women’s empowerment in their interviews. Participant Two was the most direct in aligning herself with what she called the “feminist movement” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). She used the customary vocabulary of the feminist movement, as when she mentioned “asserting her gender”
and said “you need to bring down the… old system of belief that governs your house… your university… your company, your mosque.” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). These statements made it clear that Participant Two was focused on gaining more rights for Egyptian women. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Participant Seven was very direct in dissociating herself from the women’s empowerment or feminism movement, saying “I am not a feminist” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). Participant Seven was running for public office during the time this interview was filmed, which most likely had a strong effect on her responses. As a woman campaigning for President of Egypt in order to “create a dialogue,” one might expect her responses to have an overtly feminist stance. However, it was clear from her interview that Participant Seven wanted to distance herself from the movement. “I don’t ask people to vote for me because I am a woman” she stated (Delshad & Itameri, 2012). Instead, she would prefer that her gender be “ignored,” in favor of the qualifications of the candidates (Delshad & Itameri, 2012).

If Participant Two and Participant Seven formed the two opposing poles on the continuum of identification as a feminist, than Participant One lies somewhere in the middle ground between them. Like many of the people interviewed for the “I Marched Along” project, Participant One did not use the term feminist in the interview. However, she expressed viewpoints which are commonly associated with the feminist movement in the United States. For instance, she conceptualized the revolution as a “new opportunity for women to get involved in the political life.” As a founding member of the April 6th Youth Movement, Participant One has taken a central role in the political life of Egypt. In describing the importance of female participation in politics, she made several statements reminiscent of the women’s empowerment movement in the United States, such as “we cannot say we are a democratic country without representing a half of the citizens.”
Participant One’s reluctance to label herself a “feminist,” despite advocating for women’s empowerment, demonstrates that feminism in Egypt is a highly nuanced concept, rife with political connotations. As in the United States, many of those connotations are negative, particularly in light of the connection between feminism and Western secularism, and between the feminist party and sexual liberation. As noted in Graham-Brown (1981), many Egyptian women resist the label “feminist” in an effort to resist Western imperialism and sexual liberation. This would explain how people who value rights for women, and advocate for women’s empowerment, would feel uncomfortable openly declaring themselves to be feminists.

Participant Five may have alluded to this in the phrasing of her responses; she did say that women who went to Tahrir Square and who worked for the uprising were there to “get their rights,” but she couched her sentences in vague diction, never referencing feminism directly. In fact, the only people to reference feminism directly were either adamantly opposed to it, as with Participant Seven, or vocal supporters of it, as with Participant Two. The majority of responders avoided the use of that label entirely.

Interestingly, the two participants who were direct about feminism gave the most detail about their actions during the eighteen days of the uprising, and appear to have had the most direct involvement with the revolution. Participant Two stated that the days of the uprising were “the first time that I didn’t need to assert my gender in the streets,” and that it felt “normal” for her to stand alongside men she did not know, without her male guardian present (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). She helped gather more people to join her in the square, and she stayed in Tahrir for much of the time. Far more than just standing alongside men, Participant Two reported that men and women were engaged in similar activities throughout the uprising: “we were both throwing rocks at tanks, we both put our lives in danger” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). She spoke
of the revolution as a time for women who had not previously been interested in political and social movements to start getting involved, saying “a lot of women who were watching from afar became more interested in being part of the social and political [movement]” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). Participant Two also said that this was the first time women could take part in politics in public, going so far as to state that “the feminist movement is part of the street movement… now, women will go to the streets” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). For her part, Participant Seven said although she is currently a mother and a presidential candidate, she was first an “activist.” At the conclusion of Participant Seven’s interview, the editor compiled several clips showing news footage of Participant Seven at marches and rallies. In these scenes, she is shown giving speeches to crowds of hundreds, megaphone in hand. There is footage of her during the uprising in the middle of Tahrir Square, her face bruised and bloodied, speaking to reporters about the beating she had received. Again, these clips are included in the final, edited version of the interview, which was uploaded to the website. It would be very revealing to have access to the unedited interview footage, but that was not available.

From the male perspective, Participant Eight said he was a “fighter for women’s rights,” but was adamant that more rights for Egyptian women would not come until they came with more rights for all Egyptian citizens. According to Participant Eight, the way to “liberate women… is to liberate everyone” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). This leads to the question of whether women’s rights should be separated from human rights. The perspectives given in these interviews echoed the differing viewpoints of the factions within Egypt’s political scene. While many citizens are advocating for the rights of women, highlighting abusive practices like virginity testing, there is an equally strong faction arguing that Egyptian political change should focus on securing rights for all citizens first, and then focus on female citizens. Women who
were not part of the “I Marched Along” project mentioned going up against the idea that “now is not the time” to be pursuing equal rights for female Egyptians (Newsom, 33). It is perhaps revealing that Participant Eight, a male who identified himself as someone who “fights for women,” still places rights for citizens before rights for women. This may echo the cultural phenomenon to which Participant Three was referring when she said she is used to hearing that women’s issues “are not issues” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012).

One of the most striking details in these interviews was the great disparity in how participants pictured the effect of the revolution on Egypt’s future. None of the participants stated that they believed the revolution was a failure, but they differed greatly in their estimation of its success. Participant One and Participant Four were the most optimistic, saying “I believe in Egypt” and “the revolution was liberation, for everyone in Egypt” respectively. Echoing that theme, Participant Eight said he was “optimistic about the future of women in Egypt” also. Participants Two and Three were slightly more ambiguous in their endorsement of the revolution. Participant Two in particular was hesitant in listing her hopes for the future, and said that in order to progress, Egypt needed to “bring down the old systems.” Participant Three gave more of a realist’s answer to the question of progress in Egypt. She was the only one to mention a specific goal for the women of Egypt: she said that “if you could walk down the streets in this country without being harassed, that would be achievement enough in my eyes.” Participants Five, Six, and Nine felt that the goals of women’s empowerment had not been achieved through the revolution, but were optimistic about that possibility in Egypt’s future. Participant Five put that idea into words by saying “the effects of the revolution…have not really appeared yet.” Although she appeared to be in agreement with Participant Five about the revolution not securing the rights of women, Participant Six was very adamant that those rights would be attained,
saying “all of our rights will come back to us in Egypt… They must come.” Participant Nine did not state directly his hopes for the future, but ended his interview with a call to action, which would indicate that he did not think positive progress was impossible. Participant Seven did not reference the future of Egypt. (Delshad & Itameria, 2012).

During the interview, each participant was asked if they see themselves as a role model, which reveals much about the construction of identity within that culture. Participant One, a founding member of the organization which is widely characterized as one of the most influential to the uprising, minimized her own role in the uprising. Participant One said she tried to “put her work beside all Egyptian women,” and that “I don’t care if I will be an example or a model, but I will be a citizen” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). Similarly, Participant Seven said that she was “not a pioneer,” minimizing her popular status as a role model (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). Participant Two and Participant Six phrased their responses in terms of “honor,” which is interesting, considering that the interviewer never said the word “honor” in either interview. On the subject of “honor,” Participant Six said “if I am a symbol…this would be an honor for me” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). By recasting the question of acting as a role model into the ideology of “honor,” both women may have been attempting to recast the masculine ideal of “role model” into acceptable feminine terms. Although they may not think of themselves as role models, as women, they can think of themselves as having honor and being concerned about principles. There is also the question of preserving modesty, which is of course not unique to Egyptian culture. There are few people who would feel comfortable self-identifying as a role model, and equating the position with an honor makes it possible to accept it without giving the appearance of conceit.
In terms of Foucault and Mahmood, many of the participants could be said to be constructing a personal ethos within the bounds of a larger cultural context. Foucault (1997) emphasized the system of power relationships pervading society, and these were certainly demonstrated in these interviews. Each participant referenced societal obligations in his or her interviews. For Participant One, her role as a “citizen” and her reference to social class may have been sources of obligation for her. The feminist movement appeared to be a source of societal pressure for Participants Two and Seven, although they had opposite reactions to that pressure. Participant Three spoke most openly about the sexual pressure that Egyptian society placed on her through the constant threat of sexual harassment. Familial obligations and the responsibilities of home life were other sources of societal pressure, broached by Participants Four and Five. The social obligations of fame, as personified by Participants Six and Seven, were also present in these interviews. Participant Six gained fame through the widely publicized death of Khaled Said, a close relative of hers, while Participant Seven’s run for President kept her in the public eye. Participant Eight brought up religion and nationalism, two additional sources of societal pressure. As for Participant Nine, his reference to poverty in Egypt references the social class system, which carries its own weight of societal pressures.

It is clear from these varied and multiform examples that societal pressures have an active role in Egyptian life. Foucault was concerned with constructing one’s own ethos, or set of ethics, within those larger societal pressures. In adapting Foucault’s principle to the Egyptian context, Saba Mahmood (2005) asserted that the goal of women in Egyptian was to achieve self-realization through the construction of an ethos, within the constraints of these societal obligations. Mahmood argued that although many Egyptian women recognized the male dominance in their culture, they sought not to overthrown the patriarchy, but to achieve self-
realization within it. According to Mahmood (2005), it is this distinction between autonomy and agency that allows for self-realization in the Egyptian context.

Of the nine participants, Participant One, who spoke of being a “citizen of Egypt,” fits Mahmood’s description of a self-realized woman. As a founding member of the April 6th Youth Movement in Egypt, Participant One had found a significant place for herself in Egyptian politics. She had helped create the organization that was central in the January 25th uprising, and she had done so without seeking to bring down the patriarchal system. Her role in the revolution appeared to be a source of pride for her, and she viewed the uprising as a “new opportunity for women to get involved in the political life” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). She did not reference ethics or religion, so it is difficult to get a sense of whether she had constructed what Foucault would call an ethos. However, her interview would support the idea that Participant One was a self-realized woman in the Mahmood mold.

Participant Six would also fit Mahmood’s description of how to achieve agency. Participant Six made it clear that she did not want to overthrow the system when she said “It’s an honor for me to be a woman in Cairo and in all of Egypt” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). She spoke again of how being an Egyptian woman was a “source of pride” for her, and described her goal of publicizing her relative’s death in order to win the rights he should have had. She was not protesting the patriarchal aspects of her society, but at the violations against the human rights of the citizens in general. She has made it her aim to fight for those rights, and her participation in the “I Marched Along” project marked the achievement of that goal in many ways. Through participation in that project, and in the revolution, she is the self-realized woman Mahmood described.
Aside from issues of cultural context, these interviews are revealing in terms of what motivated women and men to take active roles in the Egyptian Revolution. Again, Participant Two, the most vocal about labeling herself a feminist, was also one of the women who played a more direct role in the uprising. She spoke of how she threw rocks at tanks, gathered other people to join the uprising, stayed in the Square, and stood alongside men. Her reference to earlier activity in politics indicates that this was not the first time she had gotten involved, but that her participation in the January 25th revolution came on the heels of earlier political activism. The details of that activity, and of what precipitated it, are lacking from her interview. However, it is clear that in her case, previous political activity was a powerful factor in determining the likelihood of participation in an uprising.

Participant Four did not feel safe going to Tahrir Square, and as a result her involvement in the uprising focused on getting others to attend, urging her own family members to participate, and drumming up support for the people in the square in her own neighborhood. It is clear from the number of times she referenced her “community” that her sense of connection to the people was one of the strongest factors in her decision to help the cause of the revolutionaries. As a mother and a wife, it is clear that she had strong ties to her family and her community, and this sense of closeness may have contributed to her involvement.

Judging from her emphasis on staying in her home to help, the fourth participant might advocate for the kind of Egyptian feminism for which Nawal El Saddawi advocated. Participant Four might agree that women do not need to separate themselves from the patriarchal systems at play in Egypt in order to achieve agency. This may be reflected in the method of political activism popular in Cairo, which advocates for women to maintain their faith and their position relative to men in society, and still work against Mubarak. This belief would urge women to get
involved in protests like the January 25th uprising for the sake of their husbands and their communities, rather than for the sake of overturning the gender hierarchy. In this way, it was the duty to her faith and to her family that may have been the strongest factor in the fourth participant’s involvement in the uprising. On the subject of family, the sixth participant makes it clear that her decision to take an active role was heavily influenced by her concern for her daughters. The rights she went to Tahrir Square to protect were the rights of her children. One of the strongest contributing factors in her work as an activist was her desire to improve the country her daughters would grow up in.

The fifth participant appears to have been swayed by still another motivating factor. It was her knowledge of the historical context of the revolution that motivated her to join in the uprising. Her part in the political activity mirrored the fourth participant, and like her, she emphasized the importance of continuing traditional feminine roles. However, she brought up the history of how women have been treated in Egyptian society, recalling how the government under Mubarak had taken away many of the freedoms she had enjoyed before his predecessor’s assassination. She spoke about the erosion of many of the rights she once enjoyed, saying “In the past we used to wear short things and show skin. And now, we put on the hijab” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). It was this knowledge of her place in Egypt’s history that motivated her to take a more active role in the revolution.

Another one of those important factors is demonstrated by the sixth participant’s involvement: the death of a relative. Participant Six was a close relative of Khaled Said, and she said she went down to Tahrir Square in his honor. In the twenty-nine years of Mubarak’s rule, characterized by the violence of the continuous Emergency Law, Participant Six’s story of the gruesome beating of her close relative is not unique in Egypt. Those kinds of personal attacks,
and the effects they have on loved ones, cannot be discounted as a motivating factor. The sixth participant clarified her reasons for participating when she said “I’m going to Tahrir… to get my [relative’s] rights” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). It was the past trauma of what happened to her relative which spurred her to political activism, as demonstrated by her insistence that she had not been involved at all before Said’s death.

Her story is common to many of the women who got involved in political uprisings, as documented in Khamis & Vaughn (2011). Factors like historical context, sense of community, belief in gender mistreatment, familial duty, and previous political activism motivated different women to different degrees, and it is important not to attempt to reduce each person’s involvement to one specific motivating factor. It was the interplay of all of these causes, and a rich tapestry of thousands more, which played a part in each woman’s decision to get involved politically.

In addition to these concerns, there are deeply personal reasons impacting specific individual’s decisions to get involved in an uprising like Cairo’s. For instance, Participant Seven had her political career to think of, and her career ambitions in Egypt’s political scene may have developed alongside her decision to become an activist. Interesting, both of the male participants, Eight and Nine, mentioned money, and they were the only participants to do so. Participants Eight and Nine focused on the economic reasons for taking a stand in opposition to the government, a cause which would have resonated with many individuals living in the increasingly impoverished nation. Monetary concerns, like those outlined by Winegar (2007), certainly had an effect on their decision to get involved.

In short, there are as many individual reasons to get involved in a political uprising like the January 25th revolution in Cairo as there are individuals taking part in the revolution. Be that
as it may, the data gleaned from the “I Marched Along” interviews indicates that there are certain factors which were more likely to influence participation in the uprising. Some are equal across the community, like the sense of the historical importance of the revolution, the belief that an individual’s rights are being taken away on the basis of gender or any number of other factors, and the economic downturn. Other reasons are more personal, such as a history of previous political activism or a personal connection to an individual who had been harmed or an experience of being harmed personally. One unifying thread seems to be consistent across all women interviewed: a deeply rooted sense of community. Defined for the purposes of this study as the connection a woman has to her family, her neighborhood, and her town, a strong sense of being important to the community around you was similar in every interview.

Up until this point, the present study has focused on the unifying themes of the nine “I Marched Along” interviews. However, the individual differences among participants proved to be fascinating ground for research. The throng of thousands who marched to Tahrir Square and the crowds who stayed there demanding Mubarak’s resignation was comprised of individual men and women, and one of the most intriguing aspects of the “I Marched Along” project was its commitment to sharing their individual stories. The demographic studies and cultural touchstones explored in the literature review reveal much about the group of people who took part in the January 25th uprising, but the benefit of the interview approach is what it reveals on a personal level.

The first participant was identified as a founding member of the April 6th Youth Movement, who was instrumental in organizing the January 25th protest. As a prominent member of the youth movement, Participant One was questioned about female involvement in Egyptian politics. She emphasized the importance of participating in all levels of government, stating “we
cannot say we are a democratic country without representing a half of the citizens,” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). She stated that the 2011 uprising represented a “new opportunity for women to get involved in the political life,” but also that it was “just a reminder… that there is a woman in Tahrir Square, that there is a woman in political life” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). Throughout the interview, she focused on her hopes for the country of Egypt as a whole, saying “I believe in Egypt” and “it is a time for Egyptian people” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012).

Participant Two was much younger, and she concentrated more on the social systems within Egypt. She was the participant who readily identified herself as a feminist, and spoke confidently and directly about her plans for the women in Egypt. Echoing Nawal El Saddawi, the author of The Hidden Face of Eve, Participant Two said that the educational system in Egypt is flawed, and that its flaws are negatively impacting the youth and in particular the women. She focused much of her interview on the improvements she hopes will be implemented in Egypt, particularly in the area of education. She said “You need to change the educational curriculum that says… in any way that says that men are better than women” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012).

For Participant Three, the revolution was an important moment for women in social activism. In her interview, she reported the following about women’s participation throughout the uprising:

It started out brilliantly because suddenly all these [gender] differences just fell away and we were just Egyptians, we were all struggling... It didn’t matter if you were a woman. Nobody even inquired. After the eighteen days ended, it was a different scenario entirely. Suddenly women were starting to become increasingly marginalized, and even mentioning “What it is going to be like for women after the revolution?” was like “It’s
not the time, we need to figure out what we are going to about this.” Women’s issues are a side issue. (Delshad & Itameria, 2012).

Aside from the development of women’s roles over the course of the uprising, Participant Three focused on the aftermath of the revolution, and how participating in it affected the situation of women in Egypt. She was not overly optimistic about what the revolution means to women, saying that her primary goal is to stop sexual harassment, and she added that “if you could walk down the streets in this country without being harassed that would be achievement enough in my eyes” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). She did not speak to the fiery brand of feminism apparent in Participant Two’s interview. Participant Three did not want to “bring down the system,” she wanted to get all the way to her job without once being sexually harassed. Although she did state that sweeping political changes were necessary to modify the status of women in Egypt, she said of the harassment that “you kind of get used to it as a woman… [people] saying your issues are not issues” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012).

Of the nine people interviewed, Participant Three was the only one to share a personal story from her experiences before the uprising. She spoke about a time when she was verbally harassed by a taxi cab driver, and how it scared her. She was “fifteen or sixteen” at the time, and she said “I realized that [the cab driver] was masturbating as he was telling me this monologue, and I just ran out of the cab” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). Participant Three did not feel comfortable telling her parents or anyone in her family about this experience, saying that “it will just make things worse…if you tell anyone, it will just create greater hindrances for you” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). If she had told anyone, she anticipated that their response would be first to blame her, and then to restrict her behavior beyond how it had already been restricted. “It will just lead to questioning,” she said, for instance “oh what were you doing out late, what were
you wearing, did you really have to do that?” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). She said that if she had told someone about the harassment “in some way, it would just boil down to it’s your fault” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012).

This atmosphere of sexual harassment, and of punishment for coming forward about acts of sexual harassment, has not been well researched in Egypt. However, repeated references to harassment throughout the other interviews, and the personal history related here, demonstrate that it is a very real and persistent threat in Egypt. Interestingly, the only two people who did not bring up harassment, either specifically as with Participant Three or more generally, were the two males. Why they would not bring up harassment in an interview about activism and women’s rights in Egypt is perhaps revealing. The videos available through the “I Marched Along” project were only conducted with people interested in activism and in preserving the rights of Egyptian citizens. The men who took part in this project are clearly dedicated to women’s rights in Egypt, enough to want to participate in a project such as this. Both of them directly said they were interested in women’s rights. And even to these particular men, harassment is not something they would naturally bring up in the course of interviews like these. How difficult it must be then, for the women who have experienced sexual harassment to come forward about it? It is possible that the male participants are aware of the harassment, but they did not broach the subject because for them it is not a pressing concern. Or perhaps it does cause them anxiety, but they did not feel comfortable addressing that in the interview. In any case, this collection of interviews reveals the gender divide between addressing the reality of sexual harassment in the streets of Cairo.

Participant Four addressed sexual harassment only in vague, general terms, and appeared to be much more optimistic about the impact of the revolution. She stated that “in my house, I
was encouraging my children and my husband to participate with the revolution” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). She expressed her hopes for the revolution, stating “the revolution was liberation, in everything in our society” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). For her, the Egyptian revolution represented freedom for women and for all the citizens of Egypt: “liberation for the mind, the liberation of the existence of women” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). However, she was not present in the streets during the uprising. She did not feel safe going to Tahrir Square “with the millions that went,” and stayed in her home throughout the eighteen days (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). However, she emphasized the importance of the work she was doing in her home, saying “Maybe our actions in our own houses will achieve it” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012).

Participant Four echoed the thoughts of the other women being interviewed on the subject of the importance of the revolution for women. She said of the women who went to Tahrir, and the women who stayed indoors and participated in other ways, that “she has taken her rights in the laws, in work, she has reached very high” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). Participant Four spoke of the effect that this has had on all Egyptian women in glowing terms, saying “Her voice is being heard” and “it will be a bigger future for her in every case” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). Hers was the most hopeful interview, but it is quite possible that her position of being removed from the events of the Square impacted her perceptions.

The fifth participant focused on the roles of women throughout Egyptian history. Participant Five’s role in the household appeared to follow traditional guidelines for acting as a wife and a mother; she said “the woman in Egypt is like her husband’s arm… she is a mother, and she helps her husband” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). She emphasized the historical tradition associated with female roles, saying that it was like this “even in ancient times,” and likened the history of women’s service to the role of Egypt as “Mother of the world” (Delshad & Itameria,
2012). However, Participant Five belied the customary view of modernity as a simple progressive march. She spoke of how she used to dress less conservatively, many years before the revolution, and how that has changed. Participant Five said that there was a time “in the past” when women could wear less conservative clothes and did not fear sexual harassment in the streets (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). In the years leading up to the revolution, the culture and styles of dress became more and more conservative. Participant Five stated that right before the 2011 uprising, “I couldn’t go out or work or do anything far from my house” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012).

As regards her belief in the effect of the revolution, Participant Five was more ambiguous. She said that “the effects of the revolution…have not really appeared yet” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). This view is in direct contrast to what Participant Four believed to be the “great change” the revolution brought (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). However, Participant Five expressed optimism in her hope for the future by saying that “it will be great” if “our demands are achieved” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). Overall, she reported feeling that the goals of the uprising, particularly an improvement in the status of women, have not yet been achieved, but she appeared to maintain her belief in that possibility. She was less hopeful, perhaps, that Participant Four, but nonetheless gave a sense of a certain guarded optimism. Her interview demonstrated the continued disparity between genders when she said that if her daughter stayed out then she would be concerned, “but if my son stayed out late, I wouldn’t worry over him” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). Ultimately, however, she did state that “it is better [for women] than before” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012).

The sixth participant was a close relative of Khaled Said, the boy whose death sparked a wave of revolutions prior to the January 25th uprising. She spoke to the “I Marched Along”
project about the impact Said’s death had on her, and the impact his death had on the Egyptian revolution. She stated of the role of women that “It’s an honor for me to be a woman in Cairo and in all of Egypt” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). Although she said that a woman has “more responsibilities than a man” in Egypt, she felt her gender is something “to be proud of” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). However, she contends that these beliefs are very recent changes for her.

Before Said’s death and her subsequent celebrity status, she was not involved in feminism within Egypt or indeed with any political or social cause. In fact, Participant Six said she “had no relationship with politics or with any activism” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). But after his death, she began to take part in politics, and join in the uprising. It is in his honor that she now “speaks [her] voice,” saying “I want Khaled’s rights, and they will come… All of our rights will come back to us in Egypt, not just Khaled’s. They must come” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). Like Participant Three, she shared a personal story with the interviewer. Participant Six spoke of the day she told her two daughters, seven and ten years old respectively, about Khaled’s death. They each took to their Facebook pages, and changed the pictures on their profiles to his picture.

Participant Six said that from that day, many people in her family participated in the uprising together. Of her time going to protest, she reported:

> During the revolution, I would go to Tahrir with my mom. I’d leave my daughters home alone. But I used to tell them: I may not come back. If I don’t come back, call your father. So I’d go knowing I may not come back, my mother and I. We were going to Tahrir and they know I may not make it back. They know why I’m going. I’m going down to get their rights, so when they grow up they will feel it. (Delshad & Itameria, 2012).
In this section of the interview, Participant Six identified her children as her primary motivation for participating in the revolution. She said that she did not think the women of her generation had anything to gain from participating, saying “This entire generation won’t benefit anything from these events” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). She believed that the people who will benefit “are the next generation, the young” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). She stated that her daughters, and the next generation as a unit, “deserve to grow up in a country better than this” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012).

The interviewer went on to ask Participant Six if she thought of herself as a role model to other women in Egypt. She said that although she did not believe that she was a model, “if I am a symbol of a woman who has endured, who is going to get her rights and her dead [relative’s] rights, this would be an honor for me” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). However, she was quick to point out that she is not alone in this, that there are many women throughout the country who have similar struggles, who also endure.

Participant Six has a degree of fame throughout Egypt, but one woman who participated in this project is well known for quite a different reason. The seventh participant was the first woman to run for the Egyptian presidency, and she also contributed an interview to the project. Although Participant Seven was unable to gain enough signatures to be represented on the ballot, Wing (2012) found that her candidacy faced opposition from several key parties in Egyptian politics. The opposition to her candidacy Wing described is perhaps the greatest mark of its credence. Wing (2012) reported that “her efforts to recalibrate the balance between state and society have come under sustained attack… not least the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces” (p.461). Shenker (2012) reported that Participant Seven was attacked at a rally against the Supreme Council of Armed Forces. In this news article, Participant Seven is quoted as saying
that “people told me afterwards that some of the baltagiyya [paid thugs] were asking for me by name” (Shenker, 2012). Eventually, Participant Seven had to withdraw her candidacy, owing to the lack of required signatures supporting her.

In her interview for “I Marched Along,” Participant Seven emphasized the importance of female participation in the revolutions of Egypt’s history. She brought up the subject of her grandmother, who was an activist in the revolution of 1919. She referenced female participation in Egypt’s political history, saying “in the first article of the Constitution, all of us are equal. No discrimination” (Delshad & Itameri, 2012). Like Participant Five, Participant Seven conceptualized the revolution in terms of its place in Egyptian history. But unlike Participant Five, who did not go down to Tahrir Square or join in any of the protests, Participant Seven was a major force in those movements, and led many of the protests. Based solely on these two interviews, there does not appear to be a connection between conceptualized the uprising as a historical moment and taking a more active role in it.

Although she stated that the goal of her running for President of Egypt was to “progress the values of our society,” Participant Seven also said that she was “not a feminist” (Delshad & Itameri, 2012). Participant Seven said her goal in running for the Presidency was “to create a dialogue,” and she emphasized throughout the interview that she was primarily “an activist, and a part of a revolution” (Delshad & Itameri, 2012). In addition to defining her campaign in terms of advancing the dialogue rather than pursuing a feminist agenda, Participant Seven identified herself first as a mother. She said that “I am a mother, a journalist, and a presidential candidate,” in that order (Delshad & Itameri, 2012). She did not identify as a role model, saying “I am not a pioneer” (Delshad & Itameri, 2012).
Participant Eight was the first man to be interviewed for the project, and he focused on Islamic conservatism and its effect on women. Participant Eight was the only participant to bring up religion, a finding which surprised the reseachers. He stated that women in Egypt “do not have what they deserve,” and he identified the main cause of this by saying “I think the problem of the women in this country… is the problem of the Shi’ite” (Delshad & Itameri, 2012).

Participant Eight proposed that Islam, and “most religions,” can be interpreted in many ways, and some of the ways Islam is interpreted in Egypt create “problems” for its women (Delshad & Itameri, 2012). He said this multiplicity of meanings is to blame for how women are being treated in Egyptian culture, which he labels as a “problem” (Delshad & Itameri, 2012). He said that the Egyptian interpretation is “absolutely very liberal” and “very much for the women,” but the impact of the Saudi interpretation, which he says has “invaded” Egypt, is “absolutely against the women” (Delshad & Itameri, 2012). Participant Eight stated that “this is not our culture to see women this way,” and said the problems women face in Egypt are due to how they are perceived according to Saudi culture (Delshad & Itameri, 2012). He identified the economic interests which support the Saudi interpretation, mentioning “oil money, you see” in connection to the shifting of Egyptian culture as below the Saudi (Delshad & Itameri, 2012).

In terms of the government under Mubarak, Participant Eight said that “women suffered, everyone suffered,” and that there was not “anything good for women” (Delshad & Itameri, 2012). He proposed that the way to liberate women is to “liberate everyone” together (Delshad & Itameri, 2012). However, his view of Egypt’s future is not simple. He identified two main struggles Egypt faces: the direct fight for “democracy,” and the struggle of Egyptian culture “against the Saudi” (Delshad & Itameri, 2012). To overcome one, he proposed that Egypt must overcome the other. Although he said he is “optimistic about the future of women in Egypt,” it
comes as secondary to him, behind the future of Egyptian citizens in general (Delshad & Itameri, 2012). He says that although “I do fight for the rights of women in this country,” that struggle cannot be separated from the rights of all people in his country.

The other male voice in the “I Marched Along” project belongs to Participant Nine. His interview focused on the difficulties he sees women face in his culture. He opened the interview by saying that “If you are a woman in Egypt and you have an alternate plan for your life… it is going to be a fight for you” (Delshad & Itameri, 2012). He brought up the march for women’s rights that ended in riots on International Women’s Day, as evidence for the fact that the idea that the revolution has already changed everything is “a kind of imagination” (Delshad & Itameri, 2012). In terms of his own participation in the revolution, he reported working on the slogans for the march and taking part in the planning stages. He emphasized the failings of the International Women’s day protest, saying that he was told that he had simply “misinterpreted” the point of the revolution (Delshad & Itameria, 2012).

Participant Nine supported Participant Eight’s point about how “the revolution has not changed the people yet,” but Participant Nine did state that “it created a space for people to start working on that change” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). He proposed that the way to enact that change was to bring separate groups within Egypt together. He believes that coming together, “getting out of the bubble and getting to know each other,” is “the most important thing” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). He referred to the trap of thinking of woman’s rights as a different track than human rights. Furthermore, Participant Nine stated that women’s equality in Egypt is dependent on women believing that they themselves are equal. “If women want to be equal in this country,” he said, “then women should convince themselves first that they are equal” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012). His interview ended with an impassioned plea for women to take on
more active roles in politics, saying “If you want to gain your rights, then go to the front lines, and make these rights happen. Grab them, catch them, do not wait until someone brings them to you. That is the fight of the women now in Egypt” (Delshad & Itameria, 2012).

Case Study: Data

Keeping the “I Marched Along” project in mind, we conducted our own interview and attempted to explore the subject’s experience of the revolution more thoroughly. With just one subject, we were able to address more topics in the interview, and those topics that were broached were examined more thoroughly. Since we were conducting the interview ourselves, we could tailor our questions in the moment to the participant’s responses, and ask about some of the topics we wished to examine more specifically.

The participant was contacted through individuals and organizations in the area known to the researchers. After obtaining an Informed Consent Form from her, we spoke to the subject over Skype for one hour and twenty-nine minutes. The questions we had prepared beforehand to ask her can be found in Appendix B. The first topic we addressed concerned how the subject initially got involved in political life in Cairo. Surprisingly, she described herself as “anti-revolutionary” at first. She was “a little involved” in politics during her “university time,” but did not plan to take part in the revolution. She said that when she received the invitation to protest in Tahrir Square on January 25th she did not take it seriously, and said she “was laughing about it, like everybody else.” The subject said she originally thought “we don’t need [a revolution], because I was afraid about people… [who] would die because of it.” She said that although she thought of the revolution as “good,” she still maintained that “most of the time, revolution is… bloody, and it makes huge changes in the society.” She stayed home on January 25th, but kept track of what was happening “on satellites, on cable TV, on Facebook…everything.” Watching
changed to getting involved when she “started to share information with people, like don’t go on this way, don’t go on this street, it’s not safe.” And then she said “I started really, really to participate on the 27th.” When speaking about this transformation from anti-revolutionary woman to protestors, she said “Some of my friends asked me why did you change your opinion about the revolution, but I said it’s another thing… being there is different from talking.” When asked to describe her involvement, the subject said:

I started on the 27th. It was a very calm day, nothing had happened on this day. So I just went out to see. But you feel it was this calmness before the storm. Everybody was… ready for doing something. And I then I arranged with another friend, she is living beside me, to go to attend the demonstration on the 28th. And we went very early, very early together, and in our way we discovered that Mubarak Phones are all cut off, we don’t have any network. And first we felt like it’s just individual problem, but we… my students and I and the taxi driver also we were… all our Mubarak Phones are cut off and then we discovered that all the Mubarak Phones in Egypt were cut off, recently. All the networks, and internet. Both. Only landlines were working, other than that nothing, nothing, nothing.

After describing that first experience of the phones being shut off, the subject started speaking about the events following that discovery. She said:

So we went to downtown Cairo and just… all shops were shut and the streets were full of national security guys. They were like civilians but we can notice them … They were all around and you know we notice them from their outfits and their figures because they have muscles… they look like attackers. And I told my friends Oh my goodness they look like harassers, sexual harassers. We were, really, we were scared…and we were in
January but… my friend started to sweat, and I said okay we need to go to somewhere because the invitation was for after Friday prayer… and we were very early, like 9 or 10 o’clock so we didn’t have a place to go.

Our subject then described Eshar Mubarak, an NGO located in downtown Cairo, where she and her friend went next. She described the precautions that people were taking at the NGO, saying “they are preparing like a war will happen, food everywhere and… hospital things, medications and… kits.” From her description, the NGO appears to have been a popular site for protestors and anti-Mubarak supports to gather before the next march to Tahrir Square.

Once there, our subject and her friend got immediately involved. She described the roles they took on, saying “We made a hotline of other people using the landlines and it was very poor… but we managed to use it.” Then she described how they asked for volunteers who could use a fax machine, since all of the phones and the internet had been disconnected. She told them that she may have some ability to use the fax machine. Speaking more about her involvement, she said, “I volunteered to take statements… for all satellite channels and international agencies.” While she was still in the NGO, sending messages and struggling to work the fax machine, she said

And then the war started, after the prayers. Gas bombs everywhere, and you feel the smoke, and Eshar Mubarak is on the sixth floor but we [are] still coughing from the gas, the tear gas… and then gunshots, and then I went down to help because it was near, it was close to home, and I was afraid, tear gas, and I saw many, many antiriot police. There were a lot of demonstrators, women, men, children, old people, young people, whatever. I don’t know how they got the information or why did they come here… I think we have something in common… common frustration of the current regime, and we
don’t have anything to care about, like your life already is a mess and you suffer and you
don’t have your freedom so... you don’t have nothing to lose, so nothing to care about,
even your life, because it’s already bad, so you... maybe it’s like gambling, maybe: it
will be better, or you will die.

It is important to note at this point that the subject was addressing very serious, perhaps
traumatic events that she had witnessed and taken part in. Throughout the interview, she
addressed these serious topics with a sense of casual humor, telling jokes and laughing. She
continued to smile and laugh throughout the interview. From this we later speculated that
perhaps the subject used humor as a defense mechanism, as a way to guard herself from the
tragedy and the intensity of what she had seen during the eighteen days of the uprising. There are
certainly advantages to being about to laugh about the past, and using comedy to distance oneself
from pain. However, just as humor can be used as a way of dealing with serious events, it can
also be used as a way to avoid dealing with them. It is quite possible that she was ready to laugh
about what had happened to her but she was not really ready to accept it. We asked if she was
experiencing nightmares or other signs of trauma, but the subject was quick to reassure us that
she did not experience these. She acknowledged the gravity of her situation, and maintained that
she was coping with it. Overall, she gave a general sense of strength and stability, and appeared
to be dealing with the reality of her situation considerably well.

When asked about the concerns she must have had for her family during this time, she
said she was “of course very scared” for them. She described having “lied to them” so that they
would let her join the protests, just like “many, many Egyptian people” had to do. In order to
keep her family from forbidding her to go, she told them that she had a job translating, and that
that was where she was headed on the morning of the 28th. Making a joke, she commented “You are not afraid of [losing] your life, but you are afraid of your mom [knowing about it]!”

When we discussed what motivated her to participate, our subject identified a number of factors. She said:

I chose to participate in the first place because …it was inspiring, I remember the first guy… the first martyr, I wrote his name on my hand on Facebook. I had someone who was dead for that, so this thing is important, and I can’t stay at home and watch this from TV, I have to participate. It’s my country and I love it. And I was really, really frustrated with this country and we had this common feeling, it’s not our country anymore and we are not citizens so it was really frustrating and everything was really bad like education, economy, transportation, and you feel like there’s an elite they have everything, and some other poor people who do not have anything and even sometimes you feel like they are not even human... But they are human and they have a soul and they must fight for the right and I felt responsible.

When describing her life before the revolution, the subject spoke about starting her own business. She had planned to open an “education center” for “marginalized” people in Cairo, similar to an NGO. She wanted her business to emphasize the “right to knowledge” and the “right to information,” by featuring “media for people who are missing a platform.” Overall, she felt that her gender was an asset to the development of her business. She said that men will “offer to help you because you are a woman… many, many people… it’s a good thing.” She elaborated on that idea, saying “If you are a woman and you want to start something, then other people say ah, she is a woman and she is fighting so she needs some help.”
The next topic we covered was gender relationships during the days of the revolution. The subject referenced the way men and women were sleeping beside each other during the eighteen days of the revolution with no incidents. She compared staying in Tahrir Square during the uprising to living in a perfect world, saying

I didn’t fear anything, I felt secure… I felt like these were the best days of my life, I was in utopia, everybody is caring for each other even though they don’t know you… you feel like there is hope and you are free to talk with anybody about anything… you can tell anybody you are hungry and they will invite you to have food and drink.

However, she did mention the violence during this period. She described how they had problems running out of medicine for all the “people who got injured, some were shot.” She brought up the Battle of the Camel at one point. In a news article describing that attack, Fathi (2012) states that on February 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2011, “pro-Mubarak thugs on horses and camels attacked protesters arrayed in Tahrir Square.” The attack left eleven dead, and over 600 were injured (Fathi). The subject said the attack using camels and horses “was like the middle ages.” According to the subject, the people in the square all went through security checks, so there were no weapons in the square the demonstrators could use to defend themselves. She described how the people tried to throw stones to unhorse the riders. The subject had gone back to her home the morning before the attack in order to get more medicine, and stopped on the way back at the NGO she visited with her friend the first day she joined the protestors. “On that day they attacked the NGO… everything was confiscated, they took the people… everything is collapsing” she said. On her return to the square she found that “all my friends were injured… all my friends.” She said “the doctors were overwhelmed… everybody was injured on his head or arm or leg.”
She spoke of the feeling of fear which was with her during her time in the square. She said “I was not scared of the gunshots. It was the knives, you know?” She described the kartooos, a weapon similar to a BB gun, which riddles the body with little pellets. She said she saw many people with “marbles” all over their backs from having been shot with this weapon. The subject remained in the square from the day of the Battle of the Camel until Mubarak’s resignation, and reported seeing many individual acts of violence.

When asked for more details about her time in the square, the subject shared the stories of people she had met there. One story concerned a college-aged man who had lost the friend he had gone to Tahrir Square with. She described how he felt “awkward” when speaking to the friend’s mother, because he did not know how to explain to her why he was still alive and her son was dead. She said that now the man she met was “fighting for justice,” for the memory of his friend, and that when he told her his story, “he cried.” She went on to say that many of the people she met there were motivated by the memory of lost loved ones. Mothers in particular, she said, who “want to get justice for their sons and daughters.”

She had an encounter with a man “who had lost his shoe,” and had the sole of his other shoe “open as a mouth.” She said of the experience of seeing him “Okay, it’s responsibility, I can’t leave… I felt responsible for this guy, and many other people, I want to stay with them… I had to stay with them.” She also referenced the importance of Khaled Said in her decision to stay in the Square. Before Said’s story of being beaten to death by policemen was publicized, she said of police brutality in Egypt that “You feel like its normal. You feel like its normal to go to the police station and be beaten… it’s an ordinary thing.” She spoke of Khaled Said’s mother as a “glorious woman,” who was so “brave” to publicize the story of her son’s death.
At this moment during the uprising, the subject reported that she felt hopeful about getting Mubarak to resign. She said that she had stayed optimistic throughout the uprising, “except for one day.” That morning, she had been expecting Mubarak’s resignation to be announced. Instead, he informed the masses gathered in the square that he intended to stay in power, and the subject “felt like I failed at everything in life, and everything is depressing, and is failure, and I feel old.” However, Mubarak did resign the very next day. On that day, February 11th, she said she felt like:

Oh my goodness, my life has a meaning! I was hugging everyone, kissing, I don’t know who, and we were dancing on the streets, it was crazy… We went down the street and we were congratulating each other and I met my friend and we ran… we ran until we reached the street in downtown… I met many, many people, we were hugging each other, it’s wonderful opportunity.

She described a joyous, ecstatic city in those first moments after his Vice President announced Mubarak’s resignation. However, there was still a risk of the people in the Square being hurt. The subject described the group of “foreigners” who made a protective circle around the Egyptian people, because the national security officers were less likely to attack non-citizens, who could go to their embassy.

In the years following the revolution, the subject said that she was “not afraid any longer,” having been so “close to death.” She describes her hope following the revolution that “our social rules and traditions will be changed forever” by it, seeing as during the uprising “men and women were the same, some girls were smoking in public.” But she described the continuing abuses by police officers. She said of the pro-Mubarak forces during and after the revolution that they:
tried to break you. And they know that breaking a woman is easier. Because many, many women were participating, around 50 percent [of participants] or maybe more, I think… if they break women, they will break men and women both, because…if the man is not able to defend his woman, to protect his woman, it will… break him, and his dignity, his masculinity, it is very important. So if they break women, then they break men.

When asked about the impact of this on her, she said “I feel really scared. I tell people I am not scared of getting shot. I am scared of getting sexually harassed… this is the worst of it.” Aside from worrying about being attacked, she described how the constant fear of this was taking its own toll. She described the mentality of the police in 2013 as being “you chose the revolution, so you solve your own problem.” She said that for the police, the revolution was the “source of evil” on which everything gets blamed, and that “many people say this” now. In fact, she reported that the revolution has a “bad reputation now. Now you feel like the country is like sand, it doesn’t have a skeleton… you don’t have a strong government, you don’t feel secure.” That said, she did assert that “people now… are very aware, everyone is speaking politics. It’s a language. Nobody can make fun of you anymore.” She maintains that Egypt is “still in the process [of changing]… Egypt is a very old country, but democracy is a new trend. We are exploring, and learning, and organizing ourselves and I think it’s a very good thing.”

Asked about the future of women in Cairo, the subject outlined “two scenarios,” depending on whether the Muslim Brotherhood gives up power, or if it is taken away from them. If the Muslim Brotherhood does not step down, she said it will be a “disaster.” She says she “prays” that they will leave “every day and every night.” The other option, “if they don’t leave peacefully, will be bloody.”
Case Study Discussion

Employing the case study method to conduct our own interview was illuminating, in that engaging the individual in a longer interview gave a picture of the process of becoming a political activist, rather than just presenting the protestor at the end of that process. Our subject described herself as being “anti-revolution” before the uprising. She was the only participant to bring up previous anti-revolution sentiment in her past, and she spoke of how “everybody laughed” at the idea of the uprising at the start. Like many of the other people interviewed, the subject was unable to pinpoint one exact moment when she made the decision to get involved in the uprising. It is unlikely that one simple reason exists, given the complexity of the issue. However, throughout the interview she repeatedly referenced her community and the future of her country. She emphasized her feelings of “responsibility” and “obligation,” which would indicate that her sense of connection to her community was one of the strongest motivating factors, if not the strongest.

Examining her involvement, it is noticeable that very rarely in the over-an-hour long interview does the subject reference herself as an individual. She did tell her story in the first person, saying “I saw” and “I ran,” but she usually described her actions by describing whom she was helping or what was going on around her. For instance, she described coming back to Tahrir Square on the day after the Battle of the Camel to find all of her friends injured. She said that “when people need help, you help them,” using a universal “you” instead of phrasing it from her own point of view, as in “I helped because.” In addition to the phrasing of her responses, she referenced her “obligation” to the poor people of Egypt, describing the degree of poverty in her country and her own responsibility to help. Elaborating on her phrasing and her feeling of “obligation,” it would appear that she constructs her own identity nearer to the collectivist end of
the spectrum than to the independent. The overall effect is that she acted for the community, for
the country she “loves,” in addition to or perhaps more importantly than for herself.

The interview took on the quality of being more emotion–based than those available
through the “I Marched Along” project. Those interviews, for the most part, presented past
actions in a logical sequence, and participants described their behaviors in a very matter-of-fact,
logical tone. The overall impression of the nine people in the interviews was of a steady
progression towards getting involved, a consecutive set of behaviors during involvement, and
then a rational assessment of those behaviors once time had passed. However, with the subject of
the case study, the process was messier. She described how each moment made her feel, rather
than how each behavior triggered a response. As well as being more emotion than fact-based, her
account of the story included several unexpected elements, not referenced in any of the “I
Marched Along” interviews. For instance, she described the head cold she was suffering from for
the duration of the uprising, and any number of other personal factors which she felt contributed
to her experience personally.

Unlike the other participants, the case study subject framed the revolution within the
context of what else was going on in her life at the time. For instance, she spoke about how the
revolution impacted the business she was trying to start up. She was just starting a project similar
to this study, which involved women and children and the “unrepresented” sharing their stories
in online media. She did not expect a revolution that would delay her plans for the business.
Although her involvement in the revolution was as direct as the involvement of the other
participants, her interview gave a deeper sense of the person the revolution happened to. She was
an entrepreneur with no political history who went out to march in Tahrir for the country she
“loved,” not the ideal of the revolutionary popularized in the media.
On the subject of entrepreneurship and gender, the case study subject was at first unsure of what the question meant when she was asked how her gender impacted the development of her business. After giving it some thought, she said her gender was an asset to her business, and that men were more likely to help her get it running because she was a woman. In this way, she challenged the cultural stereotype of women not being small-business owners without having to go outside of her prescribed role. Framing this in terms of Michel Foucault’s power relationships, she was able to achieve agency in a male-dominated society without overthrowing the patriarchy or abandoning it. Going back to the style of feminism proposed in Mahmood (2005), the subject’s main goal was not to exist outside of male-dominated society, but to achieve self-realization within it. Foucault and Mahmood would construct her desire to start her own independent business as an “ethical freedom practice,” which would grant her agency and help her develop her own ethos, or personal code of conduct within a larger societal construct.

The subject did not appear to assign any significance to her gender, with the obvious exception being her fear of sexual harassment in the streets of Cairo. It was not that she did not want to talk about the experience of being a woman in Cairo, it was just that she had not examined what that meant before. Once again, this point serves to reinforce the great differences between how women live in Cairo, and how the media presents their lives. Western media in particular would be quick to label her as “oppressed” on the basis of the status of women in her hometown, but the subject had clearly taken agency in her own life by starting her own business. She did not depict herself as fitting either category usually offered to her in media coverage: either the victim to be pitied or the hero to be admired. Instead, she represented herself as a small business owner who happens to be a woman, who may use that fact to her advantage depending on the circumstances. It is one thing to notice patterns and discrepancies in oversimplification by
the media, and quite another to be confronted by the real woman occupying physical space who has been oversimplified.

Although it was never addressed directly, much of the information and the stories that the subject shared with us could be considered traumatic. She spoke very matter-of-factly about the violence she had witnessed and about the fear she lived with during those days, and in some respects continues to live with. Her composure was remarkable. She made several funny comments over the course of the interview, and her humor appeared to help her deal with the harshness of her experiences. At certain moments during the interview she acknowledged the role humor played in her coping. At one point she said “you have to laugh about these things,” again using the universal “you” rather than taking personal ownership of this idea. This comment begged the question of what happens when you cannot laugh about your experiences any more, but this topic was not brought up. Although what she had seen during the revolution would very likely qualify as trauma, when directly asked she said she had not been experiencing any nightmares. When we expressed concern about how she was feeling after having witnessed the uprising, she rushed to reassure us that she was okay, that she was dealing with it. She acknowledged the weight of what she had gone through, and referenced it being “hard” to cope with at first. However, she gave the appearance of having adjusted considerably well in the intervening years. The overall impression was one of strength and stability. We plan to remain in contact with her.

Conclusion

On a personal note, the most surprising thing about conducting this study was the quality of human resilience it revealed. Over and over again throughout our interview it became crystal clear how very much the subject of the case study had undergone. To be faced with the reality of
her position in this one-on-one setting was deeply moving. The subject of our case study, a student herself, a budding businesswoman, told us what it was like to breathe in the gas and lie to her parents so that she could reach Tahrir Square. She made a comment casually about not fearing death by guns or by knives, but being scared of sexual harassment at the hands of police officers. Of taking the risk to go to Tahrir Square, she said “Things will be better, or you will die.” And yet, considering the scope of the violent and tragic events she witnessed, how much more stirring was her resilience. Like Participant Six, who explained to her own daughters why she might not be coming home, the case study subject absolutely understood the chance that she might be killed. But she and hundreds of thousands of other unarmed, vulnerable women and men left their homes anyway.

Getting back to the research question, why? Why did she take that risk? The present study examined the factors which impacted her decision, and the decision of so many inspiring women, to take part in the Egyptian Revolution of 2011. A strong sense of connection to one’s social group, and of being an important member in that community, seems to have had the greatest influence on the decision to get actively involved. The subject of the case study spoke about her feelings of responsibility for her fellow citizens, a sentiment that appeared to be shared by many of the participants of the “I Marched Along” project. Participants spoke of their daughters, their business associates, their neighbors, and of all the citizens of Egypt at various points during the interviews, leaving one with an overall sense of the deep connections to their community that people who participated felt. It was fascinating to discover that no one interviewed in the “I Marched Along “ project or involved in the case study emphasized their own personal gains from the revolution. It is quite possible that, given the rampant poverty and human rights violations of the government under Mubarak, participants stood much to gain on a
personal level by protesting for his resignation. However, this research would suggest that it is just as possible that many of the protestors got involved for the sake of their communities, and not for themselves.

In terms of the impact of identification as a feminist on participation, it is clear that the majority of participants do not identify themselves as working for women’s empowerment specifically. Most were vague or spoke in generalizations about women’s empowerment while avoiding the use of the label “feminist.” However, those participants who did identify as feminists, and with those who strongly rejected the label, were more likely to participate actively. The subject of the case study did not identify as a feminist, and yet she spoke of her responsibility to the women of Egypt and how she hoped going to the Square would help change things for future generations of women. This would indicate that regardless of group identification, many of the men and women who joined the protest did so out of a belief that the situation of women in Egypt demanded it. Whether or not they labeled themselves feminist did not appear to influence how they felt about the rights of women in Egypt.

Several participants would appear to conform to Saba Mahmood’s definition of a self-realized woman in the Egyptian context. Her outline for how to assert agency within the constraints of a male-dominated society would explain how the participants examined for this research could identify as self-realized without throwing off the patriarchal systems present in Egypt.

The technological aspect of this revolution appears to have allowed for greater participation by women. The impact of being able to get actively involved in the uprising online without having to risk going out to the streets appears to have generated much more activity from
the female population in Cairo. It was difficult to get a sense of whether participants’ religion had a similar influence, owing to the small sample size.

There were many limits of the present study, the small number of participants being chief among them. Although the interview style of the “I Marched Along” project was advantageous in that it allowed for more in-depth exploration of motives, statistical data and representative numbers were impossible to garner given the methodology. Another concern was that the interviews which were examined were the published, edited versions. A look at the raw video footage before the editing process would have been very enlightening, and may have revealed much about the psychology behind motivation. Aside from these concerns, another limit to the present study was the timing. In the two years since the revolution, participant’s actions during the initial eighteen days were most likely embroidered by the participants’ recollections or changed drastically by personal bias, and may have been genuinely remembered incorrectly. The personal bias of wishing to control perceptions was an important mitigating factor, limiting the generalizability of the present study.

Future research in this area would ideally involve many, many more participants. In terms of subject matter, it would be fascinating to examine how religion influenced participation in the uprising. A longitudinal design could be very revealing in studying the impact that getting involved in the uprising had on the women who played active roles. More quantitative data would help flesh out the demographics of who exactly participated, and generate the necessary numbers to truly establish which factors had the greatest impact. More research is necessary into the daily lives of the women and men in Cairo before the revolution, as data on how lifestyles have changed is scarce. Hopefully, as more years pass between the end of Mubarak’s presidency and the present day, more information about specific roles will come to light.
Looking ahead, one salient point about the future of women in Egypt is its precariousness. Although this study revealed differences between the goals of feminism in the United States and feminism in Egypt, the general consensus between all participants is that the rights of women in Egypt, and the rights of Egyptian citizens in general, still need to be fought for. It is our hope that more research into their psychology will help illuminate the path going forward.
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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form

Name of Principle Investigator: Dr. June Chisholm
Name of Researcher: Kerry McBroom

Introduction

This informed consent form is for participants in a behavioral study, conducted through Pace University.

We would like to invite you to participate in our research. You may talk to anyone you feel comfortable talking with about the research, and you can take time to reflect on whether you want to participate or not. You can ask questions at any time, and will be assisted throughout the process.

Purpose of the research

The purpose of this study is to examine female participation in a political uprising. We plan to examine the factors that motivated women to take active roles in the “Arab Spring” uprising in Cairo in January 2011.

Type of Research Intervention

This research will involve you answering interview questions about your personal experience of the events surrounding January 25th, 2011. You will be asked about what role you played during that time, what motivated you to take action, and what the effect of those events has been on your life and on your community. That interview will be done online, via Skype.

Participant Selection

You are being invited to take part in this research because we feel that your experience as a participant in the political uprising in Cairo, especially as a woman, gives you a unique perspective on those events.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not. You may change your mind later and stop participating even if you agreed earlier. If you ever feel uncomfortable or wish to stop at any time, just tell the researcher, who will stop the interview immediately.
**Procedures**

We are asking you to help us learn more about the motivations behind activism. After we receive a signed copy of this form, we will set up a time that is convenient for you to be interviewed. We will be conducting the interview online, via Skype. We will not record it unless you specifically say it is alright with you, on the line below your signature on the next page. During the interview, we will ask you a series of questions about your personal experience. These questions are about what happened to you in the time leading up to the uprising on January 25\textsuperscript{th}, 2011, what roles you played in those events, and what has happened to you in the two years following those events. If you do not want to respond to a question, we will just skip it.

**Duration**

The interview will last approximately one hour. Or, if you prefer, we can break it up into a series of shorter interviews.

**Risks**

We are asking you to share personal information with us, and if you feel uncomfortable answering any question you are free to skip it. You do not have to give us any reason for not responding to any question. We want to make sure that you feel safe and comfortable during all of our research, and are very grateful to you for participating. Again, if there is anything that makes you feel awkward or uncomfortable, you can leave the study at any time.

**Benefits**

Your participation is likely to help us find out more about motivation behind activism, and the psychology behind female empowerment. You will not be provided with any direct incentive to take part in the research. Sharing your experience, and letting your voice be heard, will help fill some of the gaps in research as well as help guide and direct future research.

**Confidentiality**

We will not be sharing personal information about you, like your name or where you work, to anyone outside of the two researchers. The information that we collect from this research project will be kept private. Any information about you will have a number on it instead of your name. Only the researchers will know what your number is and it will not be shared.

**Right to Refuse or Withdraw**

You may stop participating at any time. You do not have to give the researchers a reason.
Whom to Contact

If you have any questions, please contact Kerry McBroome at km39516n@pace.edu or Dr. June Chisholm at jchisholm@pace.edu.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Pace University has approved the solicitation of subjects for this study. If you any questions or concerns, please contact the Office of Sponsored Research at 212.346.1273

Thank you for your participation!
Certificate of Consent

I have been invited to participate in research about female participation in the political uprising in Egypt.

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

0 Yes  0 No   Would it be alright with you if we recorded your interview?

0 Yes  0 No   If you said yes, would you like a copy of the recorded interview?

Print Name of Participant__________________

Signature of Participant ___________________

Date ___________________________

Day/month/year

Again, thank you!
APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

1. When did your involvement in the uprising in Cairo begin? Were you involved in political life before?

2. How did you get involved? What roles did you take on?

3. What were some of the factors that made you get involved? What were the difficulties that you faced in getting involved?

4. Before the uprising, what was your life like in your neighborhood in Cairo? How did being a woman affect your life?

5. Did you have a role model, a person within your community with whom you identified?

6. Share with us what you saw during the days of the uprising. What did it feel like on your street? In your neighborhood? In Tahrir Square?

7. Was technology (the internet, Twitter, Facebook) a big part of how you got involved?

8. What kinds of roles were other women taking on during the uprising?

9. In the first days after Mubarak stepped down, how did you feel? What did you think would happen to the women in your city? In your country?

10. In the two years since the uprising, what kinds of changes have you seen? What has happened that you did not expect?

11. What do you see as the future of women in Egypt? How do you see your role in that?
APPENDIX C

Debriefing Form

Purpose of this study

The study in which you just participated was designed to explore female participation in a political uprising. We interviewed you in order to examine the factors that motivated you to take on an active role in the Cairo political unrest.

Methodology

In this study you were asked questions about your experience of the uprising, what motivated you to participate in it, and what effect your participation had on you.

Additional Resources

For more information on the topic of this research, read “Women and globalization in the Arab Middle East: gender, economy, and society” by EA Doumato and MP Posusney.

Contact Information

If you are interested in learning more about the research being conducted, or the results of the research of which you were a part, please do not hesitate to contact Kerry McBroome, available at km39516n@pace.edu or Dr. June Chisholm, available at jchisholm@pace.edu.

Thank you for your help and participation in this study.