Uncovering Constructions of Gender and Sexuality in al-Ghazali’s 
Etiquette of Marriage

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to understand the constructions of gender and sexuality fundamentally a part of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali’s analysis of the virtue of marriage, as translated by Madelin Farah in *Marriage and Sexuality in Islam: A Translation al-Ghazālī’s Book on the Etiquette of Marriage From the Iḥyā’.* Specifically, my argument focuses on how Ghazali constructs his argument in favor of marriage, particularly how the themes of desire, duty, and virtue ingrained throughout, influence Ghazali’s discussion and analysis of marriage. I argue that these themes are products of Ghazali’s personal backstory and life experiences, and with this in mind I argue that the themes of desire, virtue and duty are fundamentally constructed and gendered based upon the interrelationship of the historical and societal contexts where Ghazali was living when he wrote the text, and his personal interpretation of sacred texts he uses to evidence his claims.

The analysis Ghazali presents in the *Etiquette* is fully dependent on his use of the Quran and Sunna (transmissions from the life of the Prophet) to evidence his claims. Therefore, this thesis also attempts to deconstruct Ghazali’s use of such textual evidence, giving special attention the inconsistencies between his own androcentric conclusions and the ideas present in the Quran and Sunna. This being said, this thesis seeks, first and foremost, to demonstrate specifically how Ghazali’s interpretation of sacred texts reflect particular constructions of sexuality and gender necessarily a part of his own life experiences, by paying attention to each gender’s distinct capacity to engage with the three themes.
I. Introduction

Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali al-Tusi (d. 1111) was both a scholar and a mystic. His reputation as one of the most influential Islamic scholars of all time is based upon Ghazali’s wide range of experiences with Islam during his lifetime. A devout Muslim, Ghazali trained for many years in the Sunni tradition before eventually becoming a teacher himself, most prominently as a professor teaching at Nizamiyya college in Bagdad. While his many years of commitment to training and teaching as a Sunni scholar are evident in his legacy, Ghazali also famously lived many years as a Sufi mystic. This interest in Sufism sparked four years into his tenure at Nizamiyya College, in 1095, after Ghazali suffered a spiritual crisis and deserted his teaching career, choosing to seclude himself and travel the surrounding regions for a period of eleven years. It was during this time that Ghazali wrote the *Ihya’ ‘ulum al-din*, the larger volume, in which his book on the Etiquette of Marriage is contained.

In the centuries before just before al-Ghazali’s lifetime, the formal structures of Islamic scholarship and governance were just being formed, and as expected this process was anything but simple. One of the major theological conflicts that occurred during this formation period was the debate happening between the traditionist schools of Islam and the “Innovators” as Ghazali called them.\(^1\) The innovators Ghazali specifically refers to in his autobiography, are similar to the Mutazalites who were notorious for deferring the authority of the Quran—believing it was created through human reasoning—instead giving preference to humanity’s capacity to independently judge and reason. At the core

of this conflict was the necessary expansion of Islamic theology (kalam) and jurisprudence (fiqh), where the practice of reasoning (the extent to which was the source of debate) became necessary as the needs of Islamic society evolved beyond the boundary of knowledge contained within the revealed texts of the Quran and Prophetic Model (Sunna). Regardless of the fact that Ghazali was born after the Mutazalites had lost most of their traction, his academic experiences were still fundamentally connected to and shaped by this same theological debate.

The most important connection between al-Ghazali and the theological conflict that predated him were the schools he trained in and eventually taught at. Ghazali studied and worked at Ashari schools, adherents to principles of the orthodox Sunni tradition. The founder of the Ashari schools was Abu 'l-Hasan al-Ashari (d. 935), a scholar who trained with Mutazalite but ended up leaving in 912 to found the Ashari schools.\(^2\) The schools he founded were distinct from the innovative tradition in which he trained, rather Al-Ashari actively chose to side with the Sunnism of the Traditionist movement.\(^3\) Unlike the innovators, the Traditionalists respected the authority of Revelation, believing that knowledge of God’s Will is revealed in the Quran and Sunna. Ultimately, since Ghazali was trained in a traditional school as opposed to an innovative one, he adopted a more traditional outlook as to the importance of revelation and the respect it garnered as authoritative sources of true religious knowledge.

In the Ashari Sunni orthodox setting, Ghazali studied kalam in depth with the influential scholar al-Juwayni until 1085 when his teacher died. Finally a learned scholar

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\(^3\) Ibid. 94-95
himself, Ghazali joined of a group of scholars close to Nizam al-Mulk, the Minister of the Seljuq state, who six years later, eventually appointed al-Ghazali to a professor position at the Nizamiyya College in Bagdad. This job marked the height of Ghazali’s scholarly career and gained him much celebrity amongst scholars and the community in Bagdad. However this period of his life was short lived, and did not last long despite the success and prestige he enjoyed as a professor at the university. Ghazali abandoned his position and family in 1095, and left Bagdad choosing to seclude himself in hopes of renewing his religion. This point in Ghazali’s life is very important to understanding this thesis as it marks the beginning of Ghazali’s exploration into Sufism while also being the period of time when Ghazali wrote his famous work *Ihya’ ‘ulum al-din*, “Revival of Religious Sciences”.

Early in 1078, Ghazali briefly was introduced to Sufism when he trained with the Sufi master Farmadhi. At that time he decided to focus his studies on *kalam* and *fiqh* but Ghazali’s ties to Sufism were renewed after leaving Bagdad. Unlike his formal Ashari training with al-Juwayni, his exploration into the world of Sufism was completely independent, learning at first from the writings of Sufi masters and eventually cementing his knowledge through lived experiences of Sufi practices. In his autobiography, *Deliverance from Error (al-Munqidh min al-Dalal)*, Ghazali writes about how first he familiarized himself with Sufi ideology and practice by reading all the preeminent books on Sufism. Eventually his exploration into Sufism was necessarily expanded beyond the relevant literature and he began practicing Sufism, gaining knowledge through what he called “fruitional experience”. Here, in his own words he explains the transition away
from scholarship and into Sufism, and most importantly the distinction between revealed and rational knowledge:

I knew with certainty that the Sufis were masters of states, not purveyors of words, and that I had learned all I could by way of theory. There remained, then, only what was attainable, not by hearing and study, but by fruitional experience and actually engaging in the way. From the sciences which I had practiced and the methods which I had followed in my inquiry in to the two kinds of knowledge, revealed and rational, I had already acquired a sure and certain faith in God Most High, in the prophetic mediation of revelation, and in the last Day. These three fundamentals of our Faith had become deeply rooted in my soul, not because of any specific, precisely formulated proof, but because of reasons and circumstances and experiences too many to list in detail.4

From this passage it is clear that after leaving teaching and Baghdad behind, Ghazali began to experiment with different ways of gaining knowledge, specifically through “fruitional experience”5. The meaning of fruitional experience is not entirely clear in the passage because of issues with translation, but for the purposes of this discussion, fruional experience is understood to mean gaining knowledge of Islam (religious knowledge) through immediate experiences of Islam, as opposed to exclusively receiving already revealed knowledge from scholars and other authority figures. Ghazali clearly is conveying the idea that fruitional experience is preferable and more fruitful than other sources of knowledge, highlighting the benefits of religious knowledge revealed by oneself, through one’s own experiences, over revealed knowledge reasoned and handed down to the community by scholars.

4 McCarthy 78
5 Fruitional experience is what McCarthy translates *al-dhawq* to mean, which if literally translated means taste or tasting
This emphasis on the relationship between experiences and knowledge is in part reacting to an Islamic culture that Ghazali felt was out of touch with the needs of the common Muslim believer. In the passage Ghazali expresses the reality that not only did he gain knowledge about his religion through religious experiences but also, that these religious experiences are what solidified his faith, more so than any scholarly proof was capable of. The creation and proliferation of proofs and theory by scholars and teachers in Islamic schools was a tradition that Ghazali was fighting against. Ghazali felt strongly that such rational and formal thinking was meaningless since it was rather inaccessible to common Muslim, and also feeling that proofs and theories did fully address the needs of the common believer. This issue was fundamentally personal to Ghazali being that the pursuit of such reasoning and intellect was the main instigator in him leaving the university and Bagdad.

Believing himself and his religion to be corrupted after succumbing to the pleasures of fame and fortune enjoyed by his position at the university, Ghazali suffered a spiritual crisis. Aware of the corruption within himself, Ghazali left his teaching post in an attempt to renew and revitalize his religious life, hoping to find a new path that would positively affect his position in the hereafter. In *Deliverance from Error*, Ghazali blames his corruption on the attachment he feels to the world, feeling as though he has not invested enough energy in restraining himself from desiring worldly things. Again, his autobiography is helpful in illuminating the exact nature of his crisis and how his religious outlook evolved from the crisis:

It had already become clear to me that my only hope of attaining beatitude in the afterlife lay in piety and restraining my soul from passion. The beginning of all that, I knew, was to sever my heart’s attachment to the
world by withdrawing from this abode of delusion and turning to the mansion of immortality and devoting myself with total ardor to God Most High. That, I knew, could be achieved only by shunning fame and fortune and fleeing from my preoccupations and attachments. I also considered my activities—the best of them being public and private instruction—and saw that in them I was applying myself to sciences unimportant and useless in this pilgrimage to the hereafter. Then I reflected on my intention in my public teaching, and I saw that it was not directed purely to God, but rather was instigated and motivated by the quest for fame and widespread prestige.  

Readily apparent in passage above, late in his post at the university, Ghazali became very self-critical and began to question his authority and his knowledge as a scholar and teacher. He questioned his motivations for his work and ultimately, became fed up with the loftiness of his position and work. The passage expresses that his desire to leave Bagdad was fueled by a desire to devote himself more fully to God, claiming that studying and teaching *kalam* did not fully satisfy the obligation of devotion. From this it is clear that for Ghazali was most concerned with how his professional life distracted him away from God rather bringing him closer; realizing that his professional ambitions and desires where of this world and garnered little importance when preparing for the next.

Ghazali’s experiences with Sufism and fondness for Sufi theology were clear influences on his ideas about Islam and its practice as presented in the *Ihya* and the *Etiquette*. Ghazali’s biggest motivation for abandoning his career was that he was becoming frustrated scholarship, feeling as though scholars were forgetting the true purpose of Islam, which was in his eyes mainly concerned “…the preparation of man for the life of the world-to-come.”  

This theme of preparation for the hereafter is something Ghazali adopted after familiarizing himself with Sufism and its ideals, and ultimately this

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6 McCarthy 78-79
7 Watt 113
theme would become huge a part of his ambition in writing the *Ihya*. The reality that Ghazali wrote the *Ihya* during his period of isolation and exploration into mysticism is a signifier that through the work, Ghazali was responding to a system or school of thought he disagreed with.

Montgomery Watt writes how Ghazali criticized the scholars of his time for being too focused with academic and juristic concerns that did not readily relate to the experience of the everyday Muslims. He says, “[al-Ghazali] regarded the religious sciences, as these were expounded in his time, as contributing very little to a man’s attainment of future bliss…The sciences were being pursued in an academic fashion that was out of touch with the needs of the ordinary man in the contemporary world.”

In response to this quandary Ghazali’s thoughts and writings became more invested in and reflective of Islamic orthodox tradition and the knowledge revealed in Quran and transmitted through hadith of the Sunna after leaving Bagdad and becoming a Sufi. His experiences with Sufism, urge Ghazali in his writing to emphasize not only the importance of complying with God’s Will, but also how religious experiences and practices affect state of one’s souls and position in the hereafter. This becomes evident in the *Etiquette*, specifically in the particular ways Ghazali writes about the self, the soul, and how marriage could directly affect the virtues of these entities.

**II. Authority and Purpose of the *Ihya* and *Etiquette***

At the height of his career, during his time as a professor at the Nīzāmiyya School in Bagdad, Ghazali was especially well respected, confident, and most importantly for this thesis, Ghazali was readily accustomed to speaking freely with authority and being

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8 Watt 163
well received. To better understand the argument of this thesis is important to first understand how Ghazali positions himself as an authority so that he can write a work as expansive and detailed as the *Ihya* and the *Etiquette*. The trope of authority is especially important to this thesis on Ghazali, given that just before writing the *Ihya* al-Ghazali had completely changed his religious perspective and practice from Sunnism to Sufism. This being said, Ghazali immediately asserts himself as an authority at the very beginning of the *Etiquette* in citing multiple Quranic passages and Prophetic commandments. This demonstration of knowledge and presenting revelation of the Quran and Sunna, firmly grounds Ghazali and his authority as a thinker and possessor of knowledge in the Islamic tradition. Furthermore, with his extensive background and experience with the Quran, hadith transmissions, and the writings of Sufi masters, Ghazali is emboldened, as an authoritative figure, with a sort of triple authority in writing the *Ihya*.

In writing the *Ihya* Ghazali viewed himself as the “renewer of religion”, signaling further that he was dissatisfied with the current climate of the Islam and desired to approach religion in a new way (Sufism). The *Ihya* is Ghazali’s attempt to re-familiarize the common Muslim with their religion and provide a guide for them to lead a religious life in line with the Truth as revealed in the Quran and Sunna. Eric Ormsby describes of *Ihya* saying, “To call it a “blueprint” for action would be inadequate; rather, it is more of a script, the exact import of which can only be realized in performance.” From this, it can be understood that Ghazali fully expected that the knowledge contained within the *Ihya* and the *Etiquette* influence Muslim’s conduct and practice of Islam.

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Ghazali’s rhetorical strategy and point of view in the *Etiquette* demonstrates a vast understanding of Islam and its views regarding marriage, as he draws influence from a variety of different sources of religious knowledge (*kalam*, philosophy, Sufism). This variety of influences and spheres of knowledge enable Ghazali to build up his authority, which in turn legitimizes the perspectives and ideas he interprets from the sources he cites. The sense of authority Ghazali creates is an especially important feature of the *Etiquette*, especially after a close reading of the textual material used by Ghazali reveals that his argument regarding the virtue of marriage might not be pure revelation word for word. Inconsistencies between the analysis of Quranic verses used by Ghazali and the verses in their full form, demonstrate that Ghazali’s arguments in the *Etiquette* are a product of the inter-relationship between his personal interpretation of sacred material and his personal biases, evolved out of his particular social and historical context. The result of this inter-relationship of interpretation and social/historical context is al-Ghazali’s fundamentally gendered argument about the virtue of marriage, and this is the primary concern of this thesis.

**III. Analysis of Quranic Verses Used in the *Etiquette***

In order to adequately evidence his argument in favor of marriage, major components of Ghazali ideas were taken from Islamic sacred texts, the Quran and Sunna (sing. hadith). Throughout his analysis Ghazali smartly cites Quranic verses or hadith transmissions in an exhaustive effort to substantiate his claims. This being said, there are inconsistencies between Ghazali’s ideas and discussion as presented in the *Etiquette*, and the corresponding Qur’anic verses. At times it is clear that Ghazali is more inspired by the textual material, using the religious truths and applying them to his own agenda and
ideas. For Ghazali, this tendency to exaggerate and manipulate the messages of the sacred verses and transmissions is a strategy—a strategy critical to his argument.

Chapter one of The Etiquette of Marriage begins with a disclaimer. The chapter starts, “Be it known that the *ulema* have disagreed over the virtue of marriage,”\(^{10}\) openly acknowledging the lack of consensus amongst scholars over the sanctity of marriage. Ghazali purpose then, in the *Etiquette*, is to clear up this confusion and take a definitive position on the virtue of marriage. Ultimately, Ghazali’s overarching argument in the book is that marriage is virtuous and should be pursued by all those who are capable of fulfilling the responsibilities bestowed upon spouses. Attempting to prove his argument in favor of marriage is true, Ghazali makes every effort to ground his analysis about marriage firmly in Revelation. Most importantly, his argument about the virtue of marriage is predicated upon the idea that God created marriage, and thus humans are obligated to participate in marriage as God Willed.

While Ghazali uses many verses and transmissions to evidence his claims, this section of my thesis focuses on three specific Quranic verses cited by Ghazali to demonstrate the gendered attributes of Ghazali’s conclusions. Additionally, the verses too were chosen specifically because they demonstrate particular themes present in Ghazali’s analysis of marriage. These themes—virtue, duty, and desire—are all interconnected and dependent on one another for the clarity of Ghazali’s argument, and furthermore, these themes all have some basis or foundation in the Quran or Sunna.

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Ghazali’s main argument is concerned principally with conveying the virtue of marriage as he tries in the *Etiquette* to convince men to marry, and so necessarily he uses both Quran and Sunna to bolster this controversial opinion. The theme of virtue is especially important to Ghazali’s discussion of marriage for a couple reasons, but a large component of his argument regarding the virtue of marriage is connected to his discussion of procreation and the virtue in having children. To evidence this particular claim Ghazali quotes Quran 52:21 as an explanation of the rewards to come for believers who have children. In Abdel Haleem’s translation of the Quran the verse reads: “We unite the believers with their offspring who followed them in faith—We do not deny them any in faith—We do not deny them rewards for their deeds: each person is in pledge for his own deeds” [Quran 52:21]. It is important to note here and realize that this verse makes no use of gendered pronouns, a distinct difference than how Ghazali uses the verse in his own analysis. As cited below Ghazali uses this verse to incentivize men to marry on the basis that God reunites believers with their children paradise, a reward exclusive to faithful believers, emphasizing that each person is responsible for their own actions. Because the attainment of virtue is related with the having children in the Quran, procreation becomes a necessary component of Ghazali’s argument when arguing about the virtue of marriage.

When Ghazali uses the same verse, he frames it to emphasize that procreation and having children cultivates virtue—apparently only addressing men given his use of “he”—arguing that God favors those married with children because He has declared that they will be rewarded for their good deeds. Ghazali writes,
He [the believer] is rewarded for his invocations and good deeds, for he has earned them, and he is not rebuked for his ill deeds; for the sin of a sinner is not superimposed upon another. For that reason the Almighty declared, "We cause their progenies to join them, and We deprive them of naught of their (life's) work" [Kor. 52:21]; that is, we do not take away from their deeds and we make their children an addition to their good deeds.\footnote{Farah 57-58, brackets/parentheses added by translator}

While our translations of the Quran differ, the resulting interpretations of the text remain similar, with the takeaways both being that the verse emphasizes virtue of marriage and procreation by bringing attention to the rewards one earns if married with children. While Ghazali’s use of the pronoun “he” does not fundamentally change the message conveyed, is important to make note of it, especially since Ghazali reproduces the same gendered pronouns throughout the work. Evidence that his androcentric tendencies are not just a product of his own interpretation, Ghazali’s further uses transmissions of Prophetic model (Sunna) which he himself was not responsible for transmitting, which demonstrates how his historical contexts and also give way to the patriarchal ideas and constructions present in the \textit{Etiquette}. Therefore when Ghazali quotes the Prophet as having said, “Whoever refrains from my sunna, he is not of me, and marriage is part of my sunna. Whoever loves me, let him follow my sunna,”\footnote{Ibid. 48} it should be understood that the use of male-normative language in this transmission is not Ghazali’s but of the original transmitter. Irrespective of the gender issues, this statement by the Prophet contribute to the sense of virtue Ghazali is attempting to construct around marriage, but it also defines marriage as a sort of religious duty and obligation.
The theme of marriage as fulfillment of religious duty arises in the first few paragraphs of chapter one, and to effectively demonstrate that marriage is a religious duty and obligation Ghazali, again, relies heavily on textual material both from the Quran and hadith. Vital to this idea that marriage is a religious duty for Muslims is the idea that marriage is a divine construct and divinely sanctioned—this implies that marriage is divine imperative, and so following suit Ghazali argues that God created marriage, obligating Muslims to marry and multiply in fulfillment of His creation plan. As evidence for this premise Ghazali presents the reader with three Quranic citations, one of which (discussed here) deftly expresses the theme of marriage being a religious duty. Strategically, he cites Quran 13:38, fully aware that it challenges the reader to fulfill their duty and enact God’s Will, while at the same time, also imbuing a sense urgency into Muslims regarding their obligation to marry. Again using Haleem’s translation, the verse reads: “We sent messengers before you and gave them wives and offspring; no messenger was given the power to produce a miracle except with God’s permission. There was a Scripture for every age;” [Quran 13:38]. Ghazali uses this verses brilliantly as it doubly conveys the necessity of marriage, referencing the messengers the God sent as models for believers to follow. Although in Haleem’s translation “messengers” is not capitalized, when Ghazali’s uses the same verse he capitalizes the word messengers, making a clear allusion to virtue of complying with the Prophet and His Sunna.13

As argued earlier Ghazali perceives marriage to be God’s divine Will for humanity, framing marriage as necessary obligation of humanity to fulfill His creation

13 Ghazali uses Quran 13:38 in the following context: “God has said in describing and praising messengers: "And, indeed, We sent Messengers before thee, and We gave them wives and children” [13:38 (cAli)]. Thus he said this in the context of praise and in pointing out excellence.” Farah 47-48
and Ghazali uses a similar argument with regards to the final theme of desire. Ghazali’s discussion of desire is thoroughly gendered as he attempts to simultaneously addressing two distinct audiences, the Sunni man and the Sufi mystic, seemingly forgetting to address the function or existence of desire in females. He approaches sexual desire as a trope he feels forced to address given the commonality of this experience amongst Muslim men, however, at the same time Ghazali is also trying to address ascetics who need to be convinced of the value of marriage. Therefore, al-Ghazali’s approach to sexual desire is formatted so that men with or without sexual appetites can benefit from his guidance in the *Etiquette*.

Seeking to effectively reach both audiences with his message about marriage, Ghazali must situate his argument about desire in the sacred tradition so that both groups of Muslims feel compelled to marry based upon his conclusions. To do so, Ghazali again draws upon themes of creation and divine imperative, this time arguing that God imbued sexual desire into humanity. His argument is reliant upon the assumption that God created sexual desire in people to ensure the survival of humanity, creating an innate desire within everyone to procreate. In speaking about the advantages of marriage, Ghazali cites *Quran 7:189* to demonstrate that God intended wives to provide companionship for men. This sense of companionship is important as it finally provides some specific insight as to the role of women in marriage. Here specifically Ghazali use of the verse sheds light on how women provide comforting reprieve for men from the stresses of life saying, “The companionship of women provides relaxation which relieves distress and soothes the heart. It is incumbent upon the pious to acquire such comfort by permissible means. For that reason Almighty God declared, "that he might take rest in
her” [Kor. 7:189].” But moreover, the whole verse also emphasizes a wife’s capacity to provide sexual satisfaction for her husband, in her role as his licit sexual companion. The full translation, again using Abdel Haleem’s, describes God’s process of creation and His intention behind the institution of marriage, being both to comfort men but also as a means of facilitating procreation. The verse reads:

It is He who created you all from one soul, and from it made its mate so that he might find comfort in her: when one [of them] lies with his wife and she conceives a light burden, going about freely, then grows heavy, they both pray to God, their Lord, ‘If You give us a good child we shall certainly be grateful,’ [Quran 7:189]

The full form of the verse arguably describes the process of men and women lying together and producing offspring, and although Ghazali only cites the first half of the verse, the verse in its entirety also resonates with Ghazali’s wider argument about desire in the Etiquette. This verse, too, is essential in that it is readily applicable to both Ghazali’s Sunni and Sufi audiences. Given that both groups are concerned primarily with following God’s Will, as revealed in the Quran and Sunna, both groups can benefit from the revelation and become closer to God through the desire for children.

**IV. Analysis of Gendered Themes Virtue and Desire in the Etiquette**

After demonstrating the inconsistencies in language and analysis between the sources of knowledge Ghazali uses and his resulting conclusions, this thesis now turns to analyzing the respective inequalities between the genders and their differing abilities to engage with the themes of duty, desire, and virtue.

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14 Farah 65
The first chapter of the *Etiquette, “Advantages and Disadvantages of Marriage”* provides knowledge on not only what the Islamic tradition says about the virtue of marriage, but also in the chapter Ghazali introduces what he considers to be the benefits and drawbacks of marriage. Here again, the three key themes come up in his analysis—duty (religious obligation), desire, and virtue—and remain important themes throughout the work, reiterated in the other two chapters as well. Duty, desire, and virtue are the three ideas Ghazali returns again and again throughout his discussion of why marriage is, in and of itself, religious. However, as this project seeks to demonstrate, access to fulfillment of these themes is gendered, with some opportunities being exclusive to men while others are only available to women. Having said this, the *Etiquette* attempts to provide all knowledge necessary for a proper understanding of these themes, which together essentially make marriage an obligation for Muslims. Ghazali’s argument in favor of marriage is premised upon the notion that God intended humans to marry, arguing that God’s creation plan is fulfilled when Muslims fulfill their duty to marry. This necessity of fulfilling God’s plan is where the theme of duty becomes important, as Ghazali believes Muslim men taking wives is exactly what God intended men to do, meaning it is the duty of Muslims to comply with His intentions and Muslims gain virtue by complying. Ghazali’s strategy of appealing to Muslims’ sense of religious duty only works if he constructs marriage as a divine imperative, or as a part of God’s larger divine plan. Similarly, the theme of desire becomes an important function of marriage being a divine construct.

At the climax of a promising academic career the teacher gave up his position after admitting to himself that his ambition had corrupted his faith. Fearing that his
religion had become corrupted and thereby he had potentially compromised his place in paradise, with the *Ihya*, Ghazali is particularly invested in securing his readers from such a fate, seeking to provide instruction on ways one can cultivate virtue and avoid corruption. One of the strategies Ghazali uses to convey the importance of marriage is the promise of virtue (in the fight against corruption) for those who marry, both men and women. To evidence this claim of the virtue of marriage Ghazali cites a hadith saying “If someone whose religion and trustworthiness you approve should come to you, then get him married; if you do not, you will cause discord on earth and great corruption.”

Here again, in the pursuit of virtue, Ghazali argues that marriage is a divine construct, this time the intended consequence being the dissipation of corruption present in individuals and in society. This divine command then is most definitely related to the theme of duty mentioned earlier, only now there is an additional duty placed on believers—combating corruption. Given how Ghazali came to write the *Ihya*, it is obvious that he himself was familiar with the consequences of corruption and so, in the *Etiquette*, he spotlights the destructive forces of corruption and how easily one is corrupted. This prophetic commandment cited above not only warns about the potential for discord and corruption but it also works to imbue the reader with a sense of duty—not only to get married, but also to combat corruption of all kinds. In light of this, Ghazali features marriage as a source of virtue for both genders, although the actions through which one gains virtue in marriage is gendered, with men benefitting the most.

For men specifically, Ghazali presents marriage as an opportunity to combat personal corruption, any corruption existing within oneself. Prominently, in the section

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15 Farah 49
where Ghazali writes about the advantage of satisfying sexual desire, men are discussed as becoming corrupted due to extreme lust and sexual desire, and marriage is presented as the solution to help alleviate the potential for such corruption. Addressing men and women, Ghazali speaks about marriage and the responsibilities of spouses dutifully fulfilled by virtuous Muslims. While Ghazali clearly states that women are capable of gaining virtue through being a wife, the most powerful analogy Ghazali uses to convey the virtue of marriage is exclusive to men. When married Ghazali says that men become guardians, as the responsibilities that come with being a husband and father have to do with maintenance and care of his wife and children. Ghazali is well aware that the responsibilities of the husband, maintenance and guardianship of his wife and children have potential to dissuade potential husbands. In response to this he emphasizes the importance and prestige attributed to being a husband and guardian, saying that if those who avoid responsibility were not afraid, “the Prophet would not have said ‘One day of just guardianship is more preferable than seventy of worship.’ Then he said, ‘Indeed, every one of is a shepherd, and every one of you is responsible for his flock.’” This hadith forces men to seriously consider marriage—especially those considering becoming an ascetic—labeling all men as shepherds capable of fulfilling the responsibilities to his family, the implication being, that being a husband and a guardian also serves God’s will.

Females are largely left unaddressed in the Etiquette and in the brief passages concerning women and their means to attaining virtue, it is clear that women are perceived by Ghazali to be subservient to men. The basis for this view is evidenced by the fact that the most detailed discussion of women and the cultivation of virtue Ghazali

16 Farah 68
provides is mentioned in the passages describing “ordering the household”, this being a wife’s primary avenue through which she is capable of cultivating the virtue. In this section he says, “The virtuous woman who takes care of the house abets religiousness in this manner, and any disturbance of these preoccupations would perturb the heart and impede life.” Here Ghazali clearly is only appropriating a particular responsibility to females that he feels men should not have to be bothered with, as he presents so textual basis for this claim. This patriarchal idea is a reproduction of Ghazali’s societal context, as he continues this train of thought by citing Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī’s sentiment that “Her contribution to freeing [the man] is by both taking care of the house and satisfying sexual desire.” From this statement it would seem that the real responsibility of females is to unburden her husband, guarding him from bearing any unnecessary burden. Ghazali presents this responsibility very seriously, despite the fact that might not quite compare to the exaltation of virtue projected onto the male in his role as guardian.

In trying to tease out other gendered constructions of sexuality, which are also fundamentally connected to the three main themes in the Etiquette, al-Ghazali clearly discusses his opinion that sexuality is a means, first and foremost, to producing children. In chapter one where Ghazali describes the advantages and disadvantages to marriage, coincidently the first advantage he describes is procreation. Although not explicitly stated, procreation being described first is an indicator of its importance and the intimate relationship between marriage and procreation. The benefits and importance of

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17 Ibid. 66
18 Farah 66-67, brackets added by author. I assume this is an interpretation, a necessary component of translation.
19 Ghazali spends by far the most effort describing this advantage, and his analysis procreation is much longer than any of the other advantages (Satisfaction of desire being a close second.)
having children, as stressed by Ghazali, is based on the Prophet’s command, “marry and multiply!”20 Given the diversity of views expounded about sexuality nowadays, Ghazali’s construction of sexuality as merely means to procreate seems to be a rather narrow construction of sexuality. However, the limited function of sexuality, as presented by Ghazali, is intentional and is a direct consequence of Ghazali’s explanation and construction of sexual desire.

The constructions of sex and sexual desire fundamental to al-Ghazali’s argument about marriage in the Etiquette are unique in that they are intimately related to his interpretation and exaggeration of creation stories in the Quran. Remembering that Ghazali’s ideas about sexuality are particularly biased in favor of marriage it becomes necessary to understand why Ghazali feels compelled to defend the virtue of marriage. In the introduction, Ghazali reminds readers in the first couple lines that creation exists not by accident, but by way of God’s Compassion, Benevolence, and Will. Explaining to the reader that creation did not happen on accident (nor does it presently) immediately sends the message that God willed creation, in congruence with a specific logic or plan He had in mind. Cleverly, asserting himself as someone informed of God’s plan for creation, Ghazali authoritatively cites the Quran, confidently informing readers of the role marriage plays in God’s plan for humanity:

One of His marvelous favors is creating human beings out of water [Kor. 21:30], causing them to be related by lineage and marriage, and subjecting creatures to desire through which He drove them to tillage (hirāthah) and thereby forcibly preserved their descendants.21

20 Farah 54
21 Farah 45
Here Ghazali clearly is referring both to the creation of marriage and the creation of human beings, however interestingly, the creation narrative Ghazali describes above is mostly a product of his own interpretation. In reality Quran 21:30 reads “Are the disbelievers not aware that the heavens and the earth used to be joined together and that we ripped them apart, that we made every living thing from water? Will they not believe?,” essentially making no reference to marriage, desire, or procreation. The idea, then, that marriage was established (by God) as means organizing sexual relationships between male and females, is a product of Ghazali’s rhetorical strategy, a combination of his interpretation of the text, informed by sentiments common to his social context. Since Ghazali’s argument is less a direct representation of revelation, his conclusions represent more of an ideal situation, which perhaps Ghazali is purporting as the truth so that he can argue that Muslims have a responsibility to comply with His Will and get married. That being said, desire too, according to Ghazali’s personal interpretation, is also divinely inspired, intended to function as an instinct facilitating and encouraging procreation.

While traditionally, marriage would not preclude a couple’s ability to procreate, in this context, where humanity is “related by lineage and marriage”, marriage before engagement in sexual relations is necessary and assumed.\textsuperscript{22} Inserting marriage into the creation story allows Ghazali to argue that God created marriage as a means of ordering creation, implying that as members of creation, humanity must comply with God’s will and marry. Further purporting that marriage is a divine imperative, Ghazali recounts the precautions God took to ensure that men and women live together married. Here he describes all the steps God took to secure marriage as an inevitability for all Muslims:

\textsuperscript{22} This is true in Ghazali’s argument and furthermore this sentiment aligns with Quranic repudiations of pre-martial sex of which there are 27 according to Boudihaba.
“Then he glorified the matter of lineage, ascribed to it great importance, forbade on its account illegitimacy and strongly denounced it through restrictions and reprimands and a serious matter, and encouraging marriage through desire and command.”²³ This quote, also a part of Ghazali’s introduction, brings the themes of duty, desire and virtue to the forefront of his argument in favor of marriage, as he attempts to convince his readers that God sanctioned marriage on those very same premises. In disclosing all the effort God expended trying to reveal and reinforce the virtue of marriage, Ghazali hopes to appeal to Muslim’s sense of religious duty, which essentially obligates them to marry. Everything, all the knowledge Ghazali divulges in the *Ihya*, is predicated on the assumption that if believers were made aware of the true path or way they would always act in compliance because God wanted it so.

Ghazali’s interpretation of sex as exclusively a mechanism to procreation, premised on the notion that desire and children were foreordained together by God. In the previous quotation Ghazali says, “He drove them to tillage²⁴ (*hirāthah*) and thereby forcibly preserved their descendants,” iterating the idea that God imbued men and women with sexual desire to secure the existence of humanity in the future. Constructed in this way, desire intentionally becomes something greater than the pursuit of sexual pleasure, making it seem as though God never intended sex to function solely as a means to achieving pleasure—whereas in reality sexuality has a much more layered and dignified purpose. In his book *Sexuality in Islam* Abdelwahab Bouhdiba describes sexuality and

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²³ Farah 45
²⁴ In her footnotes Farah gives Montgomery Watt’s interpretation of tillage, saying he interprets tillage as metaphor comparing intercourse with sowing seeds, with the eventual children being the fruit of the womb.
love as “mimicry of the creative act of God.” Therefore, by indulging one’s sexuality and conceiving children, humanity is participating in God’s creation as He willed, and sexual pleasure is reduced to being of little consequence.

Ghazali openly admits that looking beyond the pleasurable connotations of sexual intercourse is difficult, claiming that knowledge of the true purpose “can be revealed only to a pure heart in proportion to its purity,” which is dependent upon “the extent that it resists the world's pleasures, its enticements, and its snares.” Sex for Ghazali cannot simply be reduced to sexual pleasure because Ghazali is not concerned with worldly ambitions such as the pleasure associated with sex—instead he is concerned primarily with ambitions to experience the hereafter. Sexual pleasure is a worldly desire, not only because the pursuit of such is an aspiration completely bereft of religion and God, but also because the pleasure sex brings cannot be fully enjoyed. True pleasure is earned by faithful believers only in the hereafter, and one can only experience pleasure fully in there in paradise. Ghazali says “The pleasure which accompanies it [sex]—pleasure which would be unrivaled were it to last—is a harbinger of the promised pleasures in paradise.” Here he is emphasizing the relative lack of pleasure sexual intercourse brings, believing there is no pleasure in a sensation and feeling that does not last. However, he promises faithful believers, those with pure hearts, that there are unparalleled pleasures waiting for them in the hereafter. By categorizing sex as procreation and reducing sexual pleasure to the lowly position of worldliness, Ghazali is

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26 Farah 60
27 Farah 60, brackets added by me for clarity
able to further convince people of the virtues of marriage in relation to their needs of satisfying both desire and religious duty.

Given Ghazali’s expectation that men and women equally restrict their sexual instincts and desires to martial relationships, despite perhaps obvious difficulties of complying with this, Ghazali writes that he cannot possibly imagine any other use for sexuality besides procreation. Instead he chooses vehemently believe that sex and sexual desire exist simply as functions in God’s divine plan for creation. However, Ghazali openly acknowledges the benefit of satisfying sexual desire when married and smartly uses this reality to his benefit in listing “satisfaction of sexual desire” as one of the advantages of marriage. In this way desire functions in conjunction with marriage, both as potential incentive to get married and also as means for gaining virtue through procreation. Outside the boundaries of marriage, Ghazali takes a hardline against men satisfying sexual desire, warning that such behavior only results in corruption of one’s religion.

The obligation of marriage before procreating is one of the most important components of Ghazali’s argument, and so necessarily he reiterates this idea many times throughout the book. Citied earlier, this responsibility is first presented to the readers in the introduction and Ghazali reinforces this idea again in the beginning of the first chapter. Before detailing the advantages and disadvantages to marriage Ghazali presents the reader with verses from the Quran and hadith transmissions on marriage, situating his own analysis within the traditional textual framework of what had already been revealed on the subject. The passages of Quran and Hadith he presents are meant to evidence the

28 Ibid 60
claim that marriage is not only virtuous, but also that marriage is intended as a precursor to procreation. Quoting the Quran, Ghazali authoritatively naturalizes the incidence of marriage before having children “Our Lord, grant us of our wives and children the delight of our eyes, and make us a model for the righteousness.” This commandment demonstrates the necessity and virtue of marriage, while also reinforcing the proper order in which things come—wives then children is Divine Will. The primary function of arguing that marriage must be secured first, before having children, is that Ghazali wants his readers to believe that marriage and procreation are both a part of the natural system God put in place for humanity. This argument cleverly places further responsibility on Muslims by advising them to participate in God’s creation so that they might gain virtue and become righteous models.

Upon reflecting on Ghazali’s use of the theme of desire in the *Etiquette* a connection between desire and the trope of gender becomes important when analyzing the conclusions presented by Ghazali regarding desire. Being that the book is clearly addressed exclusively to a male audience, it is no surprise that Ghazali’s concept of desire is gendered. In his writing he never openly acknowledges female desire, making it appear as if only males are affected by sexual desire. Sexual desire is a trope Ghazali is forced to address, given the commonality of this problem amongst typical Muslim men, in addition to Ghazali’s obligation to address ascetics needing to be convinced of the value of marriage. When speaking to individuals whose desires habitually overpower their capacity for restraint, Ghazali offers a hadith imploring the necessity that their desire be controlled through licit channels. He quotes, “the Messenger of God

\[29\] Farah 48
commanded that everyone who sees a woman and is attracted to her should have intercourse with his wife, for that would ward off temptation.” From this hadith transmission, not only it is very clear that sexual relations should only occur between spouses, but the transmission also demonstrates the gender component of Ghazali’s argument about desire. This quotes conveys the idea that men actively desire sex, and thereby women are simply vehicles to satisfaction and a means for men to avoid the sins of temptation.

Desire is a major component of Ghazali’s argument advising men to marry, saying that an important advantage of marriage is that men are they able to satisfy their sexual desire licitly, not having to worry about compromising their souls or places in the hereafter. Part of the reason desire appears to be so thoroughly gendered and biased in favor of men is most likely because the theme of desire was something deeply personal to Ghazali’s own life experiences as a man. This is apparent in the way Ghazali writes about fearing for one’s soul and the hereafter, important as is one of the particularly Sufi ideals present in the Etiquette. Writing about the Etiquette in his article “Marriage, Love, and Sexuality in Islam” Richard Martin says “Ghazali pleads for a balance of earthly desire and desire for the hereafter; managing the former through marriage enhances the possibility of the latter.” Having been married with children before writing the Ihya and converting to Sufism, Ghazali was familiar with fearing himself culpable of excess desire and the need to expel these desire(s), especially given his backstory of misplaced desire

30 Farah 62
for worldly things (fame, fortune, etc.) as ultimately catalyzing Ghazali’s departure from the university in Bagdad.

To combat this dual problem of desire (satisfaction of sexual desire, expulsion of excess desire) Ghazali argues that marriage is capable of controlling the desire felt by both the Sunni Muslim and the Sufi mystic, the former with the problem of desiring excessively and the latter having aspirations to removes desire from himself completely. Seeking to bring both individuals closer to God by disciplining their desire, Ghazali speaks to the problem of controlling male desire in such a way where he is able to address and negotiate Sufi ideals with while also providing knowledge and consult to the common Muslim regarding a common problem (lust).

Ghazali argues that marriage builds character through restraint and sexual disciple, directly related to the theme of self-training and disciplining the self—another particularly Sufi ideal that al-Ghazali brings up in his discussion of the advantages of marriage. He consistently refers to marriage as a mechanism for working on the self and creating virtue, at the same cautioning about the boundaries of excess saying “if sexual desire prevails and encounters no resistance from the force of piety, it will lead to the commission of an abomination.” When writing about satisfaction of sexual desire, talking only to men, Ghazali argues that desire must be bridled and satiated appropriately by having relations only with his wife (or possible wives), as this is the only way to maintain his virtue and protect himself from corruption—thereby necessitating the practice of marriage. However, Ghazali again warns not to take advantage and lose sight of what is important, arguing “No matter how well known the inducement, the cure

32 Farah 61
should be in proportion to the ailment; for the aim is tranquilizing one's self, and therefore this must be taken into consideration in deciding how many wives one should have." If the man has properly considered Ghazali’s advice, heeded to remember the virtue of self-disciple, it should follow that his chosen bride and their marriage together will help mold him into a better man, a man deserving of the Graces of God and the hereafter. Remembering that additionally, men are further capable of cultivating virtue through the mandate of maintenance of his wife and family in his position as guardian over them, it follows then that men are more able to gain virtue than their spouses, given their privileges of gaining virtue both through disciplining sexual desire and in fulfilling their responsibilities as guardians.

It is important to note that Ghazali concedes that sex is a desired and natural activity. Ghazali quotes a scholar, referring to him as Junayd, analogizing the need for satisfaction of sexual desire to be as natural as his need to eat, “I am as much in need of coitus as I am of food, so the wife is definitely nourishment and a means for the purification of heart.” In citing this scholar Ghazali seeks to reduce the tension between sex as a natural activity and his inclination to control when (marriage) and why (procreation) Muslims engage in sexual intercourse. To mitigate this tension, there exists an assumption in the work that males want their sexual desire satisfied and the existence of certain temptations (masturbation, illicit sexual relationships) should be avoided in favor of marriage.

Ghazali is able to explain away any other potential worldly benefit of sexuality by explaining away the pleasure component. As seen earlier, he argues that there is no

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33 Ibid. 65
34 Farah 64
pleasure in a sensation and feeling that does not last. Emboldened by his confidence of knowledge of the way God works, vis-á-vis his “fruitional experiences”, Ghazali goes on to argue “One virtue of the world’s pleasures is that people wish to see them continue in paradise; thus they are an inducement to the worship of God." While, in theory, Ghazali disdains worldly pleasures, here he smartly acknowledges that pleasure does play an important role as motivator for believers in maintaining their faith. By categorizing and reducing sexual pleasure to the position of a lowly worldly pleasure Ghazali is not only able to further convince people of his intimate knowledge of Islam and the nature of paradise, but he also is able to thrill, woo, and entice believers with promises of greater heavenly pleasures in paradise, inducing them to follow his direction and live religiously.

After discussing in-depth the content of Ghazali’s discussion of satisfaction of sexual desire and his analysis of desire it is plainly evident that Ghazali’s interprets sexual desire to be felt exclusively by men. This is evident and obvious in how male desire is framed as an especially powerful force, to the extent where a lack of satisfaction might be debilitating to the man, meanwhile Ghazali fails entirely to even hint at the existence of sexual desire felt by females. This gendered analysis and biased discussion is common throughout the whole book, as demonstrated with the theme of virtue. Specifically, in the satisfaction of sexual desire section of his book Ghazali brings up issues of men giving into false temptation and argues that marriage exists and functions to control those temptations—enticing men into choosing marriage by telling them it is a means for indulging in their temptations and desires licitly with their wife (or potential wives). Marriage as mechanism for controlling female desire is never considered by

\[35\text{ Ibid. 60}\]
Ghazali and so it would seem that marriage functions differently for women than it does for men.

Women, here and in the rest of his discussion of sexual desire have no agency or active sexual desire themselves, rather the active role of the woman is limited to serving the man and increasing his piety. When Ghazali describes sexual desire and the role it plays in God’s plan, the active role of male desire is apparent while the function female desire is much more subtle. While in men, desire enables them to engage in sexual intercourse, in women, as presented by Ghazali, it seems as though her function is less about desire and more about having children:

…Sexual desire, it was created as an ingrained urge…In the male it is, as it were, an overseer to produce the sperm; in the female it serves to facilitate cultivations so as to produce children out of coitus. It is like luring the bird by spreading about the seed which it likes in order to lead it to the net.  

Ghazali uses this analogy of desire and roles of men and women in procreation to demonstrate how desire functions differently in men than it does in women. Women seemingly do not actively desire sex as men do, instead as the metaphor explains, woman are birds, dubiously tricked and drawn into coitus with men. This being said, it appears that female desire is something entirely different from the desire experienced by men—females desire above all to be vessels of cultivation and produce children. Referring to sexual desire as an “ingrained urge” recognizes that sexuality and sexual desire are natural processes sanctioned and willed by God, thereby naturalizing the differences in the functions of males and

36 Farah 53
female desire, all sanctioned and accepted as necessary components of His creation plan.

**V. Male and Females Role and Marriage**

Further demonstrations of the distinct roles of each gender in marriage are present in the section titled “Qualities Conducive to a Happy Conjugal Life”. In this section Ghazali writes detailed descriptions about qualities men should consider in a bride in addition to a brief paragraph of advice targeted towards the guardians of brides, both specifically referencing considerations of character one should examine when choosing a potential wife/husband. Again using sources of Quranic verses and hadith, Ghazali is dedicated to helping men understand the ideal qualities in a wife as specified by God and his Prophet. In his analysis of the necessary qualities brides must have, it is evident that Ghazalí’s discussion of women is entirely shaped by men and influenced only by a male point of view, as there is little consideration for potential alternative characteristics in female brides other than those specified by Ghazali.

Ghazali’s is narrowly focused on only one type of wife—a wife who will positively affect her husband’s piety and religious life. This narrow interpretation of the role women and the function they serve in marriage, as constructed by Ghazali, is substantiated by the Prophet, claiming “The Prophet* also said, “A woman should not be married [only] for her beauty, because her beauty may destroy her; neither for her wealth, as this may make her tyrannical; [rather] marry the woman for her religious faith.”

From this hadith passage it is clear that the Prophet considered piety an important characteristic in potential brides, but Ghazali takes the words of the Prophet a step

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37 Farah 84, brackets added by Farah
further. Ghazali ends his discussion of piety with his own analysis of the hadith transmission, adding that the Prophet “emphatically recommended religious faith, because such a woman would bolster up the [husband’s] faith.” To the Prophet “emphatically recommended religious faith, because such a woman would bolster up the [husband’s] faith.” To the Prophet “emphatically recommended religious faith, because such a woman would bolster up the [husband’s] faith.” Together, these two quotes demonstrate the role of Ghazali’s own interpretation of sacred material in his writing, making a clear distinction between what sacred texts say and what Ghazali is arguing. This distinction illustrates how Ghazali interprets and constructs female identity from sacred material, using the text both as evidence for his claims but also using revelation as a jumping off point for his own ideas and beliefs.

The most obvious discussion of gender roles in marriage, are described by Ghazali when he writes about piety, and in this section he arguing about the importance of piety in potential brides, urging his (male) readers to consider the fact that their piety is inextricably intertwined with their bride’s. Ghazali argues “…if her religious principles are too weak to give her the strength to be virtuous and constant, she will humiliate her husband, disgrace him among people, trouble his heart with jealousy, and thereby render his life miserable.” Here piety is deemed to be the most important characteristic a potential wife could have, on the basis that without a solid religious foundation a wife will only cause chaos in her husband’s life. Ghazali evidences this argument with a plethora of quotes citing the Prophet as favoring and praising pious woman above all, saying things like “He who marries a woman for her possession and beauty loses both her beauty and her possessions; [but] he who marries her for the sake of her faith will be blessed by God with her possessions and her beauty.” With this transmission Ghazali is

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38 Ibid. 84
39 Farah 83
40 Ibid. 84, brackets added by Farah
rationalizing the importance attributed to piety by arguing that other favorable characteristics and circumstances will follow if the husband rightly values piety first when seeking a wife. His analysis of the Prophet’s proclamations concludes with the revelation that the Prophet “emphatically recommended religious faith, because such a woman would bolster up the [husband’s] faith. If she is not pious, she will be an element of distraction and of trouble in her husband’s religion.” Here Ghazali is adamantly conveying his opinion that the piety of a bride should be carefully considered when considering marriage. His disclaimer that any bride lacking piety would merely be a distraction from religion reinforces the seriousness of the message Ghazali is trying to convey. Here at this junction, it should be remembered that Ghazali is attempting to argue that getting married is the best thing do for men to do for himself and his religion. Therefore, if a man’s piety is directly connected to his wife’s, he is advised to prioritize and ensure that his bride is pious before anything else.

Other features and distinctions between male and female roles in marriage presented in *Etiquette* are difficult to discern because Ghazali habitually speaks about females only in relation to men. Oftentimes, Ghazali writes of men as being weak in character, necessitating that they get married and reform themselves. This character flaw comes across most strongly when Ghazali discusses sexual desire, especially in how desire notoriously cripples men of faith, however it also bears importance when Ghazali writes about the particular type of women men should marry. He says it is duty of men to marry wives who, first and foremost, lead lives of piety, insisting that religious women create religious men. It would seem then that it is the responsibility and role of the bride

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41 Ibid 84, brackets added by Farah
to shape and influence her husband’s character and religion positively, so that they both are be able to fulfill their duties, desires and attain virtue in marriage. While men seemingly become virtuous after accomplishing the goals of religious duties in conjunction with the satisfaction their desires, simply de facto as function of getting married, little attention is paid by Ghazali to the comparative capabilities of wives to do the same.

From the discussion so far, it is clear that it is the female’s role to be pious, but it is difficult to glean much else about the female role in marriage from Ghazali’s writing. Lev Weitz too recognizes the fact that the role of the female is only defined through the male, saying:

…”discussion of the pious woman thus has little to do with the practices through which women might orient themselves to God or the dispositions of female piety as such. Rather the text’s main concern is to establish that a good woman does not distract her husband from his faith; her recognition and facilitation of his pious obligations demonstrate piety on her own part.”

Here Weitz brings attention to the fact Ghazali ultimately ignores any concerns females might have with regards to their behavior and practices in relation to God, choosing instead to emphasize the role of the female in cultivating faith in men. While the quote above is specific to a single section of Ghazali’s work, the lack of consideration for females and their practices is something that Ghazali does throughout the entirety of the Etiquette. This tendency makes determining Ghazali perception of the role of women in marriage (through familiarity with their practices or personhood) rather difficult to do.

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43 Farah 83-84 is the section discussing piety as important quality of a bride
without too much speculation. Reasons why so little attention is paid towards addressing a possible female audience are most likely reflective of the reality that in Islam men contract women to marry, rather than the other way around. Unlike men, women have no need to be advised or convinced of marriage as a duty or obligation given that ultimately, they have little choice or say in the matter.

Only at the very end of the book does Ghazali bother to address the concerns of a female audience—however, after one hundred and twenty pages of in depth analysis and advice addressed to men, Ghazali apparently does not want to waste time writing to women, only disclosing a dense paragraph listing what a wife is and is not permitted to do. Ghazali’s summary of female etiquette should draw one’s attention to the passivity of the wife’s role in marriage, and specifically how her role as wife only becomes active when she is needed by her husband for some reason.

Without going into lengthy details, summary of what constitutes etiquette for the woman is the following: She should remain in the inner sanctum of her house and tend to her spinning; she should not enter and exit excessively; she should speak infrequently with her neighbors and visit them only when the situation requires it; she should safeguard her husband in his absence and in his presence; she should seek his pleasure in all affairs and refrain from betraying him through herself or his possessions…

Evident, even in only the first third of the summary, the female role in marriage as prescribed by Ghazali is fairly minimal, mostly revolving around her household duties, her husband and his needs. The wife too is seemingly quite limited in her ability to foster or enjoy any sense of independence. Furthermore, as the summary

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44 Farah 125
Love 39

goes on, Ghazali describes the all-important traditional sentiment of obedience expected of wives saying:

…she should not leave his home without his permission: if she goes out with is permission, she should conceal herself in worn-out clothes and choose the less-frequented places rather than the main avenues and market places,…she should not approach friends of her husband while going about her business, but feign ignorance of those who might recognize her or whom she might recognize; her primary concern should be caring for her own affairs, tending to her house, performing her prayers, and fasting.

First impressions of this second section further reinforce notions of a hierarchy between the husband and wife in a marriage. Here Ghazali instructs women that they are not to even leave the house, or talk to neighbors fearing that any independent action she takes might reflect poorly on her husband. This fear for the husband’s dignity and communal standing being negatively impacted by his wife’s actions is apparently was is most important with regards to female etiquette and the way she comports herself.

Ultimately, this list offensively reduces the role of women in marriage to exclusively being a subject to her male spouse. The belittlement of females continues in a passage following this same section, when Ghazali adds “Another decorum of the woman is to be virtuous, and melancholy in the absence of her husband, and to return to her sprightliness and happiness in his presence.” This quote coupled with “…many a person finds pleasure in looking at flowing water, greenery, and the like and is not in need of relieving himself by conversing and dallying with women,” contribute further evidence

45 Ibid. 125
46 Farah 125
47 Ibid. 66
to the claim that Ghazali privileged the role of the male over the female. While the wife, indeed has a necessary role to play, again and again it is reduced and regarded as minimal, especially evident given the relative lack of effort Ghazali is puts into addressing female concerns and the well-being of the wife. Oftentimes when speaking about women Ghazali only has negative things to say regarding female character. For the most part, women are regarded as capable of attaining virtue only in how they comfort men and distracting them away temptation and corruption—any other purpose a wife might play in marriage is left un-discussed by Ghazali.

VI. Conclusion

In the eyes of some scholars, Ghazali’s tumultuous journey from scholarship to mysticism back to scholarship only increases his authority as a religious figure. In his lecture titled Imam Abu Hamid Ghazali: An Exponent of Islam in its Totality, Amid Algar makes an argument about Ghazali’s withdrawal from society and Sunnism, assuming that his diversity of religious experiences make al-Ghazali uniquely qualified to disclose religious knowledge. Algar argues that Ghazali’s experiences allowed him “to attain a greater proximity to Allah and a comprehensive immersion in the realities proclaimed by Islam, not as an aim in itself but on the contrary as a preliminary to a return to ever more fruitful activity within Islamic society”.48 For the most part it would seem as though Ghazali would agree with Algar, in that his intention with the Ihya was to convey all that he learned from his time in seclusion and engagement with Sufism. Additionally, writing the Ihya provided a medium for him to influence people and their actions with knowledge he felt was not readily available through the scholarship of teachers and jurists of his

time. Deeply influenced by his revived interest in Sufism, al-Ghazali wrote the *Ihya* as a volume focused on the individual, providing knowledge and advice as to how to lead a virtuous life devoted to God.

The correct manner in which to pursue knowledge and truth was under fierce contention during Ghazali’s time, and so his aspiration to ground his ideas and writings in religious truths is easily understandable given his historical context. However as this thesis has revealed, Ghazali’s argument in the *Etiquette* is also fundamentally influenced by his own personal experiences, especially with regard to the consequences of living a religious life unconcerned with truths. Passages from his autobiography *Deliverance from Error* describe how Ghazali felt he was led astray with the ambitions of the scholarly community. His reflections show how he succumbed to corruption primarily because he was enticed away from the truth and true Islamic practices and towards worldly enjoyments. His personal experiences of corruption are evident in the *Etiquette*, as Ghazali maintains that without proper guidance man easily falls into traps and becomes content living in sin. This being said, Ghazali makes it his mission to not only redeem himself and his religion but also has aspirations to to renew Islam and its practice with the *Ihya*, forcefully inserting himself in the lives of all Muslims.

The conclusions Ghazali presents about the virtue of marriage in the *Etiquette* are heavily dependent on the verses of the Quran and transmissions of Sunna, saying, “the truth about it [marriage] cannot be revealed except by first presenting what has been transmitted in the akhār and āthār.”49 Ghazalis’ sources of akhār (traditions traced back to authorities such as the Prophet’s companions, well-known jurists, imams), āthār

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49 Farah 47.
(traditions relating to the deeds and sayings of the Prophet) and the Quran, are the only sources of true sources of religious knowledge acknowledge by Ghazali. However, not all of Ghazali’s analysis remains true to the revelation he holds is such high esteem, as the gendered concepts of desire, virtue, and duty have been demonstrated to be reflective of the inter-relationship of Ghazali’s interpretation of sacred texts and his historical and social contexts.

These inconsistencies and inequalities of the respective roles of males and females in Ghazali’s analysis of marriage result in necessary constructions of gender and sexuality. This have attempted to demonstrate how these constructions transcend the ideas about gender and sexuality presented in the traditional canon of Islamic material, making the ideas and constructions present in the Etiquette necessarily a product of Ghazali’s own reasoning and interpretation. The manner in which Ghazali interprets Quranic verses coupled with his use of transmission of hadith transcribed by other scholars, of and before his time, were clear influences on Ghazali’s perception of gender roles in marriage and the meaning of sexuality with regards to procreation. Together, these sources of knowledge endow Ghazali with intellectual and spiritual authority thereby allowing him to interpret and construct the perspective on gender and sexuality detailed in the Etiquette.
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