FIVE CASE STUDIES OF EMIRATI WORKING WOMEN IN DUBAI – THEIR PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AND INSIGHTS

A Dissertation submitted by

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Abstract

This ethnographic case study explored the insights and experiences of a small selection of working graduates from Dubai Women's College. Based on a literature review and a preliminary study, the following themes were identified and employed as stimuli for discussion: the balance between work and family responsibilities, gender issues in the workplace, issues of power relationships for women, coping with restrictions in an Arabic Islamic environment, reasons for work, and sources of influence and satisfaction. The research utilized feminist post-structural theory to collect the data and then analyze and interpret the comments made by the women. Self-reflexivity and transparency of the positionality of the researcher were critical in this research that relied on an unstructured personal interview approach. The research resulted in a rich description of the thoughts and concerns of five diverse women. Through discourse analysis, the dominant socio-cultural discourses in the areas of gender, marriage, kinship, ethnicity, meritocracy, materialism and religion that women interact with in this cultural environment were identified. The extent to which the women take up, disrupt and challenge these discourses was also explored with a view to suggest ways to 'better' women's lives. Implications of this study include an agenda for increased emancipation of women by greater freedom of choice through self awareness and the development of potential strategies to support empowerment.

CERTIFICATION OF DISSERTATION

I certify that the ideas, results, analyses and conclusions reported in this dissertation are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

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Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1 Introduction

> As women around the world are climbing the corporate ladder, their Arab counterparts are still struggling to get a foothold in the work place. In a society where women have traditionally not been very visible in the community or in the workplace, Arab women have to fight years of social conditioning to claim their rightful place in the corporate world (Al Marzouki, 2004, p.1).

This research study was conducted to gain insight into the way young Emirati women perceive and respond to family, societal and work-related issues in Dubai. It came about due to my interest in learning more about the women that I had been teaching for the past nine years at Dubai Women's College (DWC) and how they fared when they left the college. A small sample of women was interviewed at length in order to obtain a deeper understanding of their thoughts and concerns.

1.1 Significance of the study

The Middle East reportedly has the largest gender gap of any region in the world. Prevailing cultural attitudes regarding the importance of patriarchy and the role of women serve to reinforce women's subordinate position (Kazemi, 2000). Indicators show that women's achievements in the Middle East compare favorably to other regions in the areas of fertility, life expectancy and per capita income, however, women's participation in the work force has been significantly lower than in the rest of the world. In addition, the rate is particularly lower than would be expected based on the educational levels and age structure of the female population. The factors restricting women from working reflect "social norms and attitudes that put a low value on women's work outside the home and create barriers to their joining the labor force" (UNDP, 2003, p.7).

One of the first steps toward improved agency for women is the development of an awareness of the power relations that limit their freedom (Inglis, cited in Ali, 2002). In many cases, these power relations are taken for granted as societal norms and women see themselves in unfavorable power positions within these relationships (Francis, 1999). In

this study, I attempt to examine, not only the thoughts and ideas of the participants, but also the processes that shape their thoughts.

A major aim of this research is to explore the nature of the assumed power relations that inhibit women's choices and ways that women may challenge them. Within the poststructuralist framework of this study, it is important to note that power relations are not seen as static and may change and evolve by virtue of movement in the way women position themselves within their power relations with significant others in their lives. This parallels Davies (1997, p. 274) who said,

> Post-structuralist discourse entails a move from the self as a noun (and thus stable and relatively fixed) to the self as a verb, always in process, taking its shape in and through the discursive possibilities through which selves are made.

The research has an emancipatory agenda. This term is taken to represent a range of strategies directed at "critically analyzing, resisting and challenging structures of power" (Inglis, cited in Ali, 2002, p. 233). Poststructuralism suggests that women can re-define their sense of selves by critically examining the societal discourses that have privileged the masculine and marginalized the feminine. Davies (1990, p.508) noted,

> Poststructuralist discourse offers a critique of the celebration and equation of masculinity and rationality and confirms for women their sense of self as one who is embodied, whose emotions, desires, feelings are as legitimate a part of "reason" as the much vaunted rationality she has supposedly lacked.

By understanding the power structures that may restrict them, individual women may be able to begin to resist them.

> [T]he mind of the individual becomes an important site of resistance; the marginalized individual can construct an understanding of reality independent of the dominant group. According to feminist theory, this process of resistance is an integral component of an emancipatory form of knowledge-building, one which transcends the dominant discourse by examining it from without rather than from within. (Harstock, cited in Ali, 2002, p. 234).

Adams St. Pierre (2000, p. 486) also supports this view by suggesting that, "once the working of patriarchy is made intelligible at the level of micropractice, women can begin to make different statements about their lives. Once they can locate and name the discourses and practices of patriarchy, they can begin to refuse them". In this study, I will try to identify strategies that women may have used to interact and perhaps challenge restrictive discourses.

The reality of social change, however, is more complex than encouraging women to examine and resist social discourses. Women must be able to identify the power relations that support the discourses, challenge the assumptions that speak them into existence and then speak them out of acceptance. Hazel (1996, p.309) noted the significant challenges of feminist emancipatory action saying,

> We endeavour to combat the effects of a patriarchal system which has kept us silent when we would speak, which devalues what we say when we do speak, which structures what we are able to say when the floor is finally ours, and then denies that we have spoken at all.

In fact, Davies (1990, p.514-515) pointed out that even envisioning new ways of being is especially difficult since even our desires and fantasies are shaped by social discourse noting,

> And the fact of the matter is we do not know what we can speak/write into existence until we've done it, since even those imaginary worlds through which we conjure up a possibility different from this world are discursively produced.

Consequently, it is extremely difficult for women to even imagine different ways of being or different ways of thinking. Other women and men in society must also 'see' and accept the power relations in a new way to enable women to succeed in translating their new viewpoints into actions. Davies (1990, p.504) pointed out the importance of articulating new ways to form a collective movement saying,

We can also see both the potency of speaking in new ways and the possibility of refusing old, undesirable ones. This is not an individual but rather a collective task, though the possibilities it opens up may be experienced as a profound personal liberation.

Central to this research is the notion of agency. In order to promote change, women need to feel a sense of agency. In a post-structural context, the meaning of agency can be thought of as the ability to see new ways of being and to speak them into existence. As Davies (2000, p. 66) explained, it is "having access to a subject position in which they have the right to speak and be heard". Agency can be seen as authority with the emphasis on the term 'author' where a person becomes the "author of their own multiple meanings and desires"

Davies (2000, p. 65) noted the challenges to social change based on repositioning oneself within new discourses. She theorized that while "the effects of being positioned differently within new discourses can bring about observable dramatic personal changes" there "can also be deep resistance to such changes, even when at a rational or intellectual level the change is regarded as desirable". Davies (2000, p. 65) explained that change is difficult because prevailing discourses and ways of acting have often become habituated and hard to disrupt. She explained the factors that inhibit change as follows:

> If one's body has learned to interact with the world in certain ways, then these ways may need more than access to a new discursive practice to change them. Or the means of translating an idea into everyday practice may not easily be achieved, one's life practice-as-usual or life as the practical expression of old familiar discourses always coming more readily to hand.

My research has an emancipatory agenda in that I hope it will be beneficial to Emirati women in some way. This is a typical aim for feminist research as Francis (1999, p. 387) noted, "Feminist research usually has emancipatory aims in that, "it intends to impact on and change society through dissemination of research findings, and sometimes via the processes of the research project itself". I hope that the research findings will lead to

greater insight into restrictive discourses and the ways that women have found to challenge or resist them. I also hope that through the process of the discussion itself, the research participants may come to new understandings of their ways of being that may help them to search out alternative discourses that provide them with greater power and agency. In the words of Lather (1988, p. 570), I hope to "both empower the researched and contribute to the generation of change enhancing social theory."

Concurring with Francis (2002, p. 49), I feel that "bettering people's lives" is a worthwhile emancipatory goal. To that end, I believe that improving the lives of women in Dubai involves working toward ways of thinking and being that result in greater freedom of choice and greater economic independence for women. Currently many women's husbands or families restrict their academic, career, marriage and/or lifestyle choices based on cultural discourses about the perceived role of women in society. Greater economic independence can also lead to greater choices as women may be more able to resist social discourses if they are not also economically dependent upon men who promote those discourses.

As a foreign worker in Dubai, I am a relative outsider to their culture and as such may be able to offer insights into alternative cultural discourses and ways of being. However, real change must come from within the society itself and must be taken on board by Emirati women and men. Indeed, I must be careful to avoid placing my own cultural values on what would be 'better' or 'emancipatory' for Emirati women. As Francis (1999, p. 386) appropriately noted, "The categorization of an idea or action as emancipatory is inevitably based on value judgments, and that what is experienced as emancipatory by one group may not be experienced as such by another". To avoid this potential pitfall, I will try to foreground the participants' thoughts in my analysis.

With so many daunting challenges to overcome, how then is change possible? According to Francis (1999, p. 384) who is in agreement with Foucault, change is possible by being repositioned or (re)positioning oneself in alternative discourses that may provide a greater sense of power. She wrote,

The self is passively positioned in certain discourses, but it is at the same time active in positioning in other discourses. According to Foucault (1980), wherever there is discourse there is resistance: for instance, if a self is positioned as powerless by one discourse, it is possible that s/he may position her/himself as powerful via an alternative discourse.

It is important to note that people are not always passive subjects in this process but can actively search out and adopt new ways of thinking.

Francis (1999) also noted that discourses themselves change and evolve over time as society changes. This idea suggests that DWC, an influential social institution, may have a part to play in advancing new and perhaps less restrictive discourses.

While freedom of choice is a valuable emancipatory goal, it is also important that women do not become alienated from their families and culture. As Ali (2002) noted, new knowledge can lead women to challenge traditional discourses. While this is the key to emancipation, this challenge may also result in significant or unwanted stress or even harassment or violence in some cases. In Dubai, laws still support the rights of men to control women in many circumstances so women must proceed with care. For example, a woman cannot marry without the approval of her father (Kazemi, 2000). Additionally, even in situations where there are no legal impediments, the impact of society's opinion on a woman's choices can be profound. For example, a woman's virtue and reputation may be called into question because she works in a hotel. Therefore, the emancipatory agenda must be lead by Emirati women and/or men and must proceed at a pace that is acceptable to Emirati society. This may only be possible through short term compromises that gain social acceptance to encourage a movement toward longer term commitment to new ways of thinking. Hashim (1999, p. 13) cautions that given the power that still is held by men, "It is important to be aware of the problems of advocating the dissemination and adoption of egalitarian interpretations, and not to underestimate the dangers involved in contesting patriarchal interpretations of Islam".

Within this emancipatory framework, this study explores the life-worlds of five Emirati women in Dubai through its detailed examination of the cultural discourses that both enable and constrain women's freedom of choice and the ways in which women have taken-up, negotiated, rejected and challenged these discourses. Particular interest was focused on discourses that impact upon the women's employment situation. As an educator of Emirati women for the past nine years in Dubai, I have a unique opportunity to gain the confidence of the women that encouraged them to share their thoughts about social discourses openly. On the other hand, my position as a female, Canadian, married, working mother has no doubt shaped all aspects of this research study. The willingness of participants to speak to me, the topics they chose to discuss, the way they articulated their ideas, and their perceptions of my reactions are all a function of the interaction between me and the participants. Furthermore, the way I interpreted the participants' comments, the way I chose to represent them and the inferences I drew from them are all also dependent on my viewpoint. The final result is a collection of women's stories that presents their views at this point in their lives and an analysis that suggests informative themed ideas about social discourses that are important to these women.

Knowledge and awareness of these discourses may encourage more women to further challenge and resist them in order to better their lives by increasing the extent of choices available. These expected outcomes mesh with the goals of feminist poststructural scholarship that "include developing understandings or theories that are historically, socially, and culturally specific and that are explicitly related to changing oppressive gender relations" (Gavey, 1989, p. 463). While the potency of the social world is clear in shaping women's realities; highlighting the complexities, diversities, and disunities within this world may render transparent the mechanisms of how women are spoken, and speak themselves into existence. This process may offer opportunities for women to speak themselves into new, increasingly more emancipatory, realities. Francis (1999, p. 384) quoting Davies agreed with the potential benefits of this process saying,

> the idea that we are positioned but also position ourselves and one another in
> discourse has been interpreted as positive and encouraging by some feminists. For

instance, Davies (1989, 1997) argues that the analysis of gender discourse will provide us with a new understanding of the way in which power is constituted, and the ways in which we are positioned within that discourse. She and others maintain that this raises the possibility of our creating new gender discourses, and thus reconstituting ourselves through discourse.

1.2 Context of the thesis: Background information about Dubai and Dubai Women's College

Dubai is the second largest of the seven emirates that comprise the United Arab Emirates (UAE) located in the Arabian Peninsula. Historically, the seven emirates were independent sheikhdoms until they were joined as the UAE in 1971 by the late president, Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan who died on November 2, 2004. The current president is his son, Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan. The highest governmental authority of the UAE is the Supreme Council of Rulers comprised of the hereditary rulers of the seven emirates. Each emirate retains a certain degree of autonomy and differing laws. Dubai is governed by the president Sheikh Mohammad Al Maktoum, a leading business man and entrepreneur (Hallett-Jones, 2000).

While Dubai has always been an active trading hub, the economic growth since the discovery of oil in 1966 has been phenomenal. In the recent past, people in Dubai were very poor and depended on fishing, pearling and limited trading to survive. The wealth that oil has brought has enabled the rapid development of a massive infrastructure that now supports a large non-oil economy. Manufacturing and tourism are expanding exponentially which has helped to reduce the dependency on oil to only 20 percent of the GDP of Dubai in 2001 and offered its citizens one of the highest per capita incomes in the world (Hallett-Jones, 2000).

Dubai is growing and developing at an exponential rate. The population has almost doubled from 1995 to 2003 (Brinkoff, 2004) and the GDP has increased from $11.2 billion in 1995 to about $26.7 billion in 2004 (Al Baik, 2005). In the UAE in 2003, the number of males is more than double the number of females (MOIC, 2004). This startling

statistic can be explained by the large number of male expatriate laborers who come to Dubai to work. Of the 2003 population of Dubai of 1.204 million, only 25 percent were Emirati (MOIC, 2004) highlighting the extent of the multi-cultural environment. The developing economy is creating more jobs - In 1980, there were only 146,000 jobs in Dubai, but by the year 2000, the number of jobs had increased to over 560,000 (Al Rostamani, 2001) and the number continues to grow.

The tourism sector is expanding rapidly with several new properties under construction including the new Palm Island project that will add 1700 residential properties and 40 hotels to Dubai over the next three years. These properties, currently under construction, are being built on an artificial island created in the Gulf of Arabia and are expected to be inhabited by 2006 ("Sci-Fi Dubai", 2002). The Dubai government has launched many information technology initiatives such as an E-government project that aims to simplify processes to encourage economic growth and the creation of Dubai Internet City with the following purpose: "Dubai Internet City is leading Dubai's move towards electronic commerce and the vision of Dubai's future as a regional hub for the Internet economy" (Al Gergawi, cited in Khaleej Times Weekend, 2000, p. 2).

The government of Dubai is interested in attracting top global multinationals to locate in the emirate (DDIA, 2002).   The government would like "to position Dubai as a universally recognized hub for institutional finance and as the regional gateway for capital and investment" (DIFC, 2002, homepage). The Dubai government is promoting regional growth through regional alliances with government, businesses and academic institutions (DDIA, 2002). As reported in the local newspaper in 2004, "All this development has turned Dubai into the creative, technology, financial, trading and tourism hub (receiving five million tourists last year) of the Middle East" (Al Baik, 2005).

The rapid pace of development in Dubai and the expanding population of expatriate workers have put pressure on the local people to train for management-oriented careers in the new economy. The government has implemented an initiative to gradually replace

expatriate workers with newly qualified national employees to maintain meaningful participation by locals in the development of the country. This initiative, called 'emiratization', requires the education of skilled locals who meet international standards and have a global mindset (Gulf News, 2001). Older local people are few in number and are not well educated so the burden of leadership falls to the younger generation – both men and women. This, in turn, has put pressure on tertiary institutions to provide high quality education that encompasses problem solving, critical thinking, independent learning and leadership skills that meet the expanding needs of the market place. Ensuring relevant training requires an understanding of the needs of the local market place as well as an awareness of the challenges that graduates will face in pursuing their careers. My research study was designed to address the latter issue. A group of young graduates from DWC who are currently working or have worked shared their experiences and insights.

DWC is one of twelve colleges that comprise the Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT), the largest government-funded college system in the UAE. Over the past 17 years, the HCT has offered free vocational post-secondary education to the young local population with the aim of preparing graduates with the skills needed to provide the human capital to sustain the development of the country. The following mission of the HCT clearly summarizes its mandate:

> The Higher Colleges of Technology are dedicated to the delivery of technical and professional programmes of the highest quality to the citizens of the United Arab Emirates. Graduates of the colleges will have the linguistic ability to function effectively in an international environment; the technical skills to operate in an increasingly complex technological world; the intellectual capacity to adapt to constant change, and the leadership potential to make the fullest possible contribution to the development of the community for the good of all its people (HCT, 2002).

The chancellor of the HCT is a UAE national; however, the majority of the managers and teachers are Westerners creating a rich multi-cultural environment. DWC is one of the

largest colleges in the system with a student body of approximately 2200 female students from the local emirate of Dubai. The students are Muslim between the ages of 17-25 years old, speak Arabic as their first language and most have never been employed (HCT, 2002).

Incoming students typically have very weak English and computing skills. As noted by Al Shaiba (2006, p. 4) in the local newspaper, the Gulf News, one of the tasks of the new Minister of Education is to radically reform the secondary school curriculum because "many high school graduates have been found weak in areas such as English and IT skills". In addition, most of the students have graduated from government secondary schools with a curriculum based on rote learning and memorization. Consequently, new students have very weak critical thinking and problem solving skills. Dr Hanif Hassan, the newly appointed Minister of Education, noted,

> We all agree that the quality of education is not up to the highest expectations. What's going on for real is not what we hope. We enjoy good services and infrastructure and in all aspects of life, except in education we are so far behind and we will have to work hard and make sure that education responds to whatever is needed (Al Baik, 2006, p. 3).

The challenge to educators is great. While students enter the college with very minimal leadership-type skills, they are expected to demonstrate a reasonable level of leadership ability upon entry to the workplace. As a result of the need for national leadership, graduates are often promoted rapidly into managerial positions requiring effective leadership skills. Sheikh Nahyan, the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research noted, "Since its foundation, the UAE has understood the importance of educating women, so that they might lead rich personal and intellectual lives and serve as economic and social leaders" (cited in Za'za, 2005, p. 6).

The mission of DWC is to educate young Emirati women for leadership positions in the local workforce. Historically, the number of women, especially national women, in the workforce, while growing, has been very small and rarely researched. However, the

escalating demand for emiratization and the rapidly increasing career opportunities provide a flourishing environment for more women to challenge social norms and join the work force. In fact, women are "increasingly opting for jobs in unconventional sectors such as the media, the military, the police force and travel and tourism" (Al Marzouki, 2004, p. 1) due to gradual changes in society's attitudes.

At DWC, the majority of faculty members are not Emirati, teach using mainly Western curriculum, and have had relatively little experience in the local economy. These factors led me to wonder whether, as a teacher at DWC, I and the other teachers understood the socio-cultural discourses that positioned our graduates to either enable or constrain opportunities to participate as leaders in their local economies and whether we could better prepare graduates. I felt that there may be areas where DWC teachers offer advice and training that is not relevant or appropriate to help women meet the challenges in the local environment. Or alternatively, I felt that teachers may fail to discuss issues that are prevalent in the work place. Either situation may result in graduates who are less prepared for the work environment and, consequently, may face difficulties in obtaining or sustaining employment or in achieving career satisfaction.

1.3 Research questions

Several key themes emerged from the literature and a preliminary study conducted prior to this work as very significant in the lives of Arabic women. These issues surrounding work, family, and faith were used as interview prompts to stimulate discussion and comment.

I used a personal in-depth unstructured interview approach with working graduates of DWC to explore significant social discourses that had an impact on their freedom of choice. An emancipatory and feminist lens framed the discussions and focused my attention on the discourses that I felt were vital to this agenda and ways that women challenged and resisted them. Within these guidelines, the research addressed the following questions:

1. What are the key discourses that graduates of DWC engage with to articulate their sense of self?

2. To what extent and in what ways do these women challenge or resist these socio-cultural discourses?

1.4 Outline of the thesis

In Chapter 2, I have outlined information regarding the stimulus themes of gender, marriage, kinship, leadership, meritocracy, individualism, religion, and employment that informed the field research. These broader themes and issues are explored as they provide a context within which to locate the women's stories and enrich my understanding of multiple, often conflicting discourses that shape these women's lives. Feminism, and in particular, feminism as it can be applied in the Dubai context, is also explored and discussed in this chapter as a lens for the research study.

In Chapter 3, the research methodology is explained in detail. I explain how an initial preliminary study was used to discover issues for consideration. The theoretical framework of feminism, emancipation and poststructural theory is presented and related to the specifics of this research. The case study ethnographic approach is explained with emphasis on the importance of my positionality as the researcher and the need for the transparency and self-reflexivity. The means of data collection and data analysis are also discussed. The chapter ends with a brief introduction to each of the study participants.

In Chapter 4, the stories of the five study participants are presented. In this chapter, I have chosen to write about each woman separately, relying largely on lengthy quotes transcribed from the taped interviews. I have selected quotes that both relate to the research questions but also highlight the subjectivities and life pathways of each interviewee. The intention is to provide the reader with an initial insight into these women's life worlds. A glossary is included in appendix 1 that explains cultural terms that may be unfamiliar to Western readers.

In Chapter 5, I address the research questions. In the first section I describe the key discourses that graduates of DWC engage with to articulate their sense of self. Discourses are presented in theme areas of gender, marriage, kinship and ethnicity, meritocracy and individualism, materialism and religion. Examples are extracted from the interview data presented in chapter 4 to support the emergent ideas. In section two of the chapter, I examine the extent to which and in what ways these women challenge or resist these socio-cultural discourses within the study's emancipatory lens.

In Chapter 6, I conclude the dissertation with a discussion of the implications of the research study. I discuss how the study may impact on a number of stakeholders: Emirati working women, aspiring job seekers, educators, policy makers and employers and the research community. I describe how each group of stakeholders can play a part in the emancipatory agenda through awareness of the extent to which particular socio-cultural discourses work in ways that constrain or enable choices and the development of improved strategies for finding new ways of thinking and being.

Chapter 2 Literature review

> Arab women have been in commerce since the days of our forefathers. When the men used to leave them for several months to go pearl diving, the women used to sell fish, milk and breed goats as well. The trade aspect remains, only the technology and environment has transformed. (Al Gurg cited in Ved, 2002, p. 2).

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the Arabic culture as it relates to the themes of the research study. Background information is provided about gender, marriage, kinship, leadership, and religion in Dubai with a view to understanding the discourses shaping the positions of women in the community. The factors that affect the employment of women in the UAE and the identification of barriers to sustaining meaningful careers are also discussed. These particular themes were selected based on their importance in shaping the lives of the interviewees. In addition, in keeping with the feminist approach of this research, the selected themes best illustrate the potentially constraining discourses that the women in the study interact with in their lives. Exploring ways that women can negotiate emancipatory spaces within these discourses is one of the goals of this research. I end the chapter with a discussion of feminism and the ways it may be interpreted in Dubai.

2.1 Gender

Women in the Middle East typically experience a disadvantageous position in society. The reasons for this have been debated. Many Islamic women feel that it is not Islam itself that oppresses women, but the historical Arab culture of patriarchy (Hale, 2001). Kazemi (2000) has suggested that two main and inter-related factors are primarily responsible for women's subordinate position in the Middle East – cultural attitudes favoring patriarchy and legal doctrine. He noted that the Middle East has the largest gender gap of any region in the world and has been very slow to change. He also recognized that women in the Middle East use "patriarchal bargaining" to gain power within this social structure. Kazemi (2000) emphasized that while Islam itself is not the original source for these prevailing attitudes, religious ideas reinforce patriarchy. Jaber

(2001) expanded the concept of patriarchy to include private patriarchy that concerns the authority of men over women in the family and public patriarchy that is manifested by the state-run political and religious institutions.

Laws in the Middle East, including Dubai, are differentiated along gender lines. Personal status laws discriminate against women in the areas of inheritance, divorce, marriage, and child custody rights (Kazemi, 2000). In addition, women do not have the right to pass on their nationality and have very little political influence ("A Hundred", 1999).

The combined value of the domestic and external work performed by Arabic women, while considerable, has not always been recognized. Historically, household duties were shared between men and women; however, each had specific responsibilities. For example, men looked after camels but women looked after goats and sheep. Women made products such as butter or handicrafts that could be sold to purchase other items such as jewelry or perfumes (Doumato, 1989). In keeping with attitudes favoring modesty and segregation, women sold products in a special marketplace that was segregated from the men; however, their participation was critical to the survival of many families (Doumato, 1989). This was particularly true for the families of fishermen and pearl divers who spent long periods of time away from home and relied on women to maintain the household in their absence. Many women performed a significant amount of work in agriculture, family-run businesses, the domestic economy or elsewhere in the informal sector, but they were not considered to be working by official measures since they were not paid a salary (Hijab, 1996).

Although Arabic women have worked in various ways throughout history, their participation in paid employment has been moderate. Currently, Arabic society is in a state of transition - many more women are now looking for careers outside their home precipitating a change in social attitudes.

> The Arab world is a society in transition, and it is during periods of transition that contradictions are at their most severe. Traditional definitions and methods of

operating are no longer completely valid, but new ones have yet to take shape. Thus, on the one hand, women are respected and encouraged to embark on new careers; on the other, there is an unwillingness to accept that this will mean change in other spheres, particularly in the area of relations within the family. It is possible, in some states, for an Arab woman to be the chief executive of a company, and yet not have equal rights with her husband when it comes to guardianship of their children – an inequality enshrined in the law… (Hijab, 1988, p. 11).

Although Arabs see the need to adapt to the modern world to survive economically and politically, they do not want to lose the traditional values that have defined their culture (Harik & Marston, 2003). In the UAE, the influx of foreign workers and the speed of economic development have created an even greater desire to maintain the stability of traditional culture (Hijab, 1988). Many feel strongly that the ideal of the warmth of the Arabic family system and the sense of security and belonging that it can provide should be preserved (Hijab, 1988; Sabbagh, 1996).

Women are caught in this transition and are forced to fulfill their domestic responsibilities in addition to their external work responsibilities. Although working women may delegate household tasks to domestic workers, they are still held responsible for the smooth running of the home (Al Nowais, Feb 19, 2004). In the short term, women are forced to accommodate the patriarchal rules of the extended family while trying to meet their own needs (Harik & Marston, 2003; Sabbagh, 1996). These ideas tie into research by Evetts (2000) referring to culture, structure and action dimensions that impact on women's careers. Evetts explained that cultural dimensions such as family ideologies; structural dimensions such as division of labor; and action dimensions such as women's sense of agency all impact upon women's careers. In the Arab context, cultural issues such as patriarchal ideologies, structural issues such as responsibility for domestic and child care duties and action issues related to women's sense of agency will all influence the career opportunities for women.

Men, also, will need to redefine their expectations of women (Harik & Marston, 2003). Men cannot reasonably expect women to bear the full burden of household chores and childrearing while holding a fulltime job (Bibbo, 2002). These attitudinal changes will take time as they involve a change in prevailing social discourses strongly rooted in cultural and social traditions.

In addition, working women expect to have a voice in family decisions and enjoy reasonable social freedom within cultural boundaries, particularly with increasing education levels for women and the pressure for greater agency. Arabic men and Arabic women will need to adapt to these changes in the role of women. Again, because these changes involve re-thinking and re-speaking social discourses, they will not be easy to achieve.

Women in the UAE are often encouraged to overcome several of the cultural barriers described above by choosing a socially-acceptable career. H. H. Sheikh Zayed (cited in Al-Siksek, p. 110), expressed this opinion, "I am promoting women working in places that are suitable to their nature and give them respect and dignity as mothers and makers of generations." Even when living in a non-Muslim country, Muslim girls express a preference for 'respectable' careers that maintain the family standing in the community (Siann & Knox, 1992). Women who search for jobs that minimize the effects of the cultural barriers will face less opposition from their families and society.

In the UAE, the types of careers that are currently most acceptable tend to be positions that command respect such as professions; careers that require limited working hours to allow for completion of household duties such as government jobs; and occupations that restrict the amount of contact between men and women such as home-based businesses or investments. The perceived positive characteristics of these careers are described in more detail below.

(a) Professions - Professional women have a much easier time entering the workforce and getting promoted as a result of the respect that they command based on their qualifications. This is the same in other parts of the world since professional people tend

to work with other well-educated professionals with more open views (Hijab, 1988). Women educated in more progressive private schools, especially, are accepted and succeed at work in professional fields because they are more easily able to adapt to the variety of ideas found in the workplace (Mohsen, 1985). The respect gained by obtaining a professional position appears to mediate the social barriers to women working.

(b) Government positions – Government positions are highly sought after by nationals in general and female nationals in particular. In 1996, 44.3 per cent of the UAE federal government employees were women, which is impressive considering that women comprised only 11.7 per cent of the total labor force in 1995 ("Women", n d). In 1995, only 1.1 percent of the private sector workforce was composed of nationals and 14.9 percent of the government sector workforce was national ("Give Nationals", 2001). Of the female working graduates of the HCT in 2002, 16 percent work in the private sector, with the remaining 84 percent employed in the government or semi-government sector (HCT, 2003).

These statistics show that the majority of nationals choose careers in the government sector. Some UAE government research outlines the features of the government sector that are attractive to job seekers as being suitable hours, greater sensitivity to national culture, better pay and benefits, better prospects for career growth, better leave and better training (Fawzi, 2003). Other research has determined that government employment is highly regarded because it serves the good of the nation, pays well with good benefits, has suitable working hours, and limits contact between sexes (Hijab, 1996; Soffan, 1980). Government positions seem to help women balance work and family through reasonable working hours and limit social criticism based on the perceived noble purpose of the occupation.

The preference for government work may be changing, however, since a recent survey of 500 national high school students in Dubai determined that 53 percent of the women respondents expressed a preference to work in the private sector (Gulf News Research Centre, 2003).

(c) Self-employment and investment opportunities - Arabic women enjoy inheritance rights and can control and invest their money as they choose (ECSSR, n d; Soffan, 1980). For example, Sheikha Hussa, wife of the late ruler of Dubai and a highly respected woman, developed and managed businesses and made extensive investments in her own right (Lienhardt, 2001). In Dubai alone, over 1,776 local UAE women own businesses registered with the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry in fields as diverse as advertising and landscaping (Talwar, 2002). Business endeavors may be acceptable because entrepreneurial women can reduce contact with men by using agents as intermediaries, working hours can be flexible, work can be done from home, and considerable prestige is associated with running a successful business.

Many Arab women feel that Western feminists incorrectly label Arab women as passive victims instead of active participants in facilitating change (Basarudin, 2002) and they feel that using the status of women in the West as a measure or ideal for Arab women is inappropriate (Al-Lail, 1996). Many Arabic women feel that they are not understood by the West and resent assumptions made by Westerners about their situation (Gaouette, Baldauf & Anvari, 2001; Viscidi, 2003). In general, Arabic women do not aspire to be like Western women; instead they want their own version of freedom – a freedom that is balanced by strongly held cultural values (Hijab, 1988; Wearing, 2000).

> Islamist women are deeply convinced that Western women are not only used and misled, but that they have lost their sense of pride and dignity and despite their feminist protestations are not happy in their circumstances. From their perspective, even the highly touted Western freedoms for women render them not free at all but deprived of healthy familial relationships and subject to sexual and other forms of exploitation. (Haddad & Smith, 1996, p. 138).

Many women feel that the legislation of women's rights does not necessarily guarantee a real sense of freedom - women may experience isolation, dissatisfaction and manipulation by unattainable cultural expectations and powerful media messages.

Arabic women tend to be very proud of their cultural values and reluctant to openly admit, especially to Westerners, any frustrations they may face in dealing with restrictions imposed by family members (*Fatma's story*). Thomas (1999, p. 34) characterizes the increasing demand for greater emancipation by Arab women as "a silent revolution that has made few headlines and fired few shots". However, while many Arabic women are free to make their own decisions, some Arabic women must fight to pursue their own goals or must reluctantly accept family decisions relating to careers or marriage partners (Joseph, 1996).

One particularly visible example of conflicting cultural perceptions of the status of Islamic women is the issue of veiling. The presumption that the veil is a major oppressive restriction is highly objectionable to most Arabic women who feel that the over-emphasis on this issue overshadows the importance of other more vital inequalities they would like addressed (Gaouette, Baldauf & Anvari, 2001; Maumoon, 1999). For many Arabic women, personal belief, protection, reassurance, and fashion provide appropriate reasons for wearing the hijab (Harik & Marston, 2003). Bartkowski and Read, (2003, p. 88) extend the argument further suggesting that rather than be restrictive, veiling can actually enhance women's freedom in some cases where it allows women access to opportunities that would otherwise be considered inappropriate: "the practice of veiling emancipates Muslim women from the constraints commonly connected with conservative religions. Veiling, a traditional practice reinforcing gender difference, can actually promote equal opportunity for Muslim women where co-educational schooling and paid employment are concerned". In the UAE, most national women proudly wear the optional black headscarf and light cloak, as a symbol of national identity and patriotism.

In the patriarchal society of Dubai, there are many discourses surrounding the issue of gender. Women have been and continue to be constrained by society's attitudes about the appropriate 'role' for a woman in work, in the community and in family life. In addition, the social conventions surrounding marriage also play a powerful part in shaping women's experiences.

2.2 Marriage

The critical role of the woman as a wife and mother continues to be emphasized in traditional and modern-day Arabic culture. In many cases, it defines a woman's position in society, her identity, and her worth (Dirie, 1998; Harik & Marston, 2003; Sha'aban, 1996; Soffan, 1980). In the words of a Kuwaiti bureaucrat, "A woman is daughter, sister, wife and mother. This position earns her respect. If she does not behave in a manner that befits this position, then she loses respect." (Jassim cited in Goudsouzian, 2004, p. 13). A report by the UNDP (2003, p. 7) clearly summarizes the traditional expectations for women in the Arab region as follows:

> This paradigm presumes that women will marry (early), that their most important contribution to the family and society will be as homemaker and mother, that households will be headed by men who have jobs that allow them to provide for their families, that women will depend on men for support, and that the men's responsibility for supporting his wife and family justifies his control over his wife's interactions in the public sphere.

Most marriages in the UAE are arranged by the families. Premarital sex is forbidden by law and the reputation of the bride is one of the first factors considered by potential suitors' families. In conservative families, young girls may not be allowed to leave the house unless they are chaperoned by a female relative in order to protect the girl's reputation (Mahdi, 2003). While arranged marriages are the norm, the law does state that both participants must be willing to marry. Therefore, the law supports the woman's right to accept or reject a marriage proposal. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for a woman to be pressured by her family into accepting a marriage proposal. In addition, due to the high costs of marriage, many women who would like to be married receive few proposals, therefore decreasing their opportunity for free choice (Kalsi, 2003). Many women are not free to make a "love marriage". Legally, a Muslim woman cannot marry a non-Muslim man, and if an Emirati woman marries a non-Emirati man, her children will not be considered Emirati as citizenship is passed on from the father only (AICE, 2004). Finally, Emirati women of any age are not allowed to marry without the permission of their fathers unless they receive special authorization from the court. All of these rules

place severe restrictions on the marriage choices for women. This issue is not one that is readily discussed by Arabic women with Western women due to its culturally sensitive nature.

Polygamy is permitted with men being allowed to take up to four wives. In a recent newspaper article, this practice was promoted as the solution to the 'problem' of the increasing number of older unmarried women. As reported in the Gulf News by Za'za' (2005, p.3), "Abdul Salam Mohamad, family affairs counselor and Islamic scholar, said: 'It's a fact that polygamy is a valuable way of saving women from becoming spinsters'." This quote suggests that the traditional idea that women must aspire to be married is still prevalent in modern Dubai. Women in the UAE are also encouraged to have many children. According to Jamal Al Bah, the Director of the UAE Marriage Fund, an organization that allocates cash to national couples to cover marriage expenses, married women "should have at least six babies and this should be viewed as a national duty." (cited in Nazzah, 2004, p. 3).

At the same time, the number of unmarried women is increasing and their role in society is strengthening. An increase in the female marriage age from late teens in the 1980s to 22-24 years of age in 2000 and increased educational opportunities are encouraging single women to pursue meaningful career paths that, in turn, can increase their status within their families ("What price", 2000). Today, as in the past, some career women demand marriage terms that will allow for more freedom to continue their careers after marriage (Soffan, 1980). In Saudi Arabia, many women are remaining single due to the high cost of marriage, the difficulty in meeting suitable partners and changes in women's priorities; "Now due to the economic and social changes in our society, a Saudi girl's first priority is finishing her studies. Her second priority would be to find a job. And only her third priority would be marriage" (Qusti, 2004, p. 14). The same situation applies in the UAE where the high cost of marriage is creating growing numbers of unmarried women (Vine, 2003). However, it is still inconceivable for single women to live alone and they continue to be dependent on their families for social position and protection (Harik & Marston, 2003).

2.3 Kinship

Traditional families, where men provide financial support and women look after the home and children, are the most important social structure in all Arabic cultures, including the UAE (Joseph, 1996). The importance of the family is emphasized in Islam as well as through generations of tradition, which still apply today. Thus, both religious and secular cultural beliefs similarly emphasize the family as the basis of society: "The new Islamist society, then, is one in which the role of women and the importance of the family are understood to be divinely prescribed." (Haddad & Smith, 1996, p. 139).

Families are also central to Arabic economies. People are keenly aware of each other's family memberships, identities and status which can influence worker recruitment and discipline, wages and benefits. Also, access to institutions, jobs and government services is often through family connections (Joseph, 1996). Family members cooperate in ensuring the economic welfare of the family (Sha'aban, 1996). In Arabic societies, it is not generally acceptable to replace family functions with state institutions. For example, families are expected to care for the infirm, the elderly and the unemployed. Family members also promote family businesses and help to obtain employment for family members through a strong network of contacts (Hijab, 1996).

"Family honor implies that one's sense of dignity, identity, status, and self, as well as public esteem, are linked to the regard with which one's family is held by the community at large." (Joseph, 1996, p. 199). While the concept of family honor is certainly not unique to Arabic culture, it is especially helpful in understanding behavior in an Arabic society. In some cases, the sense of family and tribal loyalty is so strong that it can be more important than right or wrong (Lienhardt, 2001). Family matters are considered to be private and are often hidden. Domestic violence and even a killing in the family are rarely discussed in public (Lienhardt, 2001). "Sacrifice by individual family members to benefit the family as a whole is expected." (Joseph, 1996, p. 199). Family members, both

male and female, may be encouraged or forced to make educational and career choices that suit the interests of the family, more than their own aspirations.

The idea of maintaining family honor can also restrict the freedom of choice in social activities, especially for women. "Just as honor has offered a measure of protection to family members, it has also been a means of controlling behavior, especially women's." (Joseph, 1996, p. 199). Women may be prohibited from certain activities that would be considered acceptable for men, based on the fear of criticism by others and the resultant family dishonor. Traditionally, the honor of the family rests on the modest behavior and purity of the female members, while a man's honor comes from how well he can protect and control the women in his family (Harik & Marston, 2003; Harfoush-Strickland, 1996). The issue of family reputation means that decisions made by individual family members must also take into consideration their impact on the entire family and their community status. In addition, the importance of maintaining a good reputation in the community leads to secrecy about behaviours that could be perceived to be socially unacceptable. The family ideal appears to be in contrast to Western culture which places individuality as one of the most important discourses (Francis, 2002).

Arabic society is still a patriarchal one "which assigns the ultimate leadership and decision-making role in the family to men." (Al Faruqi, 1988, p. 43). The responsibility of the man to provide for his wife, his children and his female relatives is generally accepted. The eldest brother is responsible for his parents and brothers are responsible for divorced or widowed sisters (Hijab, 1988). This means that most women do not need to obtain paid employment outside the home to provide for their basic needs, however, women must usually defer to male relatives. In addition, young people are taught to defer to older relatives, yet adult males tend to have more authority than even elder females (Joseph, 1996). Male guardians have the authority to decide whether a woman under their care may work, travel or marry (Sakr, 2002).

On the other hand, the patriarchal system does not mean that women have no power or influence in society. Many women develop high levels of self-confidence and poise in

order to assert themselves. Sabbagh (1996, p. xvi) has noted that strong patriarchies often produce "strong women who work very hard to ensure the compliance of the system with their needs". Women utilize strong personal persuasion skills to influence decisions in their families as will become evident in the stories presented in chapter 4. For example, Alia's grandmother facilitates a divorce (*Alia's story*), Fatma negotiates greater personal freedom in her marriage (*Fatma's story*), and Amna persuades her father to accept her career choice (*Amna's story*). Ultimately, many women are able to maintain some sense of control over the important decisions in their lives.

> Within the family, the father has the final say, which in theory gives him the ultimate power. Nevertheless, the woman's role is the key to maintaining the family. Not only does she reproduce successive generations, ensuring family continuity, size and power, but she is also responsible for the new generations' informal education. It is the mother who transmits the cultural and religious traditions that reinforce solidarity and loyalty to the family. It is not surprising that there has been such strong resistance, from men and women alike, to change in women's roles. (Hijab, 1988, p. 13).

In this patriarchal environment, women who wish to challenge cultural expectations often face significant resistance and possible criticism from society.

2.4 Leadership, Meritocracy and Individualism

While Arabic culture has clearly defined restrictive roles for women, Arabic leadership principles reinforce these roles. Patriarchal concepts and family structures pervade Arabic leadership defining and restricting the opportunities for women. Meritocracy and individualism can be overshadowed by family and tribal affiliations and patriarchal beliefs.

Blunt and Jones (1997) have highlighted the importance of considering cultural differences when studying leadership. They have pointed out that Western leadership assumes the merits of individualism and competition that are not always true in other

cultures. Individual and group motivation may also differ according to culture and economic development. Blunt and Jones (1997) recognized that effective leadership style is dependent on what followers expect. This too can have a cultural bias. In some cultures, the position of leader has deep historical roots and a wide social distance between leaders and followers is common where little involvement with followers is accepted.

The leadership of Dubai itself has not been studied in any detail; however, an examination of historical Arab leadership models can provide some insight. While there are not many Arabic management theorists, some interesting theories are available for study. Khadra (1990) proposed the prophetic-caliphal leadership model to explain Arabic leadership. In this model, leadership has four characteristics – personalism, individualism, lack of institutionalization, and the great man predisposition. "Personalism is defined as a subjective, egocentric view of the relationships of the individual to people and things" (p. 39). Personalism suggests that leaders feel that they are the most important and central power figure. This feeling may be seen in business settings as well as in families. Individualism is the tendency to make personal decisions regardless of the opinions of the group. While many leaders encourage group members to express their opinions, the leaders feel that they must make the final decision. The combination of personalism and individualism serves to undermine institutions by enforcing the power of the individual over the group. This can also result in an accepted disregard for institutional rules and policies at the discretion of the leader.

Illustrating the concept of the 'great man predisposition', the late ruler of the UAE, Sheikh Zayed, was perceived as a great man who deserved great respect, admiration and obedience. He was in power since he united the emirates in 1971 until his death on November 2, 2004. Following a benevolent patriarchal style of leadership, he was viewed as the "father of the nation' and earned the love and devotion of the people who were often referred to as his 'children' (Rahman, 2004). Sheikh Zayed followed an open door style of management and always listened to the views of his people. Salama (2004) quoted Al Gandi, the speaker of the Federal National Council stating, "Sheikh Zayed

never closed his doors to nationals, and always emphasized the fact that democracy meant normal daily gatherings between the ruler and the ruled". Under his leadership, the country has been peaceful since its inception. Local rulers in each emirate, including Dubai, are viewed in a similar manner. While there is no doubt that the country has prospered under the leadership of the sheikhs, it is also apparent that the patriarchal power structures have reinforced the traditional view that women are like 'children' who should seek the support and guidance of a 'father' figure. This notion may have restricted women's aspirations and opportunities for leadership positions.

Abbas (1990) described Arab management as being based on tribal and family traditions suggesting that teamwork outside the family may be difficult. He notes that nepotism is used for recruitment of higher positions, while qualifications are used for lower positions. Abbas (1995) described the Sheikocracy as a form of Arab leadership. This style involves adapting to new demands while observing traditional values such as personal relations, preference for individuals from influential tribes, an open-door policy, and a patriarchal approach. Abbas (1995) points out some advantages of the personal orientation of Arabic leadership such as strong loyalty, enhanced commitment to goals, and friendly customer relations. Sheiko-capitalism is a common form of governance in the Arab world where the wealth of the nation is viewed as the personal wealth of the rulers that can be distributed as the ruler chooses (Abbas, 1995).

Many of the leadership traits that Abbas described are apparent in Dubai. There is a significant amount of nepotism and tribal favoritism with many employees hired for top positions based on "wasta", which is the local term for tribal standing and influence (Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1993). However, there is an increasing trend to hire and promote based on merit. In Dubai, personal relationships are very important and having a coffee before discussing business is quite common. Open-door policies are typical where employees of any level are able to chat to the top manager of their company. Strong loyalties are also seen, but these often follow family or tribal lines.

Characteristics of Arab leadership, such as personalism and individualism, make it clear that women need to utilize strong personal power in order to succeed as leaders. The importance of family and tribal connections also explains why women from strong political families are successfully taking leading roles as pioneers in the developing economy. For example, Shaikha Lubna Al Qasimi, daughter of the ruler of one of the emirates, was appointed in November 2004 to be the Minister of Economy and Planning, the first female minister in the history of the country (Salama, 2004).

While Arab leadership is characterized by patriarchal structures and strong family allegiances, the importance of meritocracy and individualism is increasing. Sheikh Mohammed al Maktoum (2000), leader of Dubai, has stated, "It does not matter what your title is, it's about what you do. One should not look at titles, but rather at achievements". Highly skilled women are slowly being recognized and are beginning to be awarded leadership positions providing hope and encouragement for others to follow. For example, in a new federal cabinet announced in February 2006, Mariam Al Roumi was appointed as a minister joining Sheikha Lubna as the second female minister. Sheikha Lubna has been praised for her "outstanding role in advancing the performance of the ministry" and for giving "golden opportunities to many females to contribute to the development of the UAE" (Hanafi et al, 2006, p. 7).

2.5 Religion

Islam is more than a religion; it is a way of life (Ruff, 1998). Since laws and customs in the UAE are based on the principles of Islam, an overall understanding of these principles is helpful to appreciate life in the UAE. There are over 1.2 billion Muslims in the world who follow the five pillars of the Islamic faith: (1) the profession of the belief in only one god, (2) the ritual prayers that take place five prescribed times per day, (3) fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, (4) the giving of alms to the poor and (5) the pilgrimage to Mecca for those who are able (Ruff, 1998). Islam provides a set of laws, called Sharia, which Muslims should follow covering every aspect of life such as family relations, inheritance, taxation, and prayer. The laws are updated and extended by fatwa (legal opinion), consensus and custom (Bates, 2002).

When Islam was first developing, women had very few rights; therefore, the Islamic principles relating to the education and equality of women were considered revolutionary (Ruff, 1998). The Holy Koran acknowledges the equality of women by teaching that men and women are all creatures of Allah, existing on a level of equal worth and value, but with different roles (Al Faruqi, 1988). Education is stressed for both genders and all social classes by suggesting that it is the duty of every Muslim to pursue knowledge throughout life and that even slave girls should be educated (Al Faruqi, 1988; Harik & Marston, 2003). Islamic teachings do not specify the content or focus of education that is appropriate for people of different classes or genders, other than to suggest that the right of females to pursue knowledge is no different from that of males (Ahmad, 1978). In addition, the purpose of education is common for all and is explained broadly as a means of enlightenment and enrichment as shown in the following saying by the Prophet Mohammad:

> Acquire knowledge. It enables its possessor to distinguish right from wrong; it lights the way to Heaven; it is our friend in the desert, our society in solitude, our companion when friendless; it guides us to happiness; it sustains us in misery; it is an ornament among friends, and an armour against enemies. (cited in "Pearls", n.d., p. 45).

Islam considers employment outside the home for both men and women as an honorable pursuit. "The most blessed earning is that which a person gains from his own labor" is a saying of the Prophet (cited in Soffan, 1980, p. 67). The Prophet has also said that "a woman can seek employment to the degree that she is prepared, wants to, and has the approval of her husband, as long as she does so above and beyond the fulfillment of her family duties" (cited in Soffan, 1980, p. 67). Al Faruqi (1988, p. 49) concurs with this point by stating "There is nothing in Islam, however, to prevent her [a woman] from fulfilling other roles in society if they are not undertaken at the expense of her success in her domestic obligations". However, some women may find it very difficult to accomplish both domestic and employment duties. The Prophet clearly emphasizes that family commitments should take priority over personal satisfaction or employment

duties. An overarching principle is that duties take priority over rights (Treacher, 2003). In addition, roles for men and women are clearly defined in potentially restrictive ways:

> Women's roles as wives, mothers, and daughters are seen as central to the spiritual well-being of the family and the maintenance of the social order. Men who uphold the law are responsible for providing material and spiritual sustenance. They are held accountable for the behaviour, attitudes, and values of the family. (Treacher 2003, p. 62).

Hence, some women may feel pressured to forego external employment or to choose careers that allow them to satisfy both their home and work responsibilities.

Although Islamic teachings need not oppress women, some Arabic societies have interpreted and applied Islamic teachings in ways that do oppress women. However, most modern Muslims believe that strict rules such as those imposed under the Taliban, where women could not work or study, are an unnecessarily strict and fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. One author refers to these restrictions as creating "a total negation of individual liberty – a stunning sexual racism" (Latifa, 2002, p. 33). It must be stressed that most authors do not feel that the oppression of women is a correct application of Islamic principles, but rather a result of local culture (Al Faruqi, 1988; Doumato, 1989; Haddad & Smith, 1996; Harik & Marston, 2003; Hijab, 1988).

Although some people believe that the Koran must be taken literally, An-na'im noted the importance of thoughtful interpretation of Islamic texts to guide behavior as follows, "Human interpretation is unavoidable in any effort to articulate and implement the normative and practical implications of religious texts." (An-na'im, 1995, p. 52) Furthermore, An-na'im argues that interpretations need not be considered exclusively by religious experts, but that all Muslims have the right to discuss the true meaning of religious writings. An-na'im stated,

> it becomes clear that all Muslims, men and women alike, have the right to debate among themselves the meaning of what the Koran says regarding the rights of

women, or any other issue or question, challenge so-called established orthodox interpretations, and advance their own in the regard. (An-na'im, 1995, p. 53).

However, the vast majority of interpretations have been made by men. Hashim (1999, p. 12) noted that the fact of women's lack of empowerment has kept them out of a process that could potentially empower them;

> At the political level, women's exclusion from religion in the past has resulted in the dominance of patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an. It is only from a position of knowledge that women can claim their rights and contest patriarchal interpretations of Islam.

Overall, Islam, as interpreted in most societies, supports the respectability and dignity of women. However, this dignity and respect is shaped and constrained by defined understandings of the roles and responsibilities of women. Women are encouraged to pursue an education and a career as long as it does not interfere with their domestic obligations. This strongly-held belief works to significantly hinder a woman's freedom of choice.

2.6 Employment

Women in the Middle East are working but their participation in the labor market is far lower than in other parts of the world (UNDP, 2003). Hijab (1988) has outlined three critical factors that must be present at both a national and personal level to enable paid employment participation for women in any society. Firstly, the opportunity for women to work must exist through supportive legislation, facilities and attitudes. Secondly, women need to have the education and skills to be able to work. Thirdly, both the country and individuals must see the need for women to join the workforce (Hijab, 1988). While these factors equally apply to men, they are assumed to exist for men.

2.6.1 Legislation facilities and attitudes

The government in the UAE supports the employment of women through its policies. There is a policy requiring equal pay for equal work and equal benefits for working women. Maternity leave is also provided (ECSSR, no date; Soffan, 1980). In the UAE, a

National Strategy for the Development of Women has recently been approved that supports the role of women in the development of the economy (Bibbo, 2002).

Government heads encourage females to play a creative role in modernizing their country through public statements (Bibbo, 2002; "Education Pays", 2003; Soffan, 1980; "UAE women", 2002). "It is a source of pride in the region that women occupy so many senior posts." (Hijab, 1988, p. 130). The Ruler's wife, Her Highness Sheikha Fatma (cited in 'UAE Women', 2003, p. 3), openly supports working women with the following quotes, "UAE women have proved themselves and today are seen in every sector of the economy" and "The UAE woman has a pivotal role in the prosperity and development of the Emirates" and finally, "Women must surpass their conventional roles and become decision makers participating more effectively in the development of UAE society, said Her Highness Sheikha Fatima." (cited in Bibbo, 2002, p.7).

As early as the 1980s, the ruler of the country, His Highness Sheikh Zayed said,

> Young women have the right to work in all spheres; there are no obstacles before them. We expect young women to support and to proceed with everything undertaken by their brothers, the youth of the United Arab Emirates, and that there will be fruitful cooperation between the young women and their brothers in the different spheres. (cited in Al-Siksek, p. 109).

While we may question Sheikh Zayed's interpretation of obstacles that may face young women in their pursuit of 'fruitful' cooperation with their brothers, throughout his reign as ruler, Sheikh Zayed insisted that women be educated and be given employment opportunities. Al Nowais (Nov 7, 2004, p. 2) reported that "he insisted that they [UAE women] travel abroad to pursue education and later be employed in managerial positions".

2.6.2 Education and skill

In the UAE, government policy fully supports education for women and women are provided with many opportunities for learning that are fully subsidized by the government or available in the private sector. As a group, Arabic countries spend a higher percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) on education than any other developing region (UNDP, 2002). "Arab countries have shown the fastest improvements in female education of any region. Women's literacy rates have expanded threefold since 1970" (UNDP, 2002, p. 3) to 77 per cent in 1997 (Neft & Levine, 1997).

Most parents in the UAE support their daughters' education ("What price", 2000). In fact, 75 per cent of the students enrolled in higher education in 1997 were women (Neft & Levine, 1997). However, a minority of parents feel that education could interfere with the mother training her daughter in traditional tasks and that suitors may not want a wife more educated than they. This latter view has been changing; however, as the demand for higher family incomes to support modern expectations is making educated girls seem preferred marriage prospects ("What price", 2000). As more national women succeed in visible, high-status careers, they provide positive role models to demonstrate that higher education and work is desirable and respectable (Goudsouzian, 2004).

Despite the availability of colleges and universities, education in the government institutions is segregated by gender and all choices are not available for both genders. For example, women cannot study mechanical engineering and men cannot study information administration at government colleges (HCT, 2002). The development of online learning may enhance access to a wider variety of programs for students, since mixed gender classes that are unacceptable through classroom delivery, may be permitted in an online environment. However, societal views also inhibit the career choices for both men and women. As mentioned earlier, family members are often encouraged to choose careers that would benefit the family such as business, law or medicine. In addition, women are encouraged to join careers that are perceived to be more suitable for women such as education or office work.

2.6.3 Recognition of Need

Clearly, the Gulf has a need for local labor, including women, to reduce their dependence on foreign laborers (Al Rostamani, 2004; Hijab, 1988) who comprise 75 per cent of the UAE's population and hold most of the jobs in the country. The UAE ruler, H. H. Sheikh Zayed, feels that the excessive number of foreigners causes a demographic imbalance that could lead to instability in society. In addition, the level of unemployed nationals has been rising. Therefore, a nationalization program has been implemented emphasizing the need for the employment of both male and female Emiratis (Janardhan, 2003). While foreigners occupy positions at all levels from unskilled workers to top management, the current focus of the nationalization program has been to employ nationals, both male and female, at the middle to upper management levels. This ambitious initiative underlies the current emphasis placed on higher education for nationals.

On a personal level, women in the Gulf do not usually work out of economic necessity owing to the cultural imperative for men to provide financially for their wives, sisters and mothers. Women with no male support can receive social benefits from the government (Hijab, 1988; Soffan, 1980; "Women in employment", n d). However, the additional money earned by working women does allow households to enjoy more luxuries such as private education for children and material goods that can add to the prestige and status of the family (Mohsen, 1985; Sherif, 1999). Inflation, coupled with rising expectations of household staples, has also contributed to a more positive attitude towards work by both men and women (Rugh, 1985; Sherif, 1999).

The employment of a woman can also impact on her marriage prospects. On the one hand, an employed educated woman is desirable due to her potential monetary contribution to the household (Mohsen, 1985; Sherif, 1999), but on the other , a woman who is more educated than her suitors may be perceived to be threatening or difficult to control (Hijab, 1988; Sherif, 1999). Exposure to men through the work environment may also be harmful to her reputation. Again, it is evident that traditional societal values are slow to adapt. However, some women may actually seek a meaningful career as an acceptable alternative to marriage, especially if the potential groom has overly

conservative views ("What price", 2000). Remaining single may reduce a woman's status in society; however, this may be adequately compensated for by the respect gained through a successful career.

Just as it is for men, work benefits women in many non-monetary ways. Women see work as an expression of individual ability, independence, self-esteem, growth and self-identity (Harik & Marston, 2003; Mohsen, 1985). Women work to gain status and experience great pride in using their skills to make their society stronger and more prosperous (Hijab, 1988; Kalsi, 2004; Soffan, 1980).

Overall, in the UAE, there is ample opportunity for women to work from both a religious and political perspective. Although there are still many cultural restrictions that hinder a woman's work opportunities, these views are slowly changing. In addition, education, although restricted in scope, is readily available to provide the ability for women to work. Finally, there is a need at a national level to employ women in order to further nationalize the workforce. Unfortunately, there is still not a strong economic need for women to work thus greatly diminishing their motivation to overcome negative social pressures.

Despite the supportive attitude displayed by the UAE government and the acceptance under Islamic principles for the employment of women, women comprised only 9 per cent of the total UAE workforce in 1997 (Neft and Levine, 1997). For Arabic women in the UAE, the challenges are compounded by cultural views that may inhibit a woman's ability to work.

One of the major factors that influences women's participation in the workforce is the difficulty of balancing family and work responsibilities (Aryee, Fields & Luk, 1999; Hijab, 1988; Rugh, 1985; Sha'aban, 1996). Around the world, managers expect employees to be committed to their work (Howell, Carter & Schied, 2002) and families expect women, especially mothers, to fulfill many duties at home (Sherif, 1999). Global research has reported that as a result of potential family-work conflict, many adolescent women eliminate from consideration many high prestige careers requiring a high degree

of commitment (Looker, 2000). In the United States, Goldin (1997) conducted research that indicated the controversial finding that most women were unable to successfully combine family life with a significant career. Ferber and Green (2003) contested Goldin's research by suggesting that Goldin's results were flawed and reported a lower rate of success in achieving both family and career goals than actually occurred. However, the main thrust of the findings was the same – women have difficulty in balancing career and family. Ferber and Green (2003) noted that the danger to the economy of any nation was that women faced with this dilemma will be likely to choose family over career.

In Dubai, family pressures, emphasized by both religious and cultural traditions, that require an Arabic woman to fulfill her obligations both at home and at work exacerbate the issue. There is a fear that work will diminish the quality of family life enjoyed in the home and women themselves may feel that they must compromise too much of their family life (Nazzal, 2004; Rugh, 1985). According to custom, no woman is supposed to put her career or even herself ahead of her family and children (Hijab, 1988; Sha'aban, 1996). Although, the new economy has narrowed the gap between the strict segregation of duties for men and women and men are taking on more responsibility in the house, there is an ongoing presumption that the woman is ultimately responsible for the household. The manager of a charitable organization in Dubai, Mohammed bin Haider, expressed this commonly held belief on women's responsibility by saying, "[W]omen have forgotten their primary duties as mothers and wives. Women are not asked to pay for their families, they are only asked to look after them" (cited in Al Nowais, Feb 19, 2004, p. 7). For lower middle class working women, the situation is more pronounced since they are not able to hire domestic workers to help in the house (Mohsen, 1985).

Efforts to keep men and women separate for moral reasons also inhibit work opportunities (Hijab, 1988; Soffan, 1980). Working in an environment with too much contact with men may damage a woman's reputation (UNDP, 2003; Rugh, 1985). Women may also face difficulties in fulfilling job responsibilities because of the cultural inappropriateness of meeting clients in restaurants or traveling with men (Daniel, 2002). This is less of a problem in the government sector where there are often separate working

areas for men and women and social conventions are better acknowledged and accommodated.

Simply by working, some women may attract community criticism – the family may appear to be needy or the male family members may appear to be unable to support the family, thereby threatening their sense of masculine pride (UNDP, 2003; Sherif, 1999; Hijab, 1988; Rugh, 1985). For a man of high social status, a non-working wife demonstrates his ability to provide a high standard of living for his family (Harik & Marston, 2003). Some men express the idea that, in theory, women should work, but not their own wives or sisters (Menon, 2003). "Awareness has to be created among UAE men and women about the need for a change in the perception of the women's role." (Bibbo, 2002, p. 7).

Some women report being harassed by men in the workplace; however, Al Nowais (Feb 9, 2004) and Hijab (1988) highlight the predominance of resentment by foreign workers stemming from racial discrimination and fear of replacement by nationals. This problem applies equally to male and female national employees and can be mediated through effective people skills. All nationals face tough competition in the work place from highly-skilled foreign workers who are willing to accept longer working hours and lower salaries.

Some women find that a lack of socially acceptable transportation prevents them from working (Hijab, 1988). Social customs in the UAE suggest that a girl should not take a cab by herself owing to the impropriety of traveling un-chaperoned with an unknown male driver. Thus, a woman must drive herself or rely on family members for transportation (Hijab, 1988), which is not always possible. Although a woman's work may give her some economic independence, she still may not experience social independence. A woman may be permitted to work by her family but may not be allowed the freedom to drive or socialize (Hijab, 1988).

The lack of after-school care and childcare facilities is another barrier (MOFI, n.d.; Hijab, 1988; "Women in employment", n d). Many families help with childcare (Harik & Marston, 2003); however, when family assistance is unavailable, foreign housemaids are often used since Emirati child care workers are not readily available or affordable. The dependency on foreign nursemaids from a different cultural and religious background sometimes creates cultural conflict in addition to draining economic resources from the country (Hijab, 1988). In a recent study conducted in the UAE, out of 1000 national families surveyed, 65 percent of the families felt that social harm resulted from over-dependence on foreign maids (Zeitoun, 2001). Clearly, high quality, affordable child care is a necessary prerequisite to encourage greater female participation in the workforce.

The barriers to work illustrate many of society's views about women noted previously, such as the presumption that women are responsible for child care and household duties, the restriction on women mingling freely with men and the need to maintain family honor. These social pressures shape the way women in Dubai position themselves, think about themselves and make choices.

2.7 Feminism

There are many types of feminism and feminist movements such as radical feminism, postcolonial feminism and utopian feminism – each with their own particular view of the roles and rights of women (Hoffman, 2001; Hymowitz, 2003). Davies (1990), in explaining the work of Kristeva, provided a useful conceptualization which divides feminism into three tiers as follows: firstly, a liberal feminism where women demand the same rights as men; secondly, a radical feminism where women are viewed as different and superior to men; and thirdly, post-structural feminism where the development of gendered subjectivity is seen as an ongoing process of interaction between individuals and societies. Kristeva believed that although the different forms of feminism emerged at different historical moments, "they each still are relevant in different contexts since they serve different purposes and can achieve quite different things." (Davies, 1990, p.503).

To expand further, a liberal feminism may be invoked in situations where women are denied opportunities. Davies (1990, p. 503) wrote,

> If we find ourselves in a situation where access of women to an area previously denied them is the issue, engaging in that fight for access does not signify that we *are* liberal feminists, but simply that the concepts of justice and equality *can be mobilized* whenever anyone is denied access based on the genitals they happen to have.

A radical type of feminism may emerge where women seek to acknowledge their contributions that have been undervalued;

> they may be asserting the right to claim their way of doing things as of value in a world where these are constantly being downgraded. In a world that was not divided into males and females, or in a world where femaleness was not downgraded, the celebration of femaleness would not be necessary. (Davies, 1990, p. 503).

Davies (1990, p. 509) noted that one of the problems with debate at this tier is that in emphasizing the differences between men and women, it can give more power to men to dominate women; "One of the most vivid dangers at this tier is that it plays precisely into the hands of the patriarchs by emphasizing and essentializing the difference."

The third tier, then, allows for a way to move beyond fixed gender definitions and roles while still allowing for the existence of action at the first and second tiers. This approach fits in well with the poststructuralist theory that gender positioning is the evolving product of an ongoing process of negotiation with ever-changing social discourses. Davies (1990, p.503) noted,

> The major contribution to feminist debate at the third tier is the recognition that sexism is not just "out there" – it is not simply "society's" rules and regulations that lie at the heart of the problem, or sexist people who deny us our rights (though certainly these are part of the problem), but also very much in the way we have taken ourselves up as gendered beings. We perceive the world from a

gendered subject position and we recreate the sexist world by recreating the male/female dualism in the things we do and say.

Western-defined feminist movements with a bold agenda for rapid change are not especially appealing to Islamic women. In fact, many Islamic women do not like the use of the word 'feminism' as it is often associated with a Western definition of feminism and femininity which they feel does not suit their culture ("A Hundred", 1999; Hale, 2001; Uchendu, 2002). Nadia Yassine (cited in Chu, 2003, p. 41), a spokeswoman for the Justice and Charity party in Morocco, illustrated this point with the following quote, "I adapted my feminism from Islam, not Western culture." Fernea (1998, p. 414 quoted in Saliba, 2000, p. 1088) noted that "Feminism [is] synonymous with America and fast food" for many Arab women. The association with the West has also allowed those wishing to suppress feminist action to discredit those actions as being unpatriotic:

> A representative of the New Woman Research Center in Egypt told a conference organized by Amnesty International: "When we raise issues such as violence against women, we are accused of presenting a false and distorted image of women to the country and the rest of the world (Darwiche cited in Sakr, 2002, p. 829).

Treacher (2003, p. 2003) agreed that feminist action is often discouraged, whereas patriotism is valued noting, "Masculinity and the nation are yoked together, whereas women are praised if they fight for the nation but not for their own rights". In 1993, AbuKhalil (p. 14) wrote, "Feminism is now increasingly under attack because Islamic fundamentalists (like Christian and Jewish fundamentalists) have chosen to focus on women's issues and to discredit feminism by linking it to Western political interests". With the recent American conflicts with the Arab world, this problem has been exacerbated as Treacher (2003, p. 69) noted,

> The overarching dynamic (and this has historical roots in many Arab countries) is that women can be activists within the accepted realm of a common struggle, but, as soon as attempts are made to bring power differentials into the political analysis, it becomes problematic and women are silenced. In this way, secular

men, Islamic groups, and Arab governments frequently join in a common attack on women accusing them of imposing and importing Western ideas into the analysis as a way of silencing debates.

Any discussion of feminism in the Arab world must take into account the influence of religious principles which, as discussed earlier, pervade every aspect of life. AbuKhalil (1993, p. 8) discussed three schools of thought regarding women's rights under Islam. The first school denies any claims that women are subordinated under Islam stating, "On one side of the spectrum, is the apologetic Islamic school which claims that Islam has liberated women and that Muslim women have more rights than their western counter-parts." The second school acknowledges that women are subordinated but that the fault lies with the interpretation of Islam by men. AbuKhalil (1993, p.8) explained, "Another branch of the Islamic apologetic school blames the harsh conditions of Arab women – and this school, unlike the previous one, acknowledges the existence of a system of gender inequality in Arab society – on male jurists who interpreted Islamic texts in a conservative and misogynist way". The third branch attempts to improve women's rights by reinterpreting the Islamic texts from a feminist viewpoint.

AbuKhalil (1993, p. 8) made the point that using Islam to justify feminist action does offer the potential for greater support from society, stating, "The power of their argument, of course, stems from their ability to argue their feminist point of view without being dismissed as anti-Islamic. The feminist argument from an Islamic perspective grants the feminists a position in society which they would otherwise be denied."

On the other hand, he showed his skepticism about the usefulness of supporting feminist action with religion, preferring a more overarching approach that transcends religion, by noting,

> Arab feminists will not find it easy to argue their case within an Islamic framework: antifeminist thinkers and clerics have a solid base in Islamic texts to rationalize their own point of view. The goals of gender equality and equal opportunity for all members of society should be regarded as desirable regardless

of whether these goals conform with the essence of one religion or another. (1993, p. 14)

Foley (2004) extended the discussion of Arab feminism by describing two alternative approaches to the re-interpretation of Islamic principles. The first approach, referred to as equity, reinforces women's rights within their roles as wives and mothers while the second demands complete equality where women demand the same rights as men. Foley (2004, p. 59) noted,

> Female and male rights are conceptualized as being different but of the same value: thus the term equity is used indicating difference on a basis of fairness. The second strategy of Islamic equality departs from the more dominant discourse regarding women's rights and argues for the complete equality of the sexes. The equality strategy rejects the notion of innate characteristics for women and men and holds that their rights must be equal.

The equality approach which is similar to the liberal tier referred to by Davies (1990) does not sit well with the Islamic faith that sees women as equal but not the same:

> many Muslims are frequently mistrustful of feminism, because they see the feminist emphasis on equal rights as at odds with the Islamic notion of the complementarity of the sexes, and the specific roles and rights laid down for men and women, which they believe reflect their particular strengths and weaknesses (Ashfar, 1997 cited in Hashim, 1999, p. 7).

The equity approach parallels the radical approach where men and women are seen to be different but with each playing a valued, albeit pre-defined, role in society. Foley (2004, p. 59) noted that the advantage of this view is that it maintains women's "cultural legitimacy within the dominant Islamic discourse". Foley (2004, p. 60) further explained why this view is easier to justify saying,

> The strength of the equity approach is that the women who subscribe to this are able to retain male support because they do not challenge the accepted gender roles or division of labour. The strategy of these women is not to confront the

dominant discourses directly but rather to gain recognition from within the existing constraints.

On the other hand, under this framework women are still assigned a relatively subordinate position in society: "The patriarchal bargain in this context relies on male support for female roles outside of the home, but the trade-off is that women still carry the burden of domestic work and are largely excluded from public power."(Foley 2004, p. 61).

Foley (2004) also noted that the contrast between individualism and communitarianism is another critical factor that differentiates Western feminism from Eastern feminism. Although Foley's study was conducted in Malaysia, the concept of communitarianism applies equally well in the Arab context of Dubai. Foley (2004, p. 60) provided the following definitions: "Communitarianism refers to responsibilities to the family and community having priority over the rights of the individual, whereas individualism reverses this order". As discussed earlier, communitarianism is a key feature of Arabic society and therefore, feminism must be set in that context. Foley (2004, p. 70) noted the effectiveness of maintaining a culturally sensitive approach to feminism: "The acceptance of communitarianism by the activists is both culturally appropriate and politically strategic: by staying within this framework the women gain access to an audience who will listen because they are speaking in the language of their culture".

In summary, sustainable emancipatory movement in Dubai should be sensitive to the need to maintain some legitimacy within both Islamic principles and the cultural norms such as communitarianism while still advancing the opportunities to find new ways of thinking that would benefit women. The answer may lie in adopting the third tier described earlier. In this model of thinking, we can begin to disrupt the duality of male/female and blur the differences. As Davies (1990, p. 509) explained,

> A further and quite different (de)construction happens at the third tier. Masculinity and femininity are removed from the equation and both sides of what

was once understood as part of a binary divide become something any person can and should have access to.

As Lather (1991) described the process of working within and against traditional approaches to research in order to probe what is being resisted as well as how it is resisted; so too, do women have to work within and against discourses to understand the nature of the discourse and the ways to resist it. In addition, working within and against a discourse may allow for improved opportunities for sustained change. For example, while the concept of communitarianism may suggest defined stereotypical roles for men and women, women need to find ways to work within and against these societal discourses to negotiate emancipatory spaces for themselves. Ignoring communitarianism would likely result in women who may become isolated and ostracized. As noted earlier, this third tier approach does not preclude referring to liberal or radical feminist actions when appropriate but would allow for a shift in thinking to re-position Arab women in more advantageous ways.

Consequently, a broad definition of feminism focusing on a common struggle against restrictive patriarchy may better unite both Islamic and Western feminists (Mojab, 1998). As Hoffman (2001, p. 195) suggested, feminism is best defined as a "movement towards greater equality and freedom to which particular feminists and feminisms contribute both positively and partially". Although people may differ in their definition of equality and freedom, a united definition of feminism is expressed by the attempt to emancipate women in some way (Hoffman, 2001). Hymowitz (2003, p. 33) emphasized that female emancipation requires freedom of choice by suggesting the desire for a

> rich idea of personal choice in shaping a meaningful life, one that respects not only the woman who wants to crash through glass ceilings, but also the one who wants to stay home with her children and bake cookies or to wear a veil and fast on Ramadan.

This definition recognizes that women will each define emancipation in their own ways based on religion, culture and other factors unique to their life situation. Saliba (2000,

p.1091) noted that new forms of feminist analysis may overcome the effects of earlier feminism with constraining categories whose "colonizing tendencies have bound Arab women".

Mohgadam (2001, p. 45) succinctly summarizes the cultural context of feminism that I have presented by saying,

> Feminism is a theory and practice that criticizes social and gender inequalities, seeks to transform knowledge, and aims to empower women. Women, and not religion, should be at the center of that theory and practice. Around the world, women will pursue different strategies toward transformation and empowerment. We are still grappling with understanding and theorizing those diverse strategies.

In summary, this chapter outlined the main socio-cultural discourses that establish a context for understanding the women's' stories. Within this fluid and dynamic context, the following chapters of this thesis explore the expressed ideas of five Emirati women to provide insight into how working Emirati women navigate these themes. In keeping with an emancipatory lens, the strategies that women use to negotiate emancipatory spaces will be highlighted.

Chapter 3 The Research Process

> As feminists choosing to examine gendered social relations in our memories, we do not intend to rail against the powers of patriarchal oppression, but rather to look (below) at the forms of rationality through which the particular relations of power manifest in our memories are constituted and maintained (Davies et al, 2002, p. 299).

The above quote highlights the underlying principle of this research that emancipation can be advanced through understanding and challenging social discourses that support restrictive power relations. While it is true that some of the participants in this study may indeed "rail against the powers of patriarchal oppression", the intention of the study is to explore strategies women may use to negotiate emancipatory spaces.

This chapter outlines the research process for this study and has been divided into six sections: preliminary study; theoretical framework; methodology; data collection; data and discourse analysis; and introduction of the study participants. The first section describes the preliminary study that was conducted prior to the start of the formal research that explored the career aspirations of a small sample of college students at DWC. The preliminary study raised a number of questions regarding the career and family choices made by graduates that were addressed in the formal study.

The second section explores the theoretical framework for the formal study that is feminist, emancipatory and poststructuralist. The study was conducted by a woman, with female participants and with a view to better the situation of women. As discussed in chapter 2, an interpretation of feminism focusing on ways to disrupt restrictive patriarchal power relations within an Islamic and Arabic context was applied to ensure relevance to Emirati women. In keeping with poststructuralist theory, the importance of social discourses in defining the women's sense of self and their resistance of social discourses as a potential means for social change and possible movement toward increased

emancipation is explored. The issue of the relative nature of power is also important in this context to understand women's feelings of agency.

Section three explains the research methodology. This study was carried out using a case study ethnographic approach where I spent a significant amount of time with a small number of participants. By the end of the study, I had spent four to six hours over six months interviewing each of six women. All of the participants were graduates of DWC from a variety of academic programs. The women were between the ages of 21 to 27 and had varied careers and marital status.

Throughout the conduct of my research, the reporting and the analysis, my personal views and positionality have had a tremendous impact. I am cognizant of the fact that my personal biases and viewpoints have shaped the data I collected – both in terms of what I collected and what I decided not to collect, the way I have represented it and the interpretations that I have drawn from it. While the interplay between the researcher and the participants cannot be avoided, adopting a self-reflective approach regarding the potential influences should serve to make the research process transparent and enable readers to better assess the validity of the findings.

In the fourth section, I discuss the methods used for data collection. The interviews were unstructured discussions where the participants were asked open-ended questions and encouraged to move the conversations into their interest areas. Some of the interview participants seemed to enjoy talking freely while others required more prompts. In all cases, the interview times and locations were selected by the participants to foster a comfortable and convenient situation. In many cases, the preferred meeting time and place was a coffee shop in the evening. I tape recorded all of the sessions and transcribed components shortly after the interview to enable me to add affective comments.

Section five addresses the method of analysis of the research data using discourse analysis. I explain the importance of language and the use of discourse analysis and its

applicability to feminist poststructuralist research. The final section in this chapter briefly introduces each of the participants of the research study.

3.1 Preliminary study

My thesis was prompted by a preliminary study that provided an elementary understanding of some of the issues that are relevant to Emirati women. The study was conducted to examine the career aspirations of a group of female Emirate students at DWC and the possible effect of potential work-family conflict. This research involved brief personal interviews with ten DWC students that helped to develop a deeper understanding of the career behavior of graduates of DWC and the factors that influence their decisions. In addition, the study provided an insight into the current position of women in Dubai in relation to their perceived power in determining their futures. The study identified several issues that were explored further in this research project such as work-family conflict and balance, gender issues, issues of power for women, and restrictions placed on women by family and society.

The findings of this study reflected the Islamic concept that family takes precedence over personal satisfaction and employment obligations. All respondents felt that if forced to choose, family should be the higher priority. It is also interesting to note that the students took for granted the assumption that women are responsible for child care and that it is the mother that must make adjustments in her career. None of the respondents suggested that their husbands or male relatives should help with child care. The students in the study seemed to feel empowered to make important choices in their lives; however, they also seemed to readily accept certain restrictions that are placed on their decision making due to culture and patriarchal power.

Some students reported that they felt it was not possible to balance family and career and that significant compromise would be necessary. This finding parallels the results found by Goldin (1997) who conducted research in the United States indicating a controversial finding that most women were unable to successfully combine family life with a significant career. Based on their own study of American women, Ferber and Green

(2003) theorized that the danger to the economy of any nation was that women faced with this dilemma will be likely to choose family over career. The students that I interviewed supported the proposition that when faced with the choice, women would choose family over career. On the other hand, there were a significant number of students who felt that family and career could be successfully managed.

The findings from the preliminary study suggested the need for further study focusing on the actual experiences of Emirati women a few years after graduation to yield additional relevant data to understand the issues facing Emirati women in the Dubai workplace. In addition, the research suggested the need to explore the actual decisions that women have made after graduation and the socio-cultural themes that have shaped their decisions in order to assess the relative empowerment of Emirati women as they advance in their careers.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

3.2.1 Feminism and Emancipation

As discussed in chapter 2, this research study was framed by a broad definition of feminism focusing on identifying, resisting and challenging restrictive patriarchal power relations. This research encompassed the ideology of Harding (cited in Lather, 1992) regarding feminist research where the research was not only about women but was designed to help women as well. Consequently, one of the aims of the research was to explore the discourses that restrict the freedom of choice of the women in the study and the ways that women begin to resist or challenge them. As Francis (1999, p. 388) noted, feminist post-structuralist research "has been useful in opening up new theoretical avenues, and providing explanations for processes (such as the development of gender identity, and the incentive for girls to adopt gender identities if they are not inherent), which had previously puzzled researchers".

Awareness of the power relations in place that limit freedom is essential to critically analyze, resist and challenge power structures (Inglis, cited in Ali, 2002). By understanding the power structures, individual women can begin to resist them. A greater

understanding of the nature of the restrictions that legitimize patriarchal power relations may lead to a reworking of inequitable gender-based power relations. Francis (1999, p. 384) explained how being repositioned or indeed, repositioning oneself in new or alternative discourses can create a sense of power and agency:

> Power is embedded in discourses due to their ability to produce subjects and objects in certain ways: one might, for instance, be rendered powerless by gender discourses in one instance, while being positioned (or possible positioning ourselves) as powerful via social class discourse in another.

Francis (1999, p. 390) elaborated on how people are active participants in their own positioning saying, "we still feel ourselves to have agency, moral obligation, and preference for different kinds of discourse; and that creating narratives to structure, or describe our lives is part of being a human subject". This in turn may lead to a continuing process of enhanced freedom of choice through new views of what is possible and attainable. This study will attempt to identify some of the dominant discourses that restrict women and the extent to which they are visible, taken-up or resisted by women. I will explore the ways in which each of the participants interacts with these discourses to shape their sense of self, negotiate their self-worth and enhance their life choices.

Derrida (cited in Adams St. Pierre, 2000) emphasized the importance of language in shaping the world and also noted that through understanding structures based on language, the world can be reshaped in a process referred to as deconstruction. Adams St. Pierre (2000, p. 483) highlighted this point by agreeing that "Language does not simply point to preexisting things and ideas but rather helps to construct them and, by extension, the world as we know it. In other words, we word the world". She goes on to argue that "We have constructed the world as it is through language and cultural practice, and we can also deconstruct and reconstruct it". Davies (1997, p. 272) also emphasizes the importance of narratives in post-structural research for outlining our vision of ourselves;

> The point of post-structuralism is not to destroy the humanist subject nor to create its binary other, 'the anti-humanist subject' (whatever that might be), but to

enable us to see the subject's fictionality, whilst recognizing how powerful fictions are in constituting what we take to be real.

These comments reinforce the usefulness of identifying and examining restrictive discourses as a means toward beginning a process that could lead to increased emancipation for all women including the women in the study. This idea is explored further in chapter six.

3.3.2 Poststructuralist theory

"Poststructuralist theory rejects the possibility of absolute truth and objectivity" (Gavey, 1989, p. 462) and instead suggests that all identities are transient and relative. " There is no 'real' or authentic personality which can be 'discovered' by researchers, as the self is simply produced differently depending on the discursive environment" (Francis, 2002, p. 46). The importance of using discourse as a change agent was highlighted by Dewar (1996, p. 6), "I know myself through the stories I tell (each of these deeply imbricated in the other) and so I can choose, with others, to change the stories and to develop new ways of talking about them. Equally I can refuse discourses that speak me into existence in ways I no longer wish". These quotes emphasize the importance of story telling as a method for exploring and understanding social discourses.

Equally important is the issue of a person's perceived position within the social discourse. As Davies (2000, p. 89) stated,

> The constitutive force of each discursive practice lies in its provision of subject positions. A subject position incorporates both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those who use that repertoire. Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position…

This concept will guide my analysis as I try to make sense of the women's stories and attempt to understand the social discourses that shape their experiences and their telling of them.

So what exactly are socio-cultural discourses? Kress (1985, pp.6-7) defined discourses as follows:

> Discourses are systemically-organised sets of statements which give expression to the meanings and values of an institution. Beyond that, they define, describe and delimit what it is possible to say and not possible to say (and by extension—what it is possible to do or not to do) with respect to the area of concern of that institution, whether marginally or centrally. A discourse provides a set of possible statements about a given area, and organises and gives structure to the manner in which a particular topic, object, process is to be talked about, in that it provides descriptions, rules, permissions and prohibitions of social and individual actions.

This conceptualization of discourse informs the study's understanding of the women's ways of being in relation to the contexts of religion, society, family, and work. In this regard, these contexts are seen as producing particular discourses that make possible some ways of being and not others (Davies 2000). Socio-economic discourses interplay with the construction of identities where women make sense of themselves through these discourses. Women take-up, reject, resist, and challenge these discourses in various ways which are multi-faceted, fluid, dynamic, historically and contextually contingent (Weedon, 1987).

Poststructuralist theory also suggests that power is relative and varying. Power is not an absolute concept, it is always experienced in relation to others and changes depending on the circumstances (Davies et al, 2002). It is also important to note that power is developed through dominant discourses and therefore can be changed through identifying, analyzing and redefining the discourses. Power is based on "specific forms of knowledge or 'rationalities' that make any particular form of power seem reasonable or

inevitable" (Davies et al, 2002, p. 298). The study acknowledges that these power relations are often taken-for-granted, seen as inevitable and natural (Adams St. Pierre 2000). Gavey (1989, p. 464) agreed by stating, "Feminist poststructuralism maintains an emphasis on the material bases of power (for example, social, economic, and cultural arrangements) and the need for change at this level of discourse".

Weedon (1987, p. 40) clearly articulated how poststructuralist theory can be used by feminists to advance their agendas for social change:

> Feminist poststructuralism, then, is a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change. Through a concept of *discourse,* which is seen as a structuring principle of society, in social institutions, modes of thought and individual subjectivity, feminist poststructuralism is able, in detailed, historically specific analysis, to explain the working of power on behalf of specific interests and to analyze the opportunities for resistance to it.

Such theorizing frames the study's exploration of the social discourses in Dubai, the ways that the participants position themselves within these discourses and the opportunities for change. One may wonder how change is possible if we are a product of social processes and ways of thinking that are beyond our control. However, as mentioned in chapter 1, we are not inactive subjects in this process but we can play an important part in repositioning ourselves. Francis (1999, p. 394) described how gender identity can be shaped and changed through new ways of seeing; "post-structuralism appears a useful, even liberating theory to some feminists: gender itself is deconstructed by post-structuralist theory. The repudiation of a fixed self means that gender is not fixed, but that the self is positioned in gender discourse". Francis (1999, p. 390) explained how we can be active in the process of repositioning stating, "We can sometimes choose to resist certain discourses and encourage others. I can sometimes recognize when I am being

constituted through discourses of gender dualism, and choose whether to draw on alternative discourse to resist such positioning".

It is important to note again that change is not an easy process. Social discourses are ingrained and supported by society as a whole and each member of the society has been raised to follow the dominant discourses. "That which we take to be natural is very hard to understand as social, and even harder to understand as a ritual whose significance lies in the maintenance of the gender order" (Davies, 1990, p. 513) making resistance of the discourse extremely difficult. As Davies (1990) pointed out, even our desires and aspirations are shaped by these same discourses. Furthermore, even if the Emirati women had a clear vision of what they wanted to be, they may still face resistance from a society unwilling to accept their new definition and positioning of themselves and may be reluctant to openly discuss or admit any new positionings.

In addition, based on our cultural differences and life experiences, my view of what should be changed is likely to be very different to the Emirati women's views. As I noted in chapter 1, emancipatory strategy may be defined differently in multi-cultural contexts and by various people even within the same context (Francis, 1999). Consequently, while I have outlined the study's understandings of what might constitute emancipatory goals, ever mindful of possible dissonance, I endeavour to let the research participants guide me in my emancipatory comments and suggestions.

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Case Study Ethnographic Approach

I felt that an ethnographic approach was most suitable since I am currently located in Dubai and have the unique opportunity to interact intimately with Emirati women. The advantage as Tedlock (2000, p. 470) pointed out is that "by entering into firsthand interaction with people in their everyday lives, ethnographers can reach a better understanding of the beliefs, motivations, and behaviours of their subjects than they can by using any other method". Coffey (cited in Pellatt, 2003) supports the view that the involvement of the researcher in the setting being studied is a strength of ethnographic

research since deeper insight may be possible. In recent ethnographic research methodologies, authors acknowledge that they are not in a position of authority over the research participants but are merely trying to be persuasive and credible in telling their stories (Reed-Danahay, 2002) which fits in well with the poststructuralist approach. In my case, I do not try to speak as an expert on Arabic women, but rather I try to represent their thoughts and experiences.

The case study approach that I have used fits into Stake's (2000, p. 437) definition of a collective case study where the researcher "may jointly study a number of cases in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition". As Stake points out as the purpose of narrative case studies, I have attempted to "describe the cases in sufficient descriptive narrative so that readers can vicariously experience these happenings and draw conclusions (which may differ from those of the researchers)" (Stake, 2000, p.439). This approach was the most appropriate for this study whose aim was both to understand the relevance of each of the five women's stories and also to provide some insight into the lives of other women. The expectation was that the study of these cases may "lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases" (Stake, 2000, p. 437). The value in stories about particular people in a specific context is especially useful in Dubai where the body of published research is limited.

3.3.2 Selection of Participants

Using the DWC personal faculty recommendations, I contacted a selection of six working graduates of DWC by telephone. I planned to report on five women, but initially contacted six in case one of the women chose to discontinue her participation. I considered five to be an appropriate number of participants to report on to provide an adequate variety of stories and experiences while still maintaining a manageable amount of data for an in-depth analysis. The participants were selected based on the perception of the various faculty members of their willingness to speak openly. The aims, procedures and duration of the research were explained and the graduate was invited to participate. All the graduates that I contacted readily agreed to participate. A preliminary interview was conducted to explore the interest and openness of the potential participant. All of the

participants appeared to be comfortable with the process and the themes and were willing to discuss their views and therefore were asked to continue in the study. All six women continued in the study until the end so I was forced to make the decision on whether to report on all six women or to report on only five of the participants.

Based on word length limitations and the need for clarity in communication, I decided to report on five women only. The decision to eliminate one participant from the report was not made easily since all of the participants brought unique perspectives to the study. However, I felt that the inclusion of all six would hinder the readers' ability to distinguish among the women and recall their stories. I decided to retain the five participants who best illustrated the identified themes. I feel that while the elimination of the sixth participant is regrettable, the majority of her insights were reflected in the other participants' stories and I feel that the five women that I chose afforded the most insightful illustrations of the social discourses that shape their lives.

In order to allow for a variety of perspectives, graduates were selected from diverse programs, different graduation year groups, varying employment positions and with different marital status. In the past, I had personally taught two of the six participants. Out of the remaining four, I knew one slightly and had never met the other three. However, the participants that I did not know were initially contacted by colleagues who knew them and provided an introduction for me. In all cases, the participants appeared to be comfortable with sharing their thoughts and experiences with me. By virtue of their education at the college, the participants occupy a somewhat privileged position in society. It must be acknowledged that their experiences will differ, perhaps significantly, compared to less educated women.

3.3.3 Position of the Researcher

Writing about gender as it is experienced in Islamic/Arabic societies poses a number of theoretical and political challenges. How to write about gender without assigning superiority or supremacy to the Western construction of gender? How to represent competing discourses without either wiping out or exaggerating

differences? And how to capture those aspects of the Arab region that intone oppression or misery, while simultaneously capturing the resistance, power, commitment, and enjoyment of life that also characterize Arab/Islamic life? (Treacher 2003, p. 60)

In the quote above, Treacher eloquently captures the challenges of qualitative, ethnographic research. In this research, the background and views of the researcher significantly impact the research in a number of ways. "[O]ur location influences the questions we ask, how we conduct our research and how we write our research" (England, 1994, p. 87). As a researcher, it is important to be self-reflexive – to analyze my own views and articulate them clearly. To mitigate the negative effects of bias the ethnographer must make specific biases explicit and must have an open mind (Pellatt, 2003). The use of a self-reflexive research process not only provided new insights but also provided information about how the knowledge emerged (Diaz, 2002).

I am a middle-aged, female Canadian teacher at DWC and I am happily married with two teen-aged children. I feel that I have successfully combined my role as a wife and mother with my career as an accountant and teacher. I have proudly made my own decisions although I have never faced serious opposition from my family. I am very satisfied with my life; therefore, I would support the same values in others. I must acknowledge that these views impacted upon the conduct of my research. However, while it is critical for researchers like me to acknowledge and recognize their own positionality in all aspects of the research process, it does not make their positions unproblematic. Pillow (2003) extended this idea of reflexivity by postulating that while it is important for researchers to be transparent about their positions, researchers must try to know others and understand *their* positions. Notwithstanding, it is not appropriate for researchers to try to put themselves *in* the positions of their interviewees because the privileges, experiences and views would be different.

In my eight years of teaching Accounting and Management at DWC, I have had the opportunity to closely observe the development of college students. England (1994) has

suggested that the background of the researcher can serve to both inhibit and enable insight into the thoughts of the participants. I feel that my experience allowed for greater insight. I took on a role that is similar to the "witness" role described by Lather (1994) where the researcher participates with the group but is not an actual member of the group. Since I am not an Arabic woman myself, I am in a position to view Emirati women intimately but from an external perspective. I believe that this perspective allowed me to explain the women's stories in ways that are easily understood by other non-Arabic readers. However, it seemed that my extensive experience in working closely with Arabic women helped the participants to feel that I would understand their insights and experiences and encouraged them to share very sensitive issues with me.

This follows Lane's (cited in Pendlebury & Enslin, 2001) contention that useful research can be conducted by an external trained and attentive listener who is not a part of the group as a "native speaker". The fact that I am from a different culture than the interview participants did impact upon the nature of their responses, however, I feel that acknowledging this helped to maintain transparency in the research reporting. In addition, the demonstration of an open attitude throughout the interview process was vitally important. Haw (1996, p. 319) posed the question about whether cross-cultural research was valuable. She came to the conclusion that while the research data gathered will be "colored" by the position of the researcher, this does not render the research invalid or inappropriate. Rather, research conducted by a variety of researchers with differing positionalities serves to provide "different perspectives" that "can then be put into the theoretical 'melting pot' so that they can be critically examined, reworked and reinterpreted and in this way add to debate in the area".

In order to gain background knowledge and credibility with the participants, I have researched the history and culture of women in Dubai. Through my professional interactions with DWC students and graduates in general, I have developed a sense of trustworthiness with the interviewees to maintain confidentiality and exhibit a non-judgmental approach, hopefully increasing the quality of the research (Phurutse, cited in Pendlebury & Enslin, 2001).

England (1994) has noted that the researcher must acknowledge and make transparent the power relationship between the researcher and the researched. In my case, I have chosen participants who have completed their studies at the college or are studying in programs unrelated to my area of influence and therefore my intention here was to minimize the traditional power relationship. For the two graduates who I had taught in the past, while they often referred to me as 'Miss" indicating a perceived level of authority, they both appeared to offer frank opinions and insights.

In interviews, the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee significantly affects the nature of the responses. It is recognized that the interview will be affected and shaped by the interaction between both interview participants (King, 1992). The interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee not only determines what meanings emerge but also moves the meanings forward and leads to new meanings (Diaz, 2002). This process is referred to as reflexive heuristics and "is based on the idea that meanings are created in the very process of verbalizing experiences or observing other people's lives" (Diaz, 2002, p. 253). By conducting a series of interactive interviews over time, I hoped to encourage the mutual development of deeper understandings. Again, it is important to acknowledge my influence in this process. The study's feminist lens framed the interviews, however, through the use of open ended discussion and an environment of comfort and trust, I encouraged the women to freely express their ideas.

In order to elicit candid and relevant information, I encouraged elaboration and attempted to refrain from demonstrating any evaluation of the responses. A casual and flexible environment was encouraged to help informants to be relaxed and inclined to talk freely (Long & Dart, 2001). In order to make the interviewees feel more at ease and more willing to participate, the interviews were conducted at a time and place of the participants' choosing (Harris & Roberts, 2003). I encouraged the participants to choose a time and environment conducive to an open, informal atmosphere and adopted a conversational tone and relaxed body language. In most cases, the preferred location was a coffee shop, but in some cases, an office was the most convenient location for the

participant. Repeated interviews over time also appeared to encourage the building of trust and relationships.

It was important to try to ensure that the voices of the interviewees will be as authentic as possible. In any research, there are three voices – the voice of the researcher, the voice of the participants and the voices contained in academic literature. None of the voices are "original" since the researcher chooses what questions to ask, what responses to include and where and how to include them in the writing of the research report. These choices can potentially alter the meaning and intention of the voice (Segall, 2001). Authenticity, however, can be improved by the use of a continually self-reflexive and transparent stance throughout the research study. In addition, during the interviews I asked for clarification of their responses to help to increase the accuracy of representation.

3.4 Data Collection

I chose to use an unstructured interview approach to collect data. The interview method was intended to highlight new insights, provide the opportunity to explore topics in depth, allow the expression of affective as well as cognitive aspects of responses, and enable clarification of questions and answers (Frechtling & Sharp, 1997). As Fontana and Frey (2000, p. 645) noted, interviewing is "one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings". They go on to say that "unstructured interviewing can provide a greater breadth of data than the other types" (p. 652).

Participants were interviewed individually four or five times for 50-90 minutes each time over a period of approximately six months from October 2004 to March 2005. Individual interviews were preferred to allow the women to express their opinions without fear of comment by others. Basic demographic information was collected about each of the participants including age, marital status, number of children, educational achievements, and work history. The interviews followed an unstructured discussion type approach where the women were asked to respond to a variety of open-ended questions related to

themes drawn from the literature and informed by poststructural theory particularly emphasizing the issues of power and emancipation, such as:

- o Work-family conflict and balance
- o Gender issues at work
- o Issues of power for women
- o Restrictions placed on women by family and society
- o Issues facing working women in an Arabic, Islamic environment
- o Motivation for work
- o Sources of satisfaction
- o Sources of influence

Participants were encouraged to elaborate, include additional information and provide examples. Some topics were revisited at subsequent interviews to provide the women with the opportunity to contemplate and discuss the issues between sessions to develop and express deeper insights and to gain a high level of comfort with the process. In addition, the research was responsive to context and allowed for the flexibility to explore emergent issues (Fossey, Harvey, Mc Dermott & Davidson, 2002). For example, during the data collection period, Sheikh Zayed died providing the opportunity to discuss his influence on society. I also explored issues of importance and relevance to each participant and on occasion, I asked other participants about their view on an issue raised by another participant, without violating confidentiality. Throughout the interviews, I tried to draw out the comments that highlight cultural discourses and explored the ways that the women made sense of themselves within these discourses. It was important to attend to the women's perceptions and to explore the underlying cultural gendered assumptions that may appear to be 'taken for granted' by the women.

In any research that depends on people describing their thoughts and experiences, it is important to recognize that the stories told will change with each telling. Present circumstances change our views of the past and the way we choose to describe the past to the current audience. Frow (quoted in Crowe, 1998, p. 344) noted that "memory processes and retrieval of information are always reconstructed rather than recalled".

Hacking (quoted in Crowe, 1998, p. 344) referred to the transformative act of telling stories by proposing that "each of us becomes a new person as we redescribe the past". This suggests that the participants in my study will choose to tell their stories in their own way based on their thoughts and feelings at the time and their interaction with me. In addition, it is interesting to speculate about whether they themselves will experience a change in thinking by mere virtue of talking to me.

The interviews were tape-recorded with permission of the participants. Key discussions from the interviews were transcribed shortly after the actual interview date including brief notes on affective responses. Interviewees were informed of the purpose and confidential nature of the research and signed an ethics letter. Contact information for counselors was made available at the commencement of the first interview with each participant in the event that the women required support. However, none of the participants appeared to be emotionally distressed and never mentioned the desire for counselor support. Although Arabic is the native tongue of the interview participants, the interviews were conducted in English since I do not speak Arabic and I felt that the use of an interpreter would be invasive. Being DWC graduates, the participants have a very good knowledge of the English language and the interviews were conducted in a conversational manner with ample opportunity for interviewees to clarify any questions that they did not understand and for me to clarify any unclear comments. Occasionally, participants had difficulty with a vocabulary word, however, they were always able to communicate their thoughts using other words and I did not feel that the use of English unduly hindered communication.

3.5 Data and Discourse Analysis

Within a feminist poststructural framework, the data has been written up as a series of narrative descriptions. I decided that the narrative form of data representation was the most appropriate for my research. As Tedlock (2000, p. 471) noted, "One of the most important forms for creating meaning is a narrative that attends to the temporal dimension of human existence and shapes events into a unity". The examination and

analysis of underlying socio-economic discourses shed light on issues of power relationships and freedom of choice.

> Discourses are socially and culturally produced patterns of language, belief and practice. They develop over time, and different discourses become more or less prominent according to social and economic conditions. Discourses constitute power by describing and producing objects and subjects in different ways (Francis, 2002, p. 45).

Gavey (1989, p. 464) notes that discourses gain power because they produce ideas that are taken for granted as correct: "The dominant discourses appear "natural", denying their own partiality and gaining their authority by appealing to common sense".

Discourse analysis is a tool for critical analysis by endeavoring to identify the social discourses available in a given culture and society at a given time (Gavey, 1989). The definition of various discourses allows the explanation of existing power relationships and may highlight opportunities to resist and challenge them (Tisdell, 1998; Weedon, 1987). As Foucault (cited in Davies et al, 2002, p. 312) noted, "Criticism consists in uncovering that thought and trying to change it; showing that things are not as obvious as people believe, making it so that what is taken for granted is no longer taken for granted".

Following a feminist poststructuralist ideology, where women are able to see themselves in new ways, Davies (2000.p.89) explained how women can define and redefine themselves through the use of social discourse and how this process can change and develop as follows;

> An individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product, but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which he or she participates. Accordingly, who one is is always an open question with a shifting answer depending upon the positions made available within one's own and others'

discursive practices and within those practices, the stories through which we make sense of our own and others' lives. Stories are located within a number of different discourses and thus vary dramatically in terms of the language used, the concepts, issues, and moral judgments made relevant, and the subject positions made available within them. In this way poststructuralism shades into narratology.

The above quote emphasizes the usefulness of a narrative approach in the poststructuralist framework. By analyzing the stories that the participants chose to share and the way they chose to tell them, an understanding of the underlying social discourses emerges. Once women become more aware of these discourses, they may be able to find ways to deconstruct them and reconstruct them in ways that foster greater freedom. Following the study's concern to foreground relations of power affecting issues of relevance to the women, I endeavored to understand the women's subject positions and how they discursively construct themselves.

An important feature of this research is the fact that it emphasized the spoken thoughts and plans of the interviewees and their self-reported actions and decisions during the research period. The research is dependent on language and communication between the interviewer and the interviewee. As Weedon (1987, p.23) points out, language is a "site of political struggle" as we come to terms with society's meanings and implications for various words. The ways the participants chose to describe their actions and their thoughts can provide insight into the ways that they are engaging in their own version of 'political struggle'. This struggle for power may be evidenced by actions or through spoken words and may take place in the social community, or in the family unit or indeed within the woman's own ways of thinking as she constructs and reconstructs her position in relation to society's discourses. Such struggles seem to be more marked when considering the cross-cultural issues of the study. As Mernissi (1987, p. viii) has so eloquently highlighted,

When analyzing the dynamics of the Muslim world, one has to discriminate between two distinct dimensions: what people actually do, the decisions they

make, the aspirations they secretly entertain or display through their patterns of consumption, and the discourses they develop about themselves, more specifically the ones they use to articulate their political claims. The first dimension is about reality and its harsh time-bound laws, and how people adapt to pitilessly rapid change; the second is about self-presentation and identity building. And you know as well as I do that whenever one has to define oneself to others, whenever one has to define one's identity, one is on the shaky ground of self-indulging justifications. For example, the need for Muslims to claim so vehemently that they are traditional, and that their women miraculously escape social change and the erosion of time, has to be understood in terms of their need for self-representation and must be classified not as a statement about daily behavioral practices, but rather as a psychological need to maintain a minimal sense of identity in a confusing and shifting reality.

Fatma, one of the interviewees, echoed the idea that many locals are unwilling to discuss any negative aspects of their lives or their culture, especially to foreigners. Fatma volunteered this advice with regard to my research, "What I noticed, they [local people] are trying to show that they are fine, because, I'm sorry to say that, because we are like Muslims, or we are Arabs, we have to give a good impression about us" while Fatma felt that she herself was willing to be open (*Fatma's story*). Bearing this issue in mind, I am aware that certain issues were rarely discussed in the interviews such as physical violence; although I attempted to create an environment where the women felt confident to speak at ease and with openness and honesty.

Abu-Lughod (1993, p. 6) noted the need "to question what we worked on, how we wrote and for whom we wrote". Mindful of this, in documenting the stories of the women, I was also aware that the audience for this paper is not likely to be familiar with Arabic culture. To reduce possible misunderstandings, I have included background information, endeavored to explain cultural issues fully and included a glossary of potentially unfamiliar words in Appendix A and abbreviations in Appendix B.

I have presented the interview data in the form of narrative stories about each woman. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) emphasized the usefulness of narratives to illustrate the content of human lives and noted the three dimensions of temporal, spatial and personal-social as being important in narrative inquiry. People may tell and retell the stories of their lives in different ways depending on changes in these dimensions. This does not render the stories inaccurate or unimportant from a research point of view; but rather, emphasizes the importance of situating stories in place and time. I have attempted to describe the dimensions of time, space and relationship as they relate to the women in the study by noting where they are in their lives and how they feel about themselves and others at this time. For the sake of clarity, I have chosen to group similar themes in each woman's story as opposed to following a chronological account of each interview.

In analyzing the interview data, I have drawn on feminist post structural theory to identify how the women understand and navigate relations of power in their constitution of themselves as 'successful' women in their cultural context, illuminate dominant discourses that interplay to construct the participants' identities and examine how they create pathways of resistance. I have chosen to present the interview data in narrative stories about each woman centered around themes related to the research questions. I have included many direct quotes from the interviewees in an attempt to foreground the voices of the participants. The ways in which women articulate their views is significant to providing an understanding of the way they position themselves with reference to social discourses as Davies (2000, p.91) noted,

> Positions are identified in part by extracting the autobiographical aspects of a conversation in which it becomes possible to find out how each conversant conceives of themselves and of the other participants by seeing what position they take up and in what story, and how they are in turn positioned.

3. 6 Introduction of the study participants

To maintain confidentiality, the names of the participants, their friends, their family members and their employers have been changed.

3.6.1 Alia

Alia graduated from the Higher Diploma Accounting programme at DWC in 2001. She then obtained a job as a government auditor and continued to study part-time and completed her Bachelor of Applied Science in Business in 2003. I taught her several courses in 2000 and 2001 and kept in touch with her periodically since then. She is 26 years old, married and has two daughters ages five and two. Her husband graduated from an American university and studied logistics. He now works in a bank. She stated proudly, "He is a branch manager, he does well. Alhamdulilah" (Alia, 14.09.04).

Alia has two brothers and six sisters. Her eldest brother is from a different mother and she does not see him as much. Alia said, "He is working in the Port Authority. What job, I don't know. Because he is not my close brother. His mother is different so he didn't live even with us". Her parents had a "very simple education". Alia said, "I feel proud of myself when I graduated. I was only the second in the house to graduate with a Bachelor's" (Alia, 14.09.04). Alia and her husband own a house, but they rent it out to others and live with her parents-in-law.

Alia has been working as a government auditor for the past three years. She is well paid and works short hours, however, she does not find her job to be challenging or fulfilling. Alia is interested in being an entrepreneur and she has recently taken the first steps to opening her own auditing firm (Alia, 14.09.04).

3.6.2 Amna

Amna is single and graduated with a Higher Diploma from the Travel and Tourism programme at DWC. I knew Amna casually from the college although I never taught her. In response to my question, "Tell me about yourself", Amna replied, "I'm 22 years old. I'm working in the hospitality industry in the XX hotel [a well-known international hotel]". "I try my best to gain as much experience as I can here because in the future I will not work in the XX hotel like all my life. So I'm trying my best to gain experience here and then I can move to other companies or I can establish my own company like in marketing field only." (Amna, 31.10.04).

Amna explained, "My family, we live in one house. My father with us, my mother and I have five sisters, two brothers. I am in the middle. I'm the fifth. I have four older sisters, all of them are working, only my youngest sister, she's studying, still studying in the school. And my brother still studying in the Higher College. And I have also another brother, he's studying aviation. He's now in Australia actually. He got a private license from here and now he's in Australia trying to get his commercial license" (Amna, 31.10.04).

Amna's parents had some education. She said, "My father has only a primary degree and my mother a secondary degree". Her father is retired from a high government position and has now taken another job at a different government department. Amna's mother is from India and has always been a homemaker. Amna's paternal grandfather was a fisherman from Ras Al Khaimah, a smaller emirate in the UAE (Amna, 31.10.04).

3.6.3 Fatma

Fatma is 27 years old. She graduated from the Higher Diploma Accounting programme in 1999 and completed her Bachelor of Applied Science in Business in 2001. I taught Fatma several courses in 1998 and 1999 and we have always had a good relationship. From time to time, she has shared her thoughts and asked my opinion about challenges in her life. Fatma is currently considering a marriage proposal.

Fatma has three brothers and one sister. Her sister and one brother are studying medicine. Her father studied law and is now retired from his job at the immigration department. He is currently continuing his law studies and is considering opening his own law office. Fatma's mother is originally from Iran and although she has a high school certificate, she has never worked outside the home. In fact, Fatma's mother experiences very limited freedom since her husband will not allow her to drive or even leave the house without him. However, Fatma feels that he is becoming more flexible with Fatma herself now that he is older (Fatma, 24.09.04).

Fatma worked for three years at a large airline. She enjoyed the atmosphere in the accounting department but did not find the work to be challenging. Fatma felt a sense of satisfaction in her work and felt that she was appreciated by other employees. Fatma applied for and was offered a promotion in a neighboring city where she was planning to move after her marriage to a man from this city. However, when the marriage plans fell through, Fatma was unable to move to this city on her own and she was forced to refuse the promotion and leave the organization.

Fatma then accepted an officer position at an international bank which has an excellent reputation for encouraging local employees. Fatma was then assigned clerk-type duties to perform. At first she accepted these duties as a learning experience, but when no career development was available, she became very frustrated. She approached numerous staff members in the HR department who made promises but then left the organization before fulfilling any of them. After a year, Fatma quit in frustration. "I suffered a lot, for one year." Fatma feels that she has been treated badly because she has no wasta or family connections. Fatma is currently searching for a job (Fatma, 24.09.04).

3.6.4 Laila

Laila is 24 years old, single and obtained a Higher Diploma in Information Technology from DWC in 2001. I had never met Laila prior to this study. She is currently completing her bachelor degree in the same field after being convinced to study by her best friend. Laila is looking forward to finishing her time at the college. She finds it hard to balance college and work because she doesn't like to leave her work for the day unfinished. She said, "I feel myself, this is like my baby, the programme is like my baby. I should cherish it and like try to finish everything and I always try to finish before the deadline" (Laila, 29.10.04).

Laila has worked in the Internet section of a local telecommunications company as an analyst-programmer for the past three years. In her own words, she said, "I like movies, music, Japanese animation, cultural sketching, poems, swimming, sand, beaches, waterfalls. I love waterfalls" (Laila, 29.10.04).

Laila's mother left school after grade five and married her father when she was 20 years old. She was the second of seven wives and had six children. Including the children of the other wives, there are 20-21 children in the family. Each wife and children lived in separate houses but they would see each other on special occasions. Laila's father graduated with an education degree from university and worked at the Ministry of Education until he retired. He passed away last year (Laila, 29.10.04).

3.6.5 Nada

Nada is 24 years old and graduated from DWC in 1998 with a Higher Diploma in Medical Imaging. She is currently completing the last course of her bachelor degree in the same field at the college. I met Nada for the first time during this research. She comes from a well-educated family with six siblings – her mother worked as a teacher and her father is now retired from the Ministry of Health. Nada was educated in an English-language private school where although girls and boys were segregated, they still interacted and cooperated in their studies.

Nada was an excellent student who graduated with top marks; however, she and her friend were the last graduates to obtain employment. She felt that this was due to the fact that her passport shows her as a resident of Sarah and she felt that Dubai residents were preferred in Dubai where she was looking for work. After a year of unemployment, Nada used some 'wasta' to apply pressure on the Ministry of Health to employ her. After a year of rotating through all of the radiography departments in the government hospitals, she chose to work in the ultrasound maternity and pediatric area because she enjoys working with pregnant women and especially children. Nada has now been working in the same government hospital for the past six years.

Nada has been married for four years. Her marriage was arranged, however, she noted that they took quite a bit of time to make sure that they were a suitable match. "We stayed five months engaged and an additional nine months thinking about getting married

or not. I mean it was not a rushed decision. So, we studied each other properly. He is an educated person and I told him everything before getting married" (Nada, 13.10.04). Nada's husband is a lawyer with his own private law practice. Nada has a two-year old son and is currently expecting a second child.

This chapter has explained the research methodology that frames and guides this study. The following chapter presents these five women's stories.

Chapter 4 The Research Story

The purpose of this chapter is to present the stories of the women that I interviewed. I have decided to present each woman's story as a separate case study to give readers the opportunity to get a deeper impression of each woman's personal world and thoughts. Although the information in each story was gathered over a period of five to six months, I have chosen to ignore the chronological aspect in favor of grouping similar themes that may have recurred in subsequent interviews to increase clarity. I have attempted to present the stories using the women's own words to a great extent so that they tell their own stories. I have also chosen not to correct any grammar or vocabulary errors to avoid inadvertently altering the meaning or the voice of the story. Occasionally, I have summarized some aspects of the conversations into my own words to tell the story concisely. I have minimized my own voice in the interviews in order to foreground the opinions and views of the women in relation to the relevant issues.

As the interviews were quite long, I had to omit a lot of interesting information in the interest of brevity. I have selected to include the quotes that relate to my research questions regarding social discourses while still illustrating the overall issues that matter most to the women. I have included a glossary in Appendix A and a list of abbreviations in Appendix B to explain some of the cultural terms and abbreviations that may be unfamiliar to some readers. For convenient reference, I have ordered the stories alphabetically by the first name of the participant.

Since I interviewed all of the women personally, you will find me throughout the stories as well. I recognize that I had a major impact in drawing out the stories of the participants and indeed shaped the stories that they chose to tell, the ways in which they chose to tell them, and the way I chose to present and interpret them (England, 1994). While I attempt to fade into the background in order to allow the women's voices to shine through, it must be noted that I did not act as a disinterested and disconnected observer but rather an active participant in the conversations that resulted in these fascinating stories (England, 1994). As noted earlier, I acted as an informed 'witness' (Lather, 1994) where I

interacted with the participants but was not a member of the group of Arabic women that they represent. I believe that this perspective enabled me to maintain both a sense of distance and intimacy when recording and reporting the women's stories.

In constructing the stories, I drew on the tenets of feminist poststructural theory to foreground issues of power and identify the dominant discourses shaping each woman's ways of being. My attention was drawn to how each woman made sense of herself and positioned herself within these discourses. The use of the narrative approach combined with a series of interviews conducted over an extended time period allowed for reflection and re-storying by the participants (Clandinin and Connelly, 1989) and resulted in a rich description of their stories as they chose to tell them and as I interpreted them. The stories illuminate the complex ways in which each woman struggles within and against the dominant discourses that frame their lives.

4.1 Alia's Story

I interviewed Alia four times in my office at the college and once at her office. During two of the interviews, Alia brought along one of her daughters. Alia answered freely, however, I needed to ask for further elaboration on many of her thoughts to maintain a steady flow of conversation. Despite having an unchallenging job, Alia strives to find personal satisfaction while not compromising the responsibility she feels in caring for her family.

Alia is dedicated to her husband and her two children as well as her extended family. She and her husband own a house, but they rent it out to others. "I prefer to sit with my parents-in-law", Alia said. "No responsibility, no one with them in the house. They want us to sit with them; they like the kids." Alia explained that she does not argue with her in-laws. She elaborated on her reasons for why she enjoys living with them, "They are kind to me, no one with them, the house is very big, the area is better than the area which our house is." She indicated that they will live together for the next three to four years but if she has another baby, she will need more space and she might move to her own house (Alia, 14.09.04).

I asked what her grandparents were like and Alia replied, "My grandparents, okay, my grandfather, the one who I saw, he was trading dates and camels for the sheikhs in Qatar, in Saudi Arabia and Oman. That's why his relation was very strong to them even in Dubai. My grandmother, as any other wife in that period, cooking and taking care of the family" (Alia, 14.09.04). In a later interview, Alia revealed that her grandfather earned most of his income from trading in weapons while appearing to trade in dates and camels (Alia, 13.12.04).

Alia described her mother's marriages which provided an insight into historical Arabic culture; "Even in the past, my mother was telling me, boys and girls play in the street together. You see, they get married very young. And in the past, there was poverty and the life here was very hard so at the age of 13, even the boys start to work with their fathers, to go to dive, or fishing or selling fish. And the girls from the age of 12, 13 , they get married. My mother, her first marriage was when she was 13 and her second marriage, which was my father, when she was 16. The first marriage is a strange story. That guy was my grandfather's friend and he told him, 'Okay Ali, give me your hand and my grandfather gave him his hand and he said when Amna, which is his daughter, grows up, I will marry her'. And my grandfather was laughing, 'Okay, marry her'. And that guy didn't forget this story and he came back when my mother was 12 or 13. His first son is my mother's age. And he came to my grandfather and my grandfather told my grandmother that I can't give up my promise, helas, I promised that guy. And you know how the people here, mentality, if he gave you a word, that's it. I think my mother was his second or his third [wife], maybe. Then he married to my mother but my grandmother personality is very strong. She was well known about it, very strong, and everybody respect her. And then my grandmother said, 'Okay, helas, marry her, I know what to do'. They forced him to divorce her then. After one year maybe. Because some people came to them, 'Oh you know Mohamed, he married to another woman from Syria'. Then my grandmother said, 'Alhamdulilah, I have found a reason'. She told him, 'My daughter or you divorce your other wife'. Because she want her daughter back" (Alia, 13.12.04).

Regarding Alia's parents, I asked, "Did they fall in love eventually?" Alia said, "You know how it's here in our culture. There is no love before marriage. But then when you live with him, you have kids, you love him. I remember, from childhood until now, Alhamdulilah, my family is a very happy family, very close. And I think I'm very lucky that I lived with my grandparents and my parents because we are all in one house. I always think my mother is very lucky because her parents with her. I always tell my mother, 'You are very lucky, you didn't suffer to have the babies'. My grandmother used to do everything for her" (Alia, 13.12.04).

When I asked about her marriage, Alia explained, "It was arranged marriage, you know. His father recommend, 'Okay why don't you marry from Khalid's daughters? Then he said, 'Okay'. He came from the States and he just want, he told his family, 'I want her to be very young, and I want her to be thin and tall and with a little bit dark skin'. And they said, 'Okay, this is Khalid's daughter, she is blah, blah, blah and they just came to my house. I didn't saw him until we signed the contract. That day, he saw me and I saw him. Alhamdulilah, I feel I am lucky to have a husband like him" (Alia, 25.10.04).

I asked Alia why her husband wanted a very young wife and she said, "I tell you why. He's always thinking that if he marries a young woman, he can - not adjust - be as he wants her. She will be as he wants her. And that's true! When I got married, I was nineteen; so whatever he told me, I think, 'Oh that is right'. He was thirty and I was younger than him. I think it's okay. I will be always look young. And I think also, at thirty, he is more mature than me. He will be taking care more" (Alia, 25.10.04). Alia recently returned from a two-week training course in Qatar on auditing in the oil sector. Her husband accompanied her. I asked if they brought the kids along and Alia said, "He will never look after them!" and she left them with her mother (Alia, 29.01.05).

Alia does not want to have a large family. She compared this view to the past saying, "Like us, yanni, the new generation, our mentality is totally different than my parents. My mother she was sitting just at home, having kids, take care of them. But me, I want to work. I want to have my own career. I want to continue my education. Now everyone is

saying the bachelor, or the higher diploma, is nothing, you should get the master. Then they will say the master is nothing and, you know, you have to always run after the track". When I asked Alia about her mother's views on her lifestyle, she answered, "She think, I'm crazy. Killing me, killing myself with studying. She tell me, 'okay, helas, you got the bachelor, what else you want? Take care of your kids, your husband and that's it'. But I think, no, I want to do something else" (Alia, 14.09.04).

When I asked whether her husband supports her future plans, Alia replied, "He said, 'Do whatever you want. If you are happy and you feel you can do it, just do it'". Alia explained how this contrasted with her sister's husband. She said, "For example, my sister, she wants to take the Masters but her husband has only got, not even a secondary school certificate. He just finished up to the second year of secondary school. And when she came to apply for the masters, he told her, 'You have your family, you have your daughter, take care of your daughter, better than, you know, taking the master. It's useless. He told her, "What are you going to do with the master? You already got a job and that's it'". I asked what the result was and Alia said, "She changed her mind" (Alia, 14.09.04).

Alia has been working as a government auditor for the past 3 years. When I asked about her ability to balance between study, work and family, Alia explained, "See for us, as you know, here we live with our families so it was very easy for me, my parents-in-law and even my parents, they were taking care of the kids while I'm in the work and even in the college. And time management was helping me a lot, I always manage my time, when she sleeps, I start to do my work." She takes it for granted that taking care of the kids, working and studying is her responsibility. She said, "I like to keep myself busy" (Alia, 14.09.04).

Alia discussed her frustrations with her work; "Inshallah. W'allah. I don't want to stay there, really. This is not Alia. I want to do something, yanni. I want to go back home with the feeling that I, you know, achieved something. I did something to someone. But there, I don't feel like I'm learning or I'm doing a real job. Although everybody's telling me,

I'm crazy. The salary I'm getting from the XX, I won't get it anywhere. But I told them, 'No problem, two thousand or three thousand less but I'm satisfied, that's what I want". She emphasized, "Everybody's telling me, 'It' s a good job, you go whenever you want and you leave whenever you want'. Okay, but that's not what I want" (Alia, 25.10.04).

However, Alia feels that there is no discrimination against women at her workplace. She said, "In our department, they encourage us as a woman, they want us to work, especially our manager, Y.A., you can't imagine, he just want to push us, do anything, yanni, he wants us to be shown. Doing something really, and especially, for example if I do a report and it written by Alia, he will take it immediately to the person who is higher than him - this is Alia, she is a local girl, she did so and so and she found out these things." Alia discussed the way she was treated in her department, "I work with six other men and I am the only lady the last whole year and nothing happen to me. They respect me as if I am one of their sisters or a member of their family - they really respect me" (Alia, 14.09.04).

Alia defended her views on working with men by emphasizing that despite the views of some people, Islam does not prevent women from working with men. She said, "Islam didn't say don't work with men, don't study with men, just cover your face, I mean, your hair, yanni, wear a good dress, I mean cover your body and that's it. And even when Islam says, okay, when you talk, it only teach you how to deal with men, not, yanni, tell you don't deal with men at all, or don't work with men. It's only crazy people who have this mentality" (Alia, 14.09.04).

Alia has, however, observed and experienced racial discrimination for both local men and local women. She noted casually, "Because I am local they do not think that I know anything and they don't give me any attention in the meeting. But I think no problem. By time, we can be like them. I want to tell them to give us a chance, even though we don't have so much knowledge." She is very disappointed that so few locals work in the organizations that she audits. She estimated that out of 900 total employees, only 50 are

locals, despite the existence of an emiratization programme to encourage the employment of locals (Alia, 14.09.04).

Alia explained how she feels the use of wasta will change; "In our country up to this moment, wasta is working. But I think, 5 years, in the next 5 years, no. No wasta, no family name, nothing, only your own work because that's what Sheikh Mohamed wants. He wants, even if you are a high school graduate but you are productive, he wants you. But if you got a doctor or whatever, but you are not producing anything to, for Dubai, you know, he don't want you. You see, Dubai is growing very fast and they want people to come with new ideas, who work hard" (Alia, 14.09.04).

Alia is looking forward to some positive changes due to a new policy that the government auditors' work will be checked by independent auditors hired by the executive office. She said, "The executive office will check our work. Now everyone is preparing their files". "They are reporting directly to Sheikh Mohammed". Alia noted that in order to implement change, their department needs a new manager who is less like a father and is more tough. Alia said, "Our department needs a very tough person" (Alia, 29.01.05).

I asked Alia what she felt about materialism in Dubai and she said, "People just want to buy very expensive things, just to show off. People here, they don't think to invest. They think to spend more, yanni. They think of spending more than investing which I think is a big problem. It's getting worse. I don't know, yanni. If I think of the group that I am everyday with, they changed. Although they are all, they have lots of money, their fathers have lots, they are thinking of how to invest, how to save. But they are one percent of the total UAE people. Here the people, if you ask any of the working, yanni, your students, 'Do you have saving account?', she will tell you, 'No, I don't have'". Alia herself noted that while she had a savings account, her husband preferred to spend his money on his hobbies (Alia, 25.10.04).

I asked whether she felt that it was her responsibility to save for the children's education, and Alia remarked, "I think my husband as well, but you know how womens always feel.

And also I feel I have to save because maybe one day will come when we need really money and we don't have. And I'm the kind of person, very independent. I don't like to go back to my parents. And I don't want my husband as well to go back to his parents" (Alia, 25.10.04).

Alia mentioned that she believes that all household in the UAE have loans. She feels that people spend beyond their means, she explained, "And if I think about it, why are you taking a loan, big loan? To buy a fancy car? Why don't you buy a car with the money which you have? Okay, no problem, take a loan, instead of taking 250,000 to buy a Porsche, for example, just take 50,000 or 60,000 and buy a Camry, Toyota. But people here don't think. Like when I bought my car, my husband gave me 100,000 and I had 50,000 and he said, "But okay the 500ML is only 10,000 more. I told him what we have is 150 so I'll buy a car with 150 - not one dirham more than that" (Alia, 25.10.04).

Alia noted that materialism and racial discrimination are problems in Dubai saying, "The other problem is marriage from foreigners. Yanni, for the local people. If you see now the percentage of what you call it, I forgot the English word. The percentage of unmarried girls is very high. The reason behind this, I'll tell you why. Because the girls are demanding lots of money plus the men now, the boys now, they don't have to pay all this money to bring whatever the girls is want. They want very big marriage which costs around 500,000. They want, the girl, she want her own house, she want two maids, fancy car. Who will pay for all these things? This man's salary is only 10,000, for example. It's impossible. The men's here, they think, 'Oh, okay if I marry, for example, from the Far East, she will not cost me - only a ticket, only 5000 dirhams. Or if I marry a Russian'. But that's a problem. Like one of my husband's family members, he married from, to a woman from Thailand. The kids' now in college stages. Everyone is, you know, make fun of them because the culture here, 'Oh he is, his mother is from Thailand. Look at this eye'. I think this is a problem. And in the future, if he propose to one lady, no one will marry him, pure local. Yanni, like for me, when my husband propose to me, my parents ask about his father, his grand, grand, grandfather and his grand, grand, grandmother –

are they pure locals? From which family? So this is a problem. But maybe 20 years in future, these things will a little bit vanish" (Alia, 25.10.04).

I asked how Alia felt when Sheikh Zayed died. Alia responded, "A big part of us is missing. I always said, yanni, it's really from our heart. We don't feel that he is a president, even we call him Baba Zayed. We love him as… I feel that he is like my grandfather. It was, you know, like a big cloud when he left. And even today at work, I was telling my friend, 'I just never imagine how it will be, our life without him'. I asked Alia if she felt that life would be different now and she replied, "No, I wish no. Because I don't think Sheikh Khalifa will be different than him. He will not be the same 100% but still he's the son and he will, you know, follow his path" (Alia, 13.12.04).

I asked, "How important is religion to you?" Alia replied, "It's the most important thing for me and I really want to teach it to my kids because if you really follow your religion, I think, you will be a good person" (Alia, 29.01.05).

Alia talked about her plans for the near future; "I am planning to open an auditing office. It will be in Sheikh Zayed programme or encouraging young business leaders. I went there because annual rent will be 8,000 and they pay for the license and everything. So my expenses will be around 10 to 15 [thousand] only, provide me with computer, line, telephone line, fax, email address, everything, which is excellent". She also noted that she would like to have a third child (Alia, 13.12.04).

4.2 Amna's Story

Amna was a member of the first graduating class in the Travel and Tourism programme at DWC. She is proud to have chosen a different career path than her siblings and credits the college for teaching her to be punctual, meet deadlines and develop her self confidence – skills which have enabled her to succeed in her career at an international hotel. I interviewed Amna four times in a quiet coffee lounge at the hotel where she works. Amna, who is single, struggles with community perceptions of her working in an unconventional field and has currently decided to follow stricter religious principles.

Amna discussed the challenges she overcame to reach this point in her career saying, "Actually I had a problem with my family in the beginning when I chose travel and tourism major in the college. So I talked to my father. I asked him. I told him that I like this major, this new major in the college. We will be first group graduating from this major in Higher Diploma. So he said, 'Okay, you can join this major but you cannot work in the hotel'. So it was a big challenge for me. I joined this major, I studied, I finished but it required for me that I have to work, to have work placement in one of the hotels in Dubai. So I was selected to work in ZZ Hotel for one month. So I was scared a little bit in the beginning so I asked my father, 'This is only one month, only one month. I will not work in the hotel later on. I will gain experience there; I will see how work is done there'. So he said, 'Okay, no problem. Only one month'. So I start working there. At the end of my work experience, I invited my father on the last day. I told him, 'Come and see the department there'. So he came and I took him around the hotel. I showed him the departments, back offices. So he had a chat with the managers, with the staff. And when we were in the car, he said, 'Okay, no problem, you can work in the hotel after graduation'" (Amna, 31.10.04).

Amna described her pride in obtaining her position as follows, "I was the first local woman working in the UAE in the reception area so I was very proud of myself. I had so many guests coming from different countries, especially from Gulf countries, they come and encourage me; 'Oh wow, we can see a local female working here'. And, you know, I was very, very proud of myself. And then I moved to marketing and this also first job that a local woman handle. And from my childhood, I put in my mind that I want to work in the area that I be the first woman in this area, from my childhood, mashallah – so my dream become true" (Amna, 31.10.04).

Amna's motivation for work is clear in this quote; "I found myself here. They respect us. They give us chances to prove ourselves. So salary is not very important. Even when the HR, the human resources, manager talk to me, and he said, 'Okay, why you don't want to be in the reception area?' I told him, 'I like the reception area but I didn't find myself in

the reception. I feel that I need to do something different - not check in check out. Everyone can do check in check out, but I want to do something that challenging to me'. He said, 'Okay, maybe your reason because you want a high salary?' I told him, 'Salary is not very important to me. Okay, I accept this job for 3000 dirhams and I have Higher Diploma. But it is not a very important point for me. The important thing is that I have to work in the industry that I like. Because if you work in the industry that you like, you will feel comfortable. You will deal with people in good way. You will be prove yourself. You will reach high position" (Amna, 31.10.04).

Amna discussed how she dealt with the criticism she faced for her career choice saying, "My father said, 'How do you accept a job with 3000 dirhams, it's nothing'. I told him, 'Okay, but the most important thing is that I am working in something I like'. So he accept this. But my other relatives, 'Ah, you are crazy! You have to work in other companies with 8000 or 10000. So how many years you will work in the hotel and you will have the same salary?' So I told them, 'Okay, after nine months, I was promoted to marketing communications executive. It's a nice position, a department that I like. Okay, they doubled my salary. It's not very high, but they doubled my salary'. It's fine with me because I know after maybe one year or two years, I will get something else because Hotel YY [another branch of the hotel] is opening very soon, the new hotel" (Amna, 31.10.04).

Amna explained her views about the differences between the private and public sectors; "In private sector, we have to work very hard. But in government sector… You know how the employees in government sector they come at 7:30 or 8:00. They stay in the offices. They chat, chat, chat, chat, eat and chat, eat and chat. At 2:00, 2:30, they go home. They didn't do something important. Okay, they did their usual work, but not very important that maybe this job will lead them to something else. But in private sector if I do something this will lead me to something else, something you know" (Amna, 31.10.04).

I asked, "Do you have any difficulties working with the staff at the hotel?" Amna replied, "In the beginning, yeah, in the reception, because they thought that I'm a local, they don't have to talk to me, you know. They were like away from me. 'Ah, don t talk to her'. It was a bit challenge for me. So later on, I spoke to the front office manager and I told him, 'See, I don't want the staff to treat me as a local. I want them to treat me as one of the staff here – not as a local'. So he said, 'Wow! Okay!' So we had a training, I think, so he discussed this topic with them. So he said, 'Don't treat her like she's a local, treat her as if she is one of the staff, guest service officer in the reception. Treat her like this'. I told them if I did a mistake tell me you did a mistake. Yeah that's it" (Amna, 31.10.04). Amna described an incident where she was short AED 500 in balancing her cash. She noted with pride, "So this is a good case. They are not treating me as a local, they force me to pay 500" (Amna, 12.01.05).

Amna gave another example when she was initially treated as a local saying, "Even when they have activities or dinner, lunch outside the hotel, they said, 'Oh, we cannot invite her because she's a local'. I don't know. Why? It's okay for you to invite me. I can come, even with my sister, I can come. So we had, once we had a picnic in Al Mamzar Park. All the staff in the front office, we went there. Believe me, it was a very, very nice day. We stayed together we played, you know" (Amna, 31.10.04).

Amna recognized that while the government supports women working in the hospitality industry, sometimes the families do not; "The government, the Dubai government, or UAE government, they support us. Whether boy or girl, they support us. If a girl wants to work in hotel, or bank or any other private company, they support her. Like Sheikh Mohamed, he supports the girls. Every time, when he comes here, he says, 'I am proud of the UAE women'" (Amna, 31.10.04). Amna described the attitudes prevalent in society about work in the hotel industry as a major problem. She said, "Maybe the locals' perception about the private sector and working in the hotel industry, especially males. Especially males, they have a bad perception about the private sector and the hotel industry. Because females, yeah, females if you ask them to work in the hotel or private sector, they will not mind but they will mind because of their parents, because of their

families. But they will not mind to work in the hotel or the private sector. But the men, the problem is that UAE men, they want immediately a high position. They want a high position immediately. High position, high salary, less hours and government sector, helas that's it" (Amna, 12.01.05).

Amna noted that she does not always reveal that she works in a hotel to avoid community criticism. She said, "But now sometimes it depends on the person I'm talking to. So if I notice that he's not the one who will encourage me or not the one who will accept that, I don't tell him that I'm working in the hotel. For example, my grandmother, I told her in the beginning that I'm working in the hotel but because she's very old and she forgets each time, so she asks me a lot, 'Where do you work? Where do you work?' Nowadays, I don't tell her. Because, old people, when you tell them hotel or something like that, they say, 'Oh why?' and they talk so much" (Amna, 29.01.05).

Amna explained how she appreciates the cultural sensitivity of her employer saying, "They have to respect our culture. This is very important. Because now the hotels are respecting us, respecting our culture, our traditions, everything. Even I'm working in marketing, I don't have to touch the food. I don't touch these things. They don't ask me to do anything related to these things. For example, the entertainment centre, Mix, I don't handle this. My colleague handles this. They respect us" (Amna, 12.01.05).

We discussed marriage and Amna explained, "Here arranged marriages works better than love marriage. Love marriage, nowadays, is because people are looking to serials, to poems, to movies, to these things so they want to try this love. They want this. For example, if I see this one guy here, I see him, 'Oh he is so handsome, I want to marry him'. I was talking about love and these things. But marriage is not like this; marriage is more big than this. Marriage has so many things, so many responsibilities. Okay love, but not only this" (Amna, 29.01.05).

I asked Amna, "What makes a good marriage?" She replied, "First of all, I feel that I have to understand the man that I'm going to marry him. I need to understand him. I need

to see if his thoughts are like my thoughts. It doesn't mean that I have to marry a guy that has similar thoughts, no, but who can understand me and who can accept and understand my thoughts and can advice me when I do something wrong. Sharing maybe, sharing is also an important part. Respecting him, respecting his family. His relationship with people, his relationship with his family, with me, all these things" (Amna, 29.01.05).

Since none of Amna's siblings are married, I asked if they were looking for spouses. She replied, "We cannot go and force the guy, 'Come and marry my sister'. We cannot do this. My father, okay, he mention in his majlis or something. You know, 'I have a daughter'. Not directly, 'I have a daughter that…' No, no. So people know that we have female in the house". Amna noted that if he mentioned them more directly, people might think, "He's fed up with them" (Amna, 29.01.05).

I asked if working in a hotel would deter some potential husbands. Amna answered, "That's why they say that when females work in the hotel, they don't get married. And they told me actually, I was told when I started working here, they told me that". Amna noted that her family members and other community members told her, "Okay she's working in the hotel now. We don't want anyone who is working in a hotel". I asked, "Does it bother you?" Amna replied, "No, because you know why? Because I believe that if my God wrote that I will get married, then helas I will get married". Amna also said, "I want my husband to be open-minded. So he has to accept this job. Because if he thinks that this is a bad job, I don't think that I will marry him. Because he has like different thoughts, different… maybe I can try to change these thoughts but if I couldn't, I will not get married with him because I know that he is not suitable for me" (Amna, 31.10.04).

Amna commented that she wanted to marry a religious man so I asked her if she was religious. She explained how she was becoming more religious saying , "Little bit. I'm changing now. I'm changing my life now. It's a big change in my life now. No one knows in the hotel, but my friends only and my family. I don't meet people alone. But because of my job, I have to do this. So maybe if I change my job here to work in another

organization because of this, not because I want to get married or something like that. If you go to the religion, deeply in our religion, most females, they have to sit at home. Even if I work, I work in a company that is all females like a school. I'm not thinking of that but nowadays, I prefer to not be much with people, to come here and sit with them. But before, I had to meet everyone, every single one. But nowadays, no, fax, emails. The main thing that if I change my job not because I want to get married or because people are talking, no" (Amna, 29.01.05).

Amna noted that her change in thinking resulted from the new freedom she gained by having her own car. She purchased a Honda Accord which has allowed her to attend religious lectures. She said, "I feel that I am independent more. I can go there and there. If I have something to do, some work to do, I have a car, I can go there. I don't have to wait for the driver to come, you know. It's difficult, it's very hard to tell the driver go here, go there" (Amna, 29.01.05).

I asked, "How are you becoming more religious?" Amna answered, "Like in my way of talking, in dealing with people, like being more closer to God by praying more. Now I'm praying a lot. I used to pray five times a day but we have also other things we can pray, like in the morning, like after sunrise, we have a prayer, there is one prayer we can pray so now I'm praying this prayer. And at night also, I wake up at night and I pray. I feel much better. Because now I feel that I'm managing my time very well. I come to work with energy, willing to work, willing to give. It's a big change in my life. This affected me not badly, very good to my work, very good to me. I noticed that since I changed, so many things happened here. The managers give me so many projects. The manager depends on me in doing everything, in doing almost everything" (Amna, 29.01.05).

Amna explained the positive response she is receiving at work due to her new attitude saying, "For example, at work, when we work, Prophet Mohammed say, 'When you work, you have to give all your energy to this work. You have to give all your energy for this. If you start something, you have to complete it. You don't leave it for tomorrow, you

have to complete it at the same time'. So I'm doing the same thing and I'm getting a good result" (Amna, 29.01.05).

Amna has also received encouragement from her family; "My father when he knows that, he knows that I'm planning to cover my face and do this, he was seeing that I'm doing something different, he kissed me and then he said, 'Well done!'. He give me confidence and he give me more trust. Before he was asking me 'At what time you will come?' But now he knows that I changed, my thinking has changed, he doesn't ask me" (Amna, 29.01.05).

Amna has traveled with her classmates in the past, so I asked her how she felt now about women traveling without a male relative. Amna replied, "I'm not thinking or planning to travel without my brother or my father because if we see it, a female always needs a man, always. Okay we will do something, we will do it, but at the end, we need a man. We need a man and a man needs a female" (Amna, 29.01.05).

I continued probing, "What about a group of women shopping together?" Amna replied, "It's the same thing actually, when a group of females come together, in my opinion, I feel that this group will laugh loudly, will talk loudly. They will bring attention to them. That's why my father don't like. Before when I used to go to the cinema, to the movie or the shopping centre, I used to go with my other four friends, so we are a group of five. The first question he would say is, 'How many?' If two okay, but if four, five, six, no. He knows that females once they gather together, they laugh, they talk, so many things" (Amna, 29.01.05).

Amna noted that many locals are becoming more religious. When I asked why this was so, she explained, "Because of two things. One thing, we believe that Koran say when the last day will be on the earth, these changes will happen on the earth like earthquakes, the weather, people, buildings, also the type of buildings. These things will happen on the earth, so if these things happen then, helas, the life will end. Another thing is that, even it's mentioned, that a group of people will study religion. This means the end of the earth.

This is happening actually. We are seeing that so many things is happening now. The earthquake which happened recently [tsunami on Dec 26] also they say that it's part of this. From science side, they say it happens because, I don't know what happened and then the earth is going to change its direction. The sun will shine from the west and this is a sign of God of the last. It is mentioned in the Koran. So they say that the earthquake is because of this. So that's why I feel that people are now more religious and they started to think about it because of these things happening" (Amna, 29.01.05).

4.3 Fatma's Story

I interviewed Fatma five times and we met at different coffee shops and once at her home. Fatma and I are friends and she often asked my opinion about issues in her life. Fatma is currently struggling with a difficult decision – whether or not to accept the marriage proposal made by a local man, Ahmed. Fatma has experienced some difficulties in the past with racial issues at work and is currently looking for a job.

Fatma met Ahmed on a special site on the Internet for people looking for marriage partners. Fatma had a disagreement with Ahmed in their first encounter. Ahmed wrote that he wanted to form a "friendship" with Fatma. Fatma ,however, was very offended because to her a friendship meant a romance without marriage which would not be acceptable to her. Fatma explained, "Friendship is very nice in other cultures, in UAE, friendship means other things which is not acceptable." Ahmed explained that this is not what he meant and admired Fatma's strength of conviction and personality (Fatma, 24.09.04).

Ahmed is a 41 year old university professor with a PhD. He has studied and lived abroad for 13 years and appears to have liberal views about the role of women which is important to Fatma. However, Fatma is not convinced that these views will persist after the marriage. Fatma's family approve of the match since Ahmed is from a well-known local family and appears to have a good personality. Fatma is happy that Ahmed is older and is ready to settle down. She suggests that younger men often take mistresses which she would not accept. Fatma spoke about younger men, "They get married with a wife,

the wife is a wife and they also have an affair outside the house." However, Fatma feels that older men, like Ahmed, "He did whatever he wants, now he wants just to have a house, a family, settle down, which is good" then she jokes, "but maybe I will do that" (Fatma, 24.09.04).

Ahmed has said that he feels that Fatma is abnormal because of her actions, her talk, her personality but he likes that about her. She is not the sort of person who accepts society's discourses about the ways women should act. "See, miss, I'll tell you something. I noticed this because my father was trying to control me and because of the other men in the UAE, I cannot stand a man controlling me. Later on, I see that I am controlling the guy. That's why he ran away. I don't want to control him. I mean, I'm not controlling him, okay. Maybe this guy, yes, because he has lots of things he has to change! But with other men, I like to share but they don't want to share, they want to control me and I can't. He told me, 'Fatma, you have a different personality than the other local girls'. He said that, 'I had lots of local students, you know women, and you are different. You are different. You have a very strong personality that I tell you not all men in the UAE can marry you, or have a relationship with you'. I said, 'Okay, you want to run away, run away!' He said, 'No I like this personality'. Nice! I was surprised when he said, 'I like this personality'. He said, 'You know, sometimes I am scared from you but then I feel safe that somebody is there, that somebody strong is going to be with me, not just any girl that she wants to rely on me and that's it'. I feel happy with this words" (Fatma, 09.01.05).

She has met him in person a number of times with the approval of her mother, although without her father's knowledge. Despite these meetings, she is still uncertain. This is worrying Fatma as Ahmed and her family would like her to decide within the next two months. If she agrees, they will do the "paper marriage", in other words, the legal marriage, but they will not live together until after the wedding party (Fatma, 24.09.04).

Fatma explained that she is happy that her family allows her some decision-making freedom; "But Alhamdulilah, they don't force me but sometimes they *push*. 'Fatma, get

married'" (Fatma, 04.12.04). Fatma returned to this topic at a subsequent interview saying, "My mom, sometimes I feel her, she wants me to say yes. On the other hand, she says, 'Fatma, it's in your hand'. She puts all the mountain on my head, then first she says you're getting older… and telling me all the reasons and then she says, 'It's your choice'. 'Why you are saying this? Help me instead of saying this'. She says, 'Well, it's your choice. It's your life, you have to choose. I don't want to tell you something and then you come and tell me you forced me'" (Fatma, 01.11.04). I asked Fatma about how her grandmother will feel if she refuses the proposal. Fatma replied, "She thinks I'm crazy. You know these old-fashioned people, she doesn't think about the man. She should just marry and that's it, and live with it. Sometimes, miss, I think that I am different because I have refused many proposals. But, miss, I cannot also go and… You know, I believe that nobody's perfect but there are some mistakes, some points in the guy that you can't live with it" (Fatma, 04.12.04).

Fatma feels that she should get married so that she will have companionship with her husband and future children when her own family grows old. "Sometimes, Miss, I don't want to get married, I feel I'm happy alone. But sometimes you feel okay you are young now later on when you get married you will need your kids around you, when you are old and your family will not last forever for you, so you need your husband to be there with you, your kids to be around you. Because even brothers and sisters, they will go and get married, they will have their lives and you will be alone. I think that our family will stay like this and we will vanish." She also sometimes thinks that it might be better to be alone than to be controlled by someone else. Fatma lives with her family and will live there until she gets married or indefinitely, if she does not marry. It is inconceivable to her to live on her own, however, she said, "I wish" when asked about living alone (Fatma, 24.09.04).

Fatma recounted a conversation with Ahmed relating to the dowry that has been asked for Fatma that was very disturbing for her. Fatma noted that Ahmed said, "'I don't think that beauty is the most important thing'. I said, 'Yeah, that's right'. He said, 'If I wanted beauty, I would have taken a Russian. At least I wouldn't need to pay that Russian'. I

swear. I couldn't sleep 'til 3 o'clock that night, I couldn't sleep. I told my mother about him and she said, 'Fatma, just forget about him, let him go to hell, let him go to a Russian'. He said, 'I could get a Russian, I mean get married to a Russian, at least I will not pay that much for her'. I said, 'I am like a car? Or like a sheep or a goat?' I don't think that I can live with this guy, miss" (Fatma, 04.12.04).

Fatma discussed how she spoke to Ahmed's mother about their problems; "I told his mother, 'I told her this is my problem with him. Yes miss, one problem I face with him because he has a PhD in, I don't know what, okay, and he's teaching at XX university and he travels and this and he has a good position, he thinks that I'm looking at his money. He has a brother, he's divorced. And I think this problem is affecting him. I mean, his brother's wife was like this. So she wanted everything. Even they both went to Germany to study medicine. They were living in a flat. She was insisting, 'I want a villa'. I don't know why they need a villa when they are studying. And because of that, he couldn't stand it, so they got divorced. So maybe this is affecting him. But not all women are the same! So every time, miss, he's trying to say, 'Look at me, I don't have money, eh'. It's not nice, miss. I feel so cheap!" (Fatma, 04.12.04).

Fatma spoke to Ahmed's aunt about her feelings and Fatma reported that she said, "'Fatma, he doesn't have money. He's thinking that because he doesn't have money, you're going to leave him'. I said, 'No I'm not like that'. I said, 'Why is he not telling me he has this problem? Why is he not telling me he has this financial problem? I may be his wife, he should tell me everything from now'. She said, 'No, he's thinking that if he told you then you will leave him'" (Fatma, 09.01.05).

She described a situation that she found to be very funny where Ahmed was embarrassed because his brother observed Fatma and Ahmed together. She said, "Last time, miss, we met over here. And he didn't tell, I mean he told his family or his brothers, that he is engaged, okay. But they never seen us, and it's odd in the UAE society that a fiancée meets her guy outside okay, they meet together outside. At that time, he called me, 'Please come'. I don't want to meet him, rarely I like to meet him but I said, 'Let me go

and see'. Then a man who was passing over here and I looked at him and then he looked at Ahmed. He said, 'Oh God, he is my brother!' I said, 'What's wrong?' 'He's going to tell my family'. 'Okay, what, are we doing something wrong? Nothing wrong!' He said, 'Okay'. He's trying to change. Yeah, he's trying to change." Fatma summarized her feelings about Ahmed saying, "Miss, I think I need more time with him. Maybe I can get used to him and his ways. Now I can understand him more" (Fatma, 09.01.05).

Fatma went on to say, "I have friends who are local guys, just friends. But I cannot tell anybody that I have a local friend. It is not acceptable. It is not acceptable in our society to have guy friends. But I trust him more than women. I can see that women have lots of like jealous talk – not all of them, most of them". Fatma explained that women were jealous of looks, position, wealth, or material possessions (Fatma, 04.12.04).

Fatma explained how she has been asked to help her brother find a wife. She said, "So I told my brother, 'You go and find your future wife. Better than me to choose one for you. Maybe we choose her from outside she's very nice, but you cannot get to know her. Maybe I will find her very nice to me, but maybe you don't find this in her'. He says, 'No, I feel shy. I cannot imagine myself talking to a girl'. 'How can you get married then?' So last week, he said, 'I have a very nice friend, you can go to her house. I believe that he has two sisters. I hear that they are beautiful'. Once he has heard! I cannot say no, miss. He will say, 'Oh, she is not a good sister. She's not doing what I want. So I have to go there and do the thing which I don't like. Miss, she is nice. She's not extremely beautiful, like he want. But what I really didn't like about her, she finished school and she's sitting at home. She finished high school and she didn't do anything! She stayed home. I asked her, 'What are you doing? What are you planning to do?' 'Nothing. Sitting at home. Waiting for someone to marry'" (Fatma, 04.12.04).

Fatma and her mother both tried to convince her brother, who has recently qualified as a medical doctor, that he should not marry a girl without higher education. Fatma said, "And I told my brother that, 'In future, you will not feel this now, you will feel it in future, when you have kids and they are in school, and she will wait for you to come to

teach them, like mathematical things. By then, she will forget everything, as a school leaver. She will never get the chance to talk about issues. She will be just like a nice house maid. She will just cook and do your stuff. Do you want someone like that?'

He said, 'No, no', because, you know, he's a man, 'No, no, it's good. She's what I'm looking for.' But later on, after one week, you know miss, he changed his mind. See miss, they [men] don't think. You know here, they don't think. This is the problem. I can see that they are very good at mathematical things and businesses, but they come to social life, I can give them zero out of ten, not even two!'" Fatma continued, "They do practice outside but when they want to get married, they are completely different" (Fatma, 04.12.04).

Fatma explained her thoughts on men's attitudes toward assertive women, "Now when they see that a girl is like this, they say I cannot live with her – why? Because she is going to ask you, why are you doing this, where are you going to go, what is your business about, what are you studying, what you are doing. That's it, it's a normal question, why? Why you have the right to ask us and to, you know, control us and we cannot? One of those people who came to marry me, they asked me to cover my face, then I told them, okay, I will but first you have to do it. Can you cover your face? I told them, you go one day out in this hot weather and cover your face with black, not with white. Can you stand that? You will never! Really! I mean, this is also too much for us, this and that. Black also, they don't want us to wear some other colors – no - black, it must be black, I don't know why. It's very funny in this culture that they allow themselves to do things which, you know, it's forbidden for the woman" (Fatma, 24.09.04).

Fatma felt that her education shaped her basic thoughts and beliefs. She said, "I really like our college – because the staff there, they didn't just taught the material – the books and the handouts – they also built up our personalities and our minds as well – to think in-depth and to see what is right and what is wrong. It's not only – this came in the Koran and you have to do it – you have to think about it." "You create us and then you send us

out and then we live our life. This is life, Miss, we cannot be stupid and continue being stupid like the others" (Fatma, 24.09.04).

Fatma suggested that the college have some sessions where issues are discussed. She suggested, 'Why they don't make like a session a week or a month teaching them how to be like… not to have fear, to say the truth, not just to try to show off that, 'Oh we have money, we have everything, we are satisfied with everything' but inside it's different. I think it will be really good." Fatma continued, "I think it will be really good for them to teach them how to speak about their problems honestly without having fear from the others, the other girls" (Fatma, 09.01.05). Fatma also questioned the college policies. She feels that there is a conflict between enforcing strict rules that keep the female students segregated and protected from society and yet other rules which force students to work with men during their mandatory work placement positions. Referring to the college administration, Fatma explained, "They know the society and they know the culture and they are pushing, I mean forcing, the students to work with the men and they have strict rules. What is this?" (Fatma, 01.11.04). Fatma suggested that more realistic role models are needed to speak to students at the college saying, "So I think, miss, for those new generation, it would be a good idea if you bring, not a good model, they have to be honest, realistic and honest. They have to talk about the bad things as well" (Fatma, 04.12.04).

Regarding employment, Fatma stayed at the airline for three years. Although she found that her job was not very challenging, the work environment was good. Fatma felt a sense of satisfaction in her work and felt that she was appreciated by other employees. Fatma was offered a promotion in a neighboring city. At the time, this would have been an excellent opportunity as Fatma was planning to marry a man from this city. However, the marriage plans fell through and Fatma was unable to take the promotion and she left the organization (Fatma, 24.09.04).

Fatma then joined an international bank which has an excellent reputation for encouraging local employees. Fatma, however, found that she was given a position as an

officer but assigned clerk-type duties to perform. At first she accepted these duties in order to learn more about the job, but when she found out that these duties were permanent and formed the majority of her job, she became very frustrated. She approached numerous staff members in the HR department who made promises but then left the organization before fulfilling any of them. After a year, Fatma quit in frustration. "I suffered a lot, for one year." Fatma felt that the communication in this company was very poor – the HR department did not understand the job requirements, there were no job descriptions. Fatma summed it up by saying, "I'm not feeling I'm an employee." She also noted that the duties and responsibilities that she was promised at the interview, did not happen, "For example they come and tell you you're an officer and they give you a job that is not an officer's job. I'm not a kid, a fool, they can fool me." "I couldn't accept this, Miss" (Fatma, 24.09.04).

Fatma feels that the inadequacy of HR departments has meant that she has been unable to find the type of job that she was really suited for, "They are not successful to put the right person in the right place. They are just working like, you know, fill in the gaps with anybody. Because they have – like, the government puts penalties on the company and each department within the company has a certain percentage that they have to hire, so what I noticed, that they just want to achieve that target. So their mission is to achieve the target, that's it, with anybody, with anybody – they don't care about the person, this person will really create in this job, really like it, they just want a local, that's it. This is what I faced" (Fatma, 24.09.04).

In comparing the two organizations that she worked for, Fatma said, "Maybe I didn't like the job but at least I have some self-satisfaction there and I felt that there is a full department that was caring about me, they were listening to us. But at XX Bank , nobody were listening to you, nobody, I told you maybe they will listen to you for a few minutes and they will tell you the things, okay they keep promising you and then you see nothing, they leave and that's it" (Fatma, 24.09.04).

Fatma feels that she has been treated badly because she has no wasta or family connections. Other new recruits from prominent families were given more advanced and interesting work to do. In fact, Fatma noted that this special treatment was especially prevalent for men. She gave the example of one occasion where an employee was hired with limited qualifications and then continued to be paid his salary even though he didn't appear at work for six months. She finds this behavior extremely unfair and is angry that she, who is willing to work hard, is given little opportunity to do so saying, "I never had the chance to work there. Some people because they have good wasta so they can have that. But a person like me, who doesn't have a wasta, should lose the job and should suffer in the job, a lot and at the end; I cannot fight – with who, Miss? I cannot fight with myself" (Fatma, 24.09.04).

Fatma has experienced racial discrimination as well, she said, "Some of the nationalities, they try to bug you, and bother you all the time, they don't want you to learn things. You know, they don't want us to take their position one day or they don't want us to be well known or to say 'look this is what Fatma has done', for example" (Fatma, 24.09.04).

When I asked if she considered herself to be an Arab or an Iranian, Fatma replied, "I cannot say. I'm proud of myself being Irani. Then first of all I'm proud of myself being a human being, this is one thing, then an Irani, I cannot deny this. I can speak Arabic, I am living here, yes, but I cannot say that I am an Arab". I asked Fatma if she faced any problems in being a non-pure Arab and she replied, "In the school, I had a problem, then in the college I didn't have this. Again at work, I had this problem. At work, if you know or hear from people here, they have this kind of discrimination. I met a guy in, you know, an [educational] institute. Okay? And he was an American. We were talking about Indians and this and then I told him, 'I don't like to discriminate'. But he said, 'No, you can...' Because I told him that I hate them. Okay? Then he said, 'No, well you can hate them, you can have your feelings, but discrimination is only when you act, act, in action. It will show in your action only, not in your feelings. Because feelings is yours, you cannot change the feelings, but the action you can change it" (Fatma, 01.10.04).

I asked Fatma why she had these feelings and she said, "I didn't have it in the beginning but now I have it. I can't help it, Miss. I have seen a lot from them. That's why I'm jobless. This is one thing. Another thing is, yes, in the UAE, they discriminate. They are starting to give higher positions to those who are Arabs and some people, my brother's friend, he's working in HR in XX company and he's saying that they've got some rules from like sheikhs and this to give the opportunities to Arabs mostly. It's very sad. My family name is not considered Arab to them and especially to those who are very well known families" (Fatma, 01.10.04).

Fatma asked about my research and then volunteered this advice, "One thing I want to tell you something about the UAE nationals. I noticed something. I don't know if you noticed the same or not, that most of them, they try to hide a problem that we have in the UAE. Like if we have a problem with, for example, men, they try to show that they don't have a problem in the UAE society. We're all fine, we don't have a problem with men, we don't have any problems. Like in the newspaper and the news" (Fatma, 04.12.04).

I spoke to Fatma about a recent incident at college where a group of students decided that it was 'haram' to travel without a male relative. Fatma said, "You should tell them this maybe. We take all our rules from our Prophet Mohamed. So this haram was before. Why? I mean everything has a reason for making it haram, not only haram, helas. Before, miss, when there was no telephones, no car, it only was a donkey or a camel, a woman traveling on the desert, it was very difficult and dangerous for her. That's why they made it haram for her to travel alone. Miss, just imagine in the desert, even you, I don't think you would like it to go alone. Even me, I can't, I will never go. That was haram because people were kidnapping her, raping her, all this. Because of this, it is haram to travel alone. She should have a man with her, a strong one. This was the reason. But now, even on the TV, those religious people, some strict people, they still say, 'No, it's haram'. They don't think, miss. But some people who are really developing those rules, say what's the haram? We have to look at this now, we have cars, we have planes and it's very safe so why the haram? So you should tell them this, miss". Fatma emphasized that people should think for themselves (Fatma, 09.01.05).

Fatma said very philosophically, "We are trying very hard to live this life. I have problems; I mean I don't have work, I'm not lucky in love, I have problems at home, but sometimes I say, 'Alhamdulilah, I am happy'. I am happy. Some people they have more problems than me" (Fatma, 09.01.04).

4.4 Laila's Story

I interviewed Laila four times and we always met at her favorite coffee shop. Laila has had an unconventional relationship with a man causing her emotional distress and she holds strong opinions about men and marriage.

Laila's mother was the second of seven wives and had six children. Laila expressed bitterness over her family's situation saying, "I was always protecting my mother and my sisters. So whenever I see my mother like sad or like upset because of my father, I just can't take it. I just like blow up in his face, I like start shouting and fighting with him". Laila continued, "Before he died, 6 or 8 months like all the time, I used to go to my mother, and tell her like, 'Mom, you know when you want to divorce father and you are afraid that we're going stand in the way? I'm just telling you, go and divorce him. I don't want this kind of father in my house anymore. I don't know what the use of him? He's not taking care of you or us. He doesn't know even like which grade we are, or what we are eating or not or sleeping'." Laila described her mother's response, "And she just says, 'No I cannot divorce him. He's your father. He's the father of your sisters and brothers'. All my sisters and brothers don't consider him as a father so what the use? But I cannot continue to see you this upset or this unhappy, just divorce him. Before he died, like 6 or 8 months, she did"(Laila, 29.10.04).

Laila described her father's relationships with his wives saying, "He didn't care about them and they didn't care about him. But the difference with my mother, that she actually loved him. And that's why I grew up on the idea that love makes you weak. I always think that I will never reach this point in my life that I will let a man take control over me like this, makes me this weak that I cannot keep my dignity and like defend myself.

Because she's very weak, and he can do whatever he wants and she will still accept him back, still take him back. So I just tell her, 'divorce him, you don't want him' and after like a few, like so many years, she spent abut 20 years, she just divorced him. She went to the court and she just divorced him and came back. Six months after that, he died because nobody was taking care of him. Like three months, he was just trying to get my mother back and three months, he spent in the hospital and he just died" (Laila, 29.10.04).

Laila praised her mother's approach to raising her saying, "The good thing about my mother, she make me choose myself, for myself. She didn't just control me. I know like three or four of my friends, their mother just control them, you know like. 'Til now, they can't make a decision by their own. Even if there was any like emergency or anything, they won't know what to do. This is what I like about my mother, she made me who am I today by allowing me to take all the things and all the mistakes, like this, and fix them by myself. And she knows that whenever I need anything or whenever I want to know about anything, I just directly go to her" (Laila, 29.10.04).

Laila explained how she must be strong to help those around her. She said, "I'm taking care of my two sisters because like me, they worry about my mom more than they worry about themselves. So in case of any problems they come to me. And my two friends, Wafa and Noora, they depend on me because I am the stronger among them. Wafa is like the weak one. Noora is the emotional type. And both of them depend on me to be strong for them. So that's why I don't like to show that I'm weak or I'm tired or I'm sick" (Laila, 06.12.04).

Laila discussed her ethnicity by explaining, "In our country we have like two let's say like two type of people. You have the pure Arabic people what we call them the Bedu and we have the, it's Arabic but has some mixture from outside. Me, myself like I'm half Iranian, half Arabic. And you have to see, this is a personal experience. If a pure guy wants to marry a non-pure guy, the family even won't accept. Because they still feels that her family tree has to be pure Arab. They're going to have to see like three or four

generations like her mother, her grandfather, her great, great grandfather has to be pure Arab or else they won't accept the marriage itself" (Laila, 29.10.04).

Laila talked about her views on her mother's desire for her to be married; "She just lost hope in me, me getting married and settling down. I'm telling her, like this, I don't want to get married. Simple issue, I don't want to get married. She tries relatives, non-relatives, anyone and still I haven't found that person who like I would give up my freedom to marry. If you marry like a local guy, you are giving up more than your freedom, you're giving up like, I won't say all of yourself, but a huge part of yourself, your personality, your identity, the way you are. You have to change everything to adjust to that person. I mean local guys are not ready to adjust themselves and compromise like at the middle like. It's my way or the highway. I won't blame local guys for that. I would definitely fault the society – mothers, because mothers allow their boys to do whatever they want and even in case of mistakes or anything, they won't blame their kids, they're going to blame the other kids. Or in case of marriage, they won't blame the boy, their son for the mistakes of the marriage, they're going to blame the girl, I mean, his wife for anything that happens. And even in case of divorces which is increasing hugely in our country, like they won't say. The first thing that comes up in their mind, it's the girl's fault" (Laila, 29.10.04).

Laila had mentioned that she had been in love. Laila noted that the reason the romance didn't lead to marriage was due to the fact that her great, great grandfather was Iranian. She explained, "His mother didn't want me because I am not pure Arabic. With all my respect to his mother, I thought that he would take a position or a stand against his mother and say, 'This is the girl that I want. This is the girl that I want to marry'. Either he likes me and he's going to take a position and marry me. I mean he is not a girl. I mean, if a girl, if I was in his shoes, then I won't have anything to do. If her family said no, then I cannot do something else I cannot do something more than just try to persuade my family. But he is a man. He's the one that's calling the shots. He's the one who can do like everything that he likes because he is the man. In our country, the man can do whatever he wants, even like if it was against his mother or against his family. But he

said that, 'I cannot just marry you and my mamma says no'. But I said, 'No, if she saw how serious you were in trying to marry me, she would prefer having her son's happiness over like separating from you or you being mad on her for the rest of your life'. But I don't think that he had that strong will. And he had to do everything that mamma said and I hate that" (Laila, 06.12.04).

Laila went on to explain how she disliked the secrecy of their relationship, "It's kind of like the things I was raised on. Mom gives me all the freedom that I can take. I can do whatever I want. I can stay late until 12:00 or 1:00 because she has that confidence in me. And I don't want to ruin that confidence. Because going and just hiding, it's not me. I just want to do like other people do, grab the guy's hand and show the whole people that this is the guy that I love, the guy that I'm married to. It's the guy that he's mine. Let people see what a good choice I made. This is what I'm thinking of. I don't want to sit in the car and when something happens, something funny is going on. I want to be able to tell the world that see this and this and this happened. And tell my friends and tell my sisters, my family, that this guy made me happy, he bought me stuff and take me somewhere and everything. But when you do things in secret, you are not allowed to say. You just keep it a secret. And probably all the happiness and the fun and the joy, you feel it there, but it's not the same. It's lacking something. It's not public, not everybody knows" (Laila, 06.12.04).

Laila explained how she changed as their relationship developed. She noted that she let him hear her cry on the phone. Laila also noted, "Before I used to do what I liked, but I felt like before I go anywhere, I just tell him that I'm going there and there and there and I'll come back at this hour and come back at this hour. I wasn't just like taking his permission although it was feeling like I was taking his permission. And, I don't know, I felt like that he has to know because he's my guy now. But I don't know, I did so many things for him and I didn't think about my dignity or faith. Like I'm a girl, I'm not supposed to do this for a guy that I don't have any like kind of relation to him, he's not my fiancée, he's not my husband, he's not anything to me. But I shouldn't do this for

him. But I think because I loved him that much, I didn't care about what society will say or what other people will manage to think" (Laila, 06.12.04).

I asked Laila if she thought that his feelings were as strong as hers and she answered, "I don't know. 'Til now, I'm not sure". Laila explained in more detail; "It got so serious and he couldn't take the first serious step. You know, the thing that breaks me the most is that we planned everything – the house, the location, the furniture, the rooms, the kids' names, for God's sake. You know, we planned everything. Before, you know, I had this kind of limits and boundaries and didn't let anybody get too close to me, but with him, you know, like I let all my guards down. I really, really gave him my heart. I literally gave him my heart. And now, I'm in a position that I cannot take my heart back and I cannot go back to what I used to be. I am stuck in the middle. I don't know what to do. I cannot say that I cannot love him, I mean, I am not in love with him. I cannot say that I hate him. It's just kind of stuck in the middle. And now even if he asks me, it's not that I'm happier without him, I'm not. But I am more in peace of mind, I'm really, because I don't do anything behind my family's back. I am more confident about my actions as I was before. And although I love him, I'm not ready to go back to what we were" (Laila, 06.12.04). Laila is now resisting any attempts to get back together (Laila, 19.01.05).

Laila told me about her job as a software developer saying, "But seriously I love my work, I do. I reached the point when I was saying to myself, 'Why in the hell did you become a developer? Couldn't you just make flowers, become a chef, I don't know, go to sewing or something? Why in the hell are you becoming a developer? But I don't know, like after you develop something and people admire it. You know, like your boss say, 'Good job! Well done! This is excellent job!' I feel myself so happy, I don't know, I feel like I did something nice and people appreciate what I did. Yeah, I like my job. I don't mind spending timeless hours there. I'm supposed to work from 7 to 3 but I work from 7 to 10, sometimes I come on Thursdays, sometimes I come on Fridays. As my mother says, 'The only thing left is for you to take your bed to the office'" (Laila, 29.10.04).

Laila elaborated, "It's not that I'm doing the work for the deadline itself. It's because I want to finish it. I want to see how it looks like. I want to see if what I did is good or not? Am I improving in the work or not? Did the work that I create today is the same work as I created six months ago or one year ago? Is it the same? If it's the same, then it's my mistake because I didn't do anything new or did not bring anything new to myself or to my skills. Then my friends say, 'You are crazy, no one will appreciate it'. I said, 'I'm not looking for appreciation from my manager. I just wanna finish everything so my manager won't have any point against me. So if someone is talking about me, my manager will say, 'Yes, she's a good developer'. That simple statement says more than enough to me. I am a reliable developer or I can deliver work in the proposed time. I can do that" (Laila, 29.10.04).

Laila likes to take on a challenge, especially if others think that she can't do it. "I had to prove myself at something. I had just to show the supervisor or show the people that I'm working with that I'm capable of doing some actual good work. You know I spent on that work countless hours to make sure that everything was good, and everything was perfect and everything was neat." Laila emphasized that she needs to be thanked and appreciated before hearing negative criticism. "The 'but' has to come in the middle" (Laila, 19.01.05).

When I asked about different nationalities at work, Laila mentioned that it is a very multicultural environment and everyone gets along well. She said, "My two closest work colleagues are the Pakistani guy and the Indian guy and they are like my closest colleagues, except my best friend, I just talked to you about, she works with me as well. So I just love to work with them" (Laila, 29.10.04).

Laila noted that some girls behaved differently around local male employees. She said, "But I won't say that I shouldn't work with locals because some of the girls with us think that way; 'I can joke around or like be myself in front of a non-local but in front of a local, I should be more reserved, and I should be like more quiet, or I don't know, try to leave everything formal as it is'". When I asked Laila to explain why this was the case,

she said, "Because, I won't say all, some of the locals we have tend to exaggerate things. So if just a girl was like kidding with them, or just was like trying to loosen up the formal area, definitely the guy will say that she has a crush on him. That's the first thing that comes up in their mind. I won't say everyone but, I don't know, like 80 percent, 70 percent of them think like that. That's why she doesn't want him to go that far, to think that of her. So they will be so tied up, so quiet, so formal, so professional, so work is work and nothing else. But me, I don't know, I just try to be myself. And if I cannot be myself, I do not interact with that person because I don't want to create another me. I can be something else in the work and be something else outside the work. Like something to somebody who is quiet and formal in the work and something who's like loose and funny and crazy outside the work. I just don't think of myself as that. And the people who I interact with in the work know this about me that I'm funny, I'm crazy, I'm kind of loose minded and they don't mind that and they still respect me. Others who I feel that will think worse of me or who will think that I am not who I am or have hidden purposes behind this jokes and behind this, then I'll just says, 'I don't want to interact with you'. And work is work, work is different. If I have to interact with them, then I will make everything work related, not other than work" (Laila, 29.10.04).

Laila did mention that she faced some racial discrimination when she first joined the organization. She said, "I was working under the supervision of one Indian guy and he was so mean to me. He didn't teach me anything. He didn't guide me through anything and I hated even asking him questions. So I spent most of my time just going through the net, going through knowledge, buying books, trying to figure out most of the problems". I asked, "Why was he so mean to you?" Laila replied, "I don't know. He was like working alone and then suddenly a local will work for you so he thought that his job was threatened because maybe they will exchange, they will like replace me instead of him" (Laila, 19.01.05).

Laila feels that the UAE will not be the same without Sheikh Zayed. She said, "He's the one who encouraged girls to start studying, girls to work, women to decide to build the society itself, build the foundation". Laila continued, "You think of Sheikh Zayed as like

super man, somebody who will always be there. And we get to know that suddenly he is not, he is just a normal person like you are and one day he is going to get sick and die. I think people expect too much of their president" (Laila, 06.12.04).

Laila is very proud of her new car. She said, "I have this grand new Lexus standing outside the house I paid about 120 for that car" and she showed me her car in the parking area as we left the interview (Laila, 29.10.04).

4.5 Nada's Story

I interviewed Nada four times in quiet coffee shops. Nada is very eloquent and spoke her mind freely. She is very ambitious in her career plans while also being devoted to her young son and husband.

Nada has now been working in the same government hospital for the past six years. While she enjoys her work, she is frustrated at the attitude of her manager and the lack of appreciation she receives from management. Nada explained her feelings about her manager, "We have problems with our manager. She is a lady and I think that she is threatened by us that probably we will take over. But, she is a local anyway and she has fifteen years of experience. I can't understand why she is so scared; probably because we are so enthusiastic and we have all these new ideas and since I joined work, I have changed a lot of things at work. Before, we were so unorganized. I have started this new program. We are working on international protocol now in ultrasound. I have brought people from the States to educate the staff which she couldn't do. In fifteen years, she have not done anything of such to the work and I have been there for six years and I have done more than her. And, I think she is threatened probably by me more than other girls because she knows that, and the people above her, the management, knows that I have a future" (Nada, 13.10.04).

Nada explained another reason why she is frustrated at work, "All my ideas were stolen, and put under her name, you know, plagiarized. I've done all the research, all the work, stayed all the night doing them, and getting approval and talking to the people and when

the proposal goes to the big people, her name is being signed, as if this was her research and her work" (Nada, 13.10.04).

When she spoke to upper management about her manager, they responded by giving Nada a promotion and more responsibilities, but did not address the real problem.
Nada discussed her recent promotion to senior radiographer, she said, "You get paid less but you do more work. No increment is given, just they change the designation." When I asked whether she was happy about the promotion, Nada replied, "No, it makes no difference; the salary is the same, I have to do more things. This job, really, the people there are really good in depressing the employees, really" (Nada, 13.10.04).

Nada found that the problems at work were affecting her personal life and she decided to submit her resignation and accept an offer in a private company. The hospital refused to accept her resignation and Nada now feels better about staying in her current position due to the supportive attitude she observed during this process. She explained how the hospital director asked to see her and told her, "'Don't worry, you're like my daughter'. He's an old man. He's a doctor. He's a very nice guy. And he said, 'I can't afford to lose someone like you. I need you in this hospital. You were one of the pioneers and we don't want to lose such a brain!' I thanked him so much. At least they cared and came to ask me the reasons for my resignation. That was more than enough". She added, "But at that time, see because the way they approached me was really nice and it touched me. Because I felt that they respected me and they called me and they were like, 'We want you. We don't want to let you go'. I mean when I resigned, they didn't sign it and that's it. They understand. And I have been there for a long time, six years. These people, we know each other. We are like friends now more than … It's like a friendship relationship more than an employer and employee, you know. This bond, this sort of friendship relationship is going on and I don't want to lose that". Nada continued, "I mean, simple words won't cost them much but it would really affect your perception and the way you work and how you deal with others in that society. You won't think of leaving them if you were satisfied" (Nada, 11.01.05).

Nada explained what she has learned from studying in a mixed environment, "You tend to learn how to deal with them. You know there are some lines that you cannot cross with boys, though we are friends. Some of the boys, they are with me since first grade, you know they are like my brothers by 9th grade. But still there are some borders that I learned by time that I shouldn't cross. And if I was older, I would have done probably a bigger mistake. But I learned that early before doing that bigger mistake. This is what the girls are doing right now. You know talking to guys behind their families, without their families knowing about this. I didn't have a problem with that. My family used to trust me and they knew that I had male friends. But they knew that they were only friends and I wouldn't exceed that. But for us, unfortunately the girls, since all these years they haven't interacted with boys other than the ones in the family. For example, she would fall in love with the first guy that she talks to. Some of the girls are that weak on that part. 'Oh that's a different guy! He's telling me sweet things'. And probably he wouldn't mean that. He would take her as a friend and she would think, she would build her own expectations. This is the problem. And these are some of the problems that some of the girls are facing at work. At work, since it's a mixed culture, some of the girls are being harassed by boys. Some of the girls, they won't know how to deal with such mentality. Whereas, I had no problem with that, no problem at all. And I didn't feel shy or anything. They used to send flowers to my parent's house! Especially when I was working in Rashid Hospital, they used to send roses and I was feeling, 'Oh they're so stupid! They're trying to win my heart with that!' So I wouldn't think of marrying or getting into a relationship with such guys. I was so mature in that on the emotional side. I was so mature, I was thinking of other things. I was thinking of someone even more mature than that because I knew that building a family and building a relationship is not like having kisses and roses and gifts – this is not a relationship. This is what I learned from school" (Nada. 18.11.04).

Nada continued to describe her mother by saying, "She was a school teacher, she used to teach us after school, she used to care for the family, that's why she resigned after some time. Because we were financially, my father was able to support us financially, now she

said, 'No, I have to hold the children now, seven children. I cannot leave them like this'" (Nada. 18.11.04).

Nada has been married for three years. Her marriage was arranged, however, she noted that they took quite a bit of time to make sure that they were a suitable match. "We stayed five months engaged and an additional nine months thinking about getting married or not. I mean it was not a rushed decision. So, we studied each other properly. He is an educated person and I told him everything before getting married. I told him this is the nature of my job. He said, 'I have no problem with that.' He is a lawyer, he is busy, he is not free, you know, all the time. But we were living in his parent's house and they were like, 'Oh you have to go work again, what such work? Are you sure you are going to work?' It's the old mentality, they're old people, and it was difficult at that time, but I survived the pressure from the house and the pressure from work, from my manager" (Nada, 13.10.04).

Nada feels that the new generation of men prefer women who can think for themselves. She said that men like women who are, "probably like me who thinks for her own and who shares. Sometimes I take my own decisions - that's my person. I have my own personal life, my husband has his own personal life, but some decisions we have to make it together. And if you are not a rational person, you cannot make rational decisions. So men, they don't want someone who is too clinging. You have to give them their space. If you want the man, your husband to stay by your side and to love you, you have to give him his space. You shouldn't be too, to cling to him a lot. This kind of personality, too weak, clingy, 'I cannot do this', 'what do you think?', no, no, no. You can go out with your friends, you can enjoy your time, I have my own life as well. In this way, he will stay with you more, he will love you more" (Nada, 18.11.04).

I asked, "Are there some men who don't want their wives to go anywhere?" Nada answered, "Yes, a lot". I asked, "What can wives do about that?" Nada replied, "They have to be smart. At the beginning, my husband was…When we were engaged, "No you're not allowed to do this, you're not allowed to do that, you're not allowed to go out

with your friends, you're only allowed to go out with your mother'. But I changed him a lot because I was smart at that time. He knew my personality. At that time, I didn't go into fights because of this. My mother was helping me a lot with that. I used to tell her, 'This is what he's telling me, do you think that I should break the engagement off because of this?' She said, "No, Nada, this is not the reason. He is a good guy. But it's the way he was brought up where men are controlling, where men have to take 100 percent control'. She told me, 'You can change him because', she told me, 'I changed your father'. Whenever he used to tell me, don't do that, I used to listen to him and I didn't do it. I used to tell him, 'I'm not doing it because I don't want to go into fights with you, not because I am convinced of that. You have to understand that life has changed, people are changed. I always used to tell him, if you want to this step, this marriage step, it's a big step, if we will start it with no trust then why are you marrying me? Marry someone that you will trust'" (Nada, 18.11.04).

Nada explained how it is difficult for women to get to know men in Dubai; "For us, it's different because of the society. I cannot just hang out with him without any relationship. At least his parents should talk to my parents. Some sort of arrangement is there so that the society won't start talking about me or him in a bad way. So the society sometimes governs a lot of our actions" (Nada, 18.11.04).

Nada explained her initial reservations about her fiancé, saying, "My parents gave me all the freedom. I studied whatever I liked, I worked in the place that I wanted to work in, I went to the school that I liked, I had my own friends, I walked with the people that I liked and now this man comes into my life and he's telling me to do this and not to do that. It was difficult. It was not easy, believe me. It was difficult, until now, there are some things that I am trying to adjust. But this is the whole thing about marriage, it's sharing and you have to give some things up to let things work out. If I wanted this total freedom life, I shouldn't have married this guy from the start. I could have stayed single but the moment I took this decision to get married, I had in my mind that I had to sacrifice some of the things. But at the beginning, it was difficult but now, believe me, it's okay with me. I'm doing it willingly, some of the things. And he has changed a lot. He has given up

things to me. This is why things are working out because it's not only me that's sacrificing things, it's also him, he's sacrificing a lot of things for me. So I have to do the same thing for him" (Nada, 18.11.04).

Nada discussed the trust and freedom that she now experiences after 4 years of marriage, "On the other hand, people will respect me more because I am married or engaged. I have a ring now. They will have limitations because I put limitations to people. There's a circle around me that they can't cross. And he learned this by time. Now I can go wherever I want even without asking him. I have full trust to do that. He knew me now. He knows me, he knows my personality, he knows the way I'm thinking and he knows that … I mean some of the girls, they exaggerate. They are 24 hours out of the house, they don't think of the husband, they think only of theirselves. They are too narrow-minded. They don't think of their child, they throw the child to the housemaid. He knows that I'm not like that. I'm giving my husband his time, my child his time. And he knows that every few weeks, I will gather with my friends, you know, just to catch up with them. He will actually encourage me now. 'Why are you sitting at home and doing nothing?' 'No, I'm studying, I'm doing my bachelors, I'm studying or I'm looking after my son'. My son is my priority. If he goes to sleep, then I can go where I like. So he started knowing this after some time" (Nada, 18.11.04).

I asked what sacrifices are needed in a marriage and Nada explained, "For example, I used to see my friends almost every day. They were very close friends. We knew each other for more than 23 years now. So I know them more than him. And now I talk to them every day on the phone but I see them once a month. It was painful to me because I used to see them every day. Such sort of things. For example, I had to keep quiet when some of his family members would hurt me and not to answer back, just to respect him. Because later on, they would think that he's not a good husband, because look his wife is making fights with his family. So I was keeping quiet to respect his parents and to respect his name. So many things that I had to keep quiet for that really hurt my pride. Yes, because not all the people are the same. Some people are too mean, some people are jealous, especially when they see you happy and successful. I am successful at my work,

successful in my education, I have a son, my husband is successful, we have our own house and they don't have all of this. They're having so many problems. So they try to create fights with me and my in-laws or with me and my husband. If I wasn't wise enough, I would answer back, but I keep quiet, just not to make things grow bigger. You know, these things it would hurt my pride in front of everyone but I would keep quiet because I think it's the best for my family. I don't care about them. I know myself, my husband knows me, that's more important to me than them. It's the same thing with my husband. My family are different. They treat him as a son. My mother's motto is treat your son-in-law better than your son because he has your heart. He has your daughter. She tells me, 'If I didn't treat him well then he isn't going to treat you good. If I treat him good then he is going to love you'. And this is what's happening. Sometimes even if he was mistaken and my mother heard about it or something or my father, they usually stand up by his side and not me. Yeah, they tell me, you are mistaken, you are supposed to listen to your husband. And he likes this about them" (Nada, 18.11.04).

I asked what her husband has sacrificed. Nada answered that he spends a lot less time with his friends although this is not easy. She said, "For a man, it is difficult because it the men's society -they used to tease him a lot. 'Your wife is controlling you now, you're not a man anymore.' Though he wants to change things, he cannot change things the way I can. I'm a female and my situation is different. They understand I have a husband, I have to stay in my husband's house. But for a man to stay in a house in our society is like he is, he doesn't have his own personality, his wife is controlling him. This is the mentality in our society. So for him, it's more difficult than me" (Nada, 18.11.04).

Most of Nada's friends are married and still working. Their husbands are happy to have working wives because of the financial contribution they can provide. She said, "The husbands won't mind because it's difficult to survive, because if the husband is not a businessman, then the income is too low, she has to work" (Nada, 13.10.04). Nada discussed her own financial situation and her need to work, noting, "So we're thinking to take an interest loan from the bank so that's why I am quite unsure about resigning or not because I have to help my husband with this. We have to pay for the loan together and I

have to get my son to school. Things are getting quite expensive here in the country, not like before" (Nada, 18.11.04).

I asked, "How are families different now?" Nada explained, "Everyone is distant. Before we used to, I mean family relations were stronger than now. Now what they think of is money. If you have money, then you are respected. I think this is everywhere. If you are a rich person, everyone would respect you. If you don't have anything, then no one would respect you. You know, this, the people's mentality has changed. But there are still some good people. The majority is still holding up but I think eventually things will change here in Dubai. It won't stay the same; not only Dubai but I mean the UAE. This globalization and people coming from all over the world, I mean it's changing the people's mentality, it's changing the people, you know, this tradition is lost" (Nada, 13.10.04).

Nada expounded her views on the unfortunate focus on appearances; "The government has to work on the people, not only making Dubai, or UAE look better. I mean I know people who can't even afford to buy a cup of water in Dubai, locals. When you see Dubai from outside it is like a pearl, but because we live in this country, we know the insides and believe me this is only a showoff and, you know, because the way you look really influences people. They see you like holding a nice Christian Dior bag and driving a BMW car and wearing all this jewelry, then they think of you as, they consider you as a high person. Even though you don't have a nice personality, you are a wicked person or something like this. But if you didn't have a good appearance, this is how the people are thinking here, I'm telling you about our community. If you don't look good, didn't wear a good bag, even though you come from a good family, she's nothing" (Nada, 13.10.04).

She explained why she purchased a very expensive designer handbag, "See, sometimes you have to be conniving really, in order to be able to deal with the people around you. For example if I carry this bag and I go into my in-laws house, they go and show off in front of everybody, 'everyone see, this is our daughter-in-law'. They are so proud and they start treating me well. So we have to be conniving in order to survive. I'm telling

you the community has changed". Nada saw a connection between the development of Dubai and the materialism she sees, "Dubai is moving towards quality and if you are holding a quality bag, they feel that you are part of this" (Nada, 13.10.04).

Nada has a housemaid at home. For child-care, her father comes each day to pick up her two-year old son and take him to his home where he and Nada's mother look after him each day. They are happy to do this since the son is the first grandchild. Nada rents a house and owns two new BMW cars. She wants to put her son in a private school when he is a bit older. Nada would eventually like to have three children although she is from a family of seven children and her husband came from a family of ten children (Nada, 13.10.04).

Nada talked about the birth of her son and how stressful she found dealing with all of her intrusive relatives. She said, "I wanted to go to the toilet and I couldn't. I wanted to take a bath and I couldn't because people were in my room until 2:00 am in the morning!" They allowed it because I was staff. I told her, 'Please, you should apply the rules to my family. I don't want this to happen to me'. I was tired. I didn't get enough sleep".
Nada continued, "Then at the third day, I started crying in front of… I was holding myself and smiling to all these people. But by the third day, I told them, 'Please leave the room'. I asked the doctor to request that I leave from the hospital immediately. I don't want to stay" (Nada, 18.11.04).

On November 2nd, 2004, Sheikh Zayed, the ruler of the UAE died after a long illness. I asked Nada, "How did the death of Sheikh Zayed affect you and your family?" She replied, "And I was in shock. I mean I don't know him personally, I have never met him in person but since I was young, he was my leader, Sheikh Zayed, Baba Zayed. We never call him Sheikh Zayed, by the way, we always call him Baba Zayed because he's always close to the people. And his death really hurt me a lot. And the second day, I was crying a lot. And even my son, when they were putting all his pictures on TV, he was like, 'Mama, Baba Zayed, Baba Zayed!' Even this two year-old, you know, knew about him!" Nada continued, "You know, sometimes people when they reach to some level at work, if

you are like a manager or you have a position, they try to show their power. These small, small politics, he doesn't know about them. We know that, the local people, we know that, that's why we love him. He treats everyone equally no matter what. He was like a father" (Nada, 18.11.04).

Nada has just discovered that she is expecting her second child. She is still planning to pursue a Masters degree but now plans to wait for a year (Nada, 21.02.05). She said, "It would be an advantage of having my Masters degree just to prove that I am the best and I can do it. I can do it. I can still learn and I have the knowledge" (Nada, 01.11.04).

When I asked whether she could receive any funding from the government for her further education, she answered "If you have wasta, you will get so many things in this country". She explained, "I come from a very good family and my family name is high but my father is tired from talking to all of them. They are his friends. It takes an effort. My father says, 'They are my friends, I don't want them to think that I'm misusing them'". Nada adds, "It's the way my father has raised us up. He's like, 'I don't want to take advantage of my friends. If I feel it's necessary, definitely I will talk to them'" (Nada, 13.10.04).

This chapter attempted to present the fascinating stories of each of the women in the study in a clear and meaningful way. The stories were condensed from an extensive body of research with the view to present the points that relate to the research questions while still maintaining a sense of each participant and her way of thinking. I attempted to use the actual words of each participant while still endeavoring to ensure a smooth flow and easily readable document. I hope that you have enjoyed 'meeting' these women as much as I have. In the following chapter, I will analyze and interpret the research findings according to my research questions and theoretical framework.

Chapter 5 Analysis and Interpretation

In this chapter, I consider my two research questions. In the first section, I discuss the key discourses that graduates of DWC engage with to articulate their sense of self. This analysis is done in keeping with Weedon's (1987) work regarding the ways that women attempt to construct and perhaps deconstruct their positions in society. My analysis of the discourses interacts with the themes covered in the literature review and is organized around these topic areas. In the second section, I look at ways in which these women challenge or resist the social discourses. Informed by Davies' thoughts on positioning (2000) and power (2002), I consider how the women position themselves within these discourses and negotiate power relationships with the people around them.

Section 5.1 Key discourses

Through the interview process, a rich description of women's lives emerged highlighting many of their thoughts on forces that shape and reshape their worlds. In analyzing the data, I have highlighted the issues associated with the participants' sense of self and the overriding discourses that emerged from the research. In this section, I will consider the following research question: What are the key discourses that graduates of DWC engage with to articulate their sense of self? I will discuss these key discourses which fall into six main areas: gender discourses, marriage discourses, kinship and ethnicity, meritocracy and individualism, materialism, and religious discourses. Each area will be discussed separately beginning with gender.

5.1.1 Gender discourses

As noted by Kazemi (2000), the Middle East has a very large gender gap so it is not surprising that important social discourses centered around gender. There is an underlying assumption in Emirati society that men and women are suited for different roles in society (Treacher 2003) and that certain careers are not suitable for women (Hijab, 1988). For example, women should not work late hours and should not interact actively with men. A key aspect of this assumption is that women are fully responsible for child care. Published literature supports these views emphasizing the need for women

to choose careers that allow them to balance career and family and careers that provide greater segregation from men as described earlier (Rugh, 1985; UNDP, 2003). This discourse is potentially very restrictive for women, especially those who aspire to non-traditional positions in society and unconventional careers. Additionally, this discourse reinforces the binary divide between masculinity and femininity making de(construction) of gender differences and the blurring of gender suggested by Davies (1990) more problematic. The interview data clearly supported the historical importance of this assumption and how it can potentially impact the educational choices, the career paths and the behavior of women in the modern day, despite the efforts of women to challenge it.

From the interview data, only one of the mothers of the participants had a career, however, she ended her career as a teacher to look after the children. Nada noted that her mother said, "No, I have to hold the children now, seven children. I cannot leave them like this" (*Nada's story*). Nada admired this trait in her mother. Alia noted her feeling that her husband was not capable of looking after her children saying, "He will never look after them" (*Alia's story*). Alia did not seem concerned about her husband's inability to care for the children; she accepted it as the norm reinforcing stereotypical male/female differences.

Alia discussed the changing roles and attitudes of women. She noted that currently more women are working and continuing their education. She compared this to the past saying, "Like us, yanni, the new generation, our mentality is totally different than my parents. My mother she was sitting just at home, having kids, take care of them. But me, I want to work. I want to have my own career" (*Alia's story*). Alia justified both her mother's choice of looking after her children and her own choice to work by observing that the world is different now and therefore expectations can change. This also illustrates the fluidity of social discourse and the relevance of historical context noted by Weedon (1987).

In agreement with the published research presented earlier (Fawzi, 2003), the interviewees supported the community view that government positions are considered to be very suitable for women as they provide security, high salary and reasonable working hours. Both Alia and Nada, the two mothers in the study, work in government positions. Alia who works as a government auditor noted how all her friends and family feel that her job is perfect because the hours are short. Alia said, "Everybody's telling me, 'It's a good job, you go whenever you want and you leave whenever you want'". She noted that although she would like to leave the job because it is not fulfilling, everyone else thinks that would be "crazy" (*Alia's story*). While Alia challenges this view by expressing a desire to change careers to find greater self satisfaction, she has not been able to find the motivation and perhaps the sense of agency to do so.

On the other hand, working in the hotel industry is considered unconventional and often inappropriate due to the unusual hours and the interaction with many men and women. The women employed in this field have to work hard to maintain a good reputation within their families and the community. Amna said, "Especially males, they have a bad perception about the private sector and the hotel industry. Because females, yeah, females if you ask them to work in the hotel or private sector, they will not mind but they will mind because of their parents, because of their families" (*Amna's story*). Amna continues to work in the hotel despite community criticism.

Even Nada who holds a government position, faced difficulties initially from her in-laws. When she was considering marriage, Nada discussed her unconventional working hours with her fiancé who was agreeable. However, his parents disapproved of Nada working night shifts and made comments suggesting that Nada was behaving inappropriately. Nada reported that they said, 'Oh you have to go work again, what such work? Are you sure you are going to work?'" (*Nada's story*). Nada found the presumption that her reputation was questionable to be very offensive which is not surprising considering the historical importance of honor in Emirati society (Joseph, 1996).

Based on the traditional patriarchal focus of Emirati society discussed by Al Faruqi (1988), women are expected to be subservient to men and therefore, assertiveness by women has not traditionally been encouraged. Assertiveness is seen to be a masculine trait that while admired in men, is undesirable when displayed by women. However, several of the women that I interviewed consider themselves to be very assertive and are proud of this fact although they recognize that it is unconventional and perhaps undesirable. Hamed and Suleiman (2003, p. 7) noted that the increase in education for women was catching men "flat-footed as they are unable to come to terms with these changes" and further commented that "this, in turn, has created an environment of increasing incompatibility issues between the sexes as women garner a self-confidence that exists outside the reliance on marriage".

Fatma expressed her feeling that most men find assertive women hard to live with because they can't be easily controlled and will want to know more about their husbands' actions. Fatma feels that there is a double standard where men have the freedom to do more than women. She sums this up saying, "It's very funny in this culture that they allow themselves to do things which, you know, it's forbidden for the woman" (*Fatma's story*). Fatma is happy that her current fiancé, a university professor, accepts and values her assertiveness although he appreciates that this is an unconventional trait in this society. Fatma said, "He told me, 'Fatma, you have a different personality than the other local girls'. You have a very strong personality that I tell you not all men in the UAE can marry you, or have a relationship with you'"(*Fatma's story*). While admitting to exhibiting possible "non-feminine" behaviours is a positive step toward reworking the discourses, women still perpetuate the dominant discourse by expressing the view that they are 'different', thus strengthening the existence of the norm.

Men in the UAE society, on the other hand, are expected to be strong and decisive. Laila was very disappointed when her love interest was not willing to act against his mother's wishes although this would be acceptable in society. Laila explained, "With all my respect to his mother, I thought that he would take a position or a stand against his mother and say, 'This is the girl that I want'. She continued, "And he had to do everything that

mamma said and I hate that" (*Laila's story*).Fatma also indicated how she felt that although men may be intelligent, they were not socially adept. Fatma said, "I can see that they are very good at mathematical things and businesses, but they come to social life, I can give them zero out of ten, not even two!'" (*Fatma's story*).

Amna explained that she feels that women need to behave unobtrusively in public to avoid attracting inappropriate attention. Amna explained, "When a group of females come together, in my opinion, I feel that this group will laugh loudly, will talk loudly. They will bring attention to them"(*Amna's story*). Amna has decided not to go out with her friends in order to avoid the possibility of appearing to behave inappropriately in public. This decision illustrates Mahdi's (2003) point about the ways that Emirati women behave in order to preserve their reputation. At the moment, Amna has accepted this very constraining discourse which may severely limit her choices in life.

Overall, there is a strong differentiation between the perceived roles that men and women should play in society which can oppress women. Women struggle to position themselves within these expectations while still trying to maintain a sense of control over their own decisions. Women who choose to challenge these roles by pursuing unconventional careers such as working in the hospitality industry (*Amna's story*) or displaying non-traditional values such as assertiveness (*Fatma's story*) face negative talk by the community or pressure from their families. This behaviour is explained by Davies (1990, p. 513) as the way for the community to maintain dominant discourses. She explained,

> While the subjection of oneself through the discourses of gender may be a "private" process, when done "incorrectly" it becomes a visible, collective, and public process whereby the individual is hailed as incorrect, told that they have misrecognized the positions that are available to them.

However, women are beginning to be able to see themselves in new ways that can result in a sense of emancipation which can encourage others and mold existing discourses. Amna, for example, has been able to convince her family to value her career in hospitality (*Amna's story*). On the other hand, women themselves perpetuate

stereotypical roles by ascribing certain characteristics to each gender such as submissiveness for women (*Alia's story*) and assertiveness for men (*Fatma's story*) reinforcing the equity concept embedded in society (Treacher, 2003). Foley (2004) noted that the concept of different roles based on gender entrenches women in a subordinate position in society. The limited interaction between women and men in the society acts as an impediment to broadening views since men and women are less able to learn about one another to dispel the stereotypes and see each other in new ways. However, the increasing employment of women in mixed gender work places is a positive step toward developing a deeper understanding of women by both men and women and finding new ways for women to position themselves in society.

5.1.2. Marriage discourses

As in any culture, marriage is a critical issue for women. In the Arabic community, marriage and family have always played a central role and marriage discourses appear to be numerous and powerful. As noted by Joseph (1996), Arabic society is based on family units and a woman's position as a wife and mother are essential to her sense of self. While this discourse again emphasizes stereotypical differences between men and women and therefore restricts freedom of choice, it does not necessarily subordinate women as the 'role' of wife and mother are generally highly respected and revered. Women are able to work within this discourse to maintain respect while negotiating greater agency.

Two of the participants, Alia and Nada, were both married through arranged marriages. Nada had the chance to get to know her husband in advance, while Alia did not. Fatma has been through a broken engagement and is currently considering a marriage proposal. Laila has been in love but the relationship ended when the man's mother refused to permit a marriage to a non-pure Arab. Amna is single and has not mentioned any relationships with men. In addition, the participants' mothers experienced varied marriage situations from a polygamous situation to both more open and more controlling relationships. Therefore, it is not surprising that the women held a variety of views on the subject of marriage.

A key discourse related to the attributes that an ideal bride should have. It appears that women are convinced of the need to be desirable to attract men. Desirable attributes include appearance and subservience but intelligence and earning power are increasing in importance. When I asked about her marriage, Alia explained that her husband was looking for "her to be very young, and I want her to be thin and tall and with a little bit dark skin". Alia explained that a prevailing assumption is that a young wife can be molded into what the husband prefers saying, "He's always thinking that if he marries a young woman, he can - not adjust - be as he wants her. She will be as he wants her. And that's true!" (*Alia's story*). Alia seemed to accept that women developing into what men wanted was both normal and desirable. This will potentially have a large impact on the way that women view themselves and their sense of self worth since women are seen to have value based on their relationship to men.

Alia feels that she was selected for marriage based on her age and physical attributes. However, Nada feels that the new generation of men prefer different characteristics. She said that men like women who are, "probably like me who thinks for her own and who shares" (*Nada's story*). She continued describing the ideal wife saying, "So men, they don't want someone who is too clinging. You have to give them their space". It is clear from Nada's comment, "he will love you more" (*Nada's story*), that she feels that the way a woman behaves will influence the way a man feels toward her. Nada appears to have a slightly more proactive view than Alia by suggesting that a woman can influence what characteristics a man wants in his wife. In both examples, however, the women continue to value themselves through the eyes of a man.

Fatma explained how she has been asked to help her brother find a wife. This example illustrates how the attributes of a good wife may be in the process of change, particularly through the influence of women. Fatma's brother initially felt that a beautiful woman with no further education would suit him saying, "She's what I'm looking for". He then changed his mind after pressure from his mother and sister and decided that she was not suitable (*Fatma's story*). Fatma and her mother are both encouraging her brother to choose his own wife based on his feelings rather than on superficial physical

appearances. Through negotiation and discussion, Fatma and her mother are attempting to influence her brother's thinking. If successful, this is a positive step toward problematising or disrupting the dominant discourses that position women as commodities.

Alia reflected a commonly-held belief that marriage to an older man is better because "he will be taking care more" (*Alia's story*). This highlights the assumption that a husband will take care of his wife. Fatma, who is currently considering a marriage proposal shares this idea. Fatma spoke about younger men, "They get married with a wife, the wife is a wife and they also have an affair outside the house." However, Fatma feels that older men, like her potential fiancé, Ahmed, are more likely to "settle down" and focus on a family (*Fatma's story*). Not surprisingly, Alia who did not get to know her husband until after their marriage, noted that she feels *lucky* to have a happy marriage (*Alia's story*). Fatma echoes the importance of luck saying, "I'm not lucky in love" (*Fatma's story*).

As discussed earlier, an underlying assumption in UAE society is that men are responsible for women and should control them (Al Faruqi, 1988) potentially resulting in a greatly reduced sense of agency for women. While this may hold true in many households, there are also examples where the balance of power has been disrupted. Alia discussed that while she feels empowered because her own husband is very supportive of her plans to study and start a business, this is not the case for her sister, Noora. Alia explained that Noora's husband would not allow her to continue her studies because he felt it was not necessary, although Alia hinted that the fact that the husband did not have any higher education was a factor in the decision. Alia noted that he told Noora, "It's useless" and he said, "You already got a job and that's it" and Noora then "changed her mind" (*Alia's story*). In reporting that her sister 'changed her mind', Alia is suggesting that her sister chose to adopt her husband's way of thinking. When a woman doesn't feel empowered to disagree with her husband but feels that she must adapt her own way of thinking to align with his or at least appear to do so, her agency and array of apparent choices may be severely limited.

Fatma who has a very controlling father explained how she is fighting against being controlled herself. Fatma said, "I noticed this because my father was trying to control me and because of the other men in the UAE, I cannot stand a man controlling me" (*Fatma's story*). Fatma has found it difficult to find a relationship where there is mutual sharing. Nada noted that her parents taught her to listen to her husband from the beginning of her marriage. Whenever there is a disagreement, even if his opinion is wrong, Nada's parents told her that she must listen to him. Nada explained, "Yeah, they tell me, you are mistaken, you are supposed to listen to your husband. And he likes this about them" (*Nada's story*). Nada is clearly expressing that deference to one's husband is an expected societal norm. This is supported by the literature on the patriarchal structure of Arabic society (Al Faruqi, 1988).

Nada expanded on the issue of control by explaining that men receive pressure from society to control their wives and, in fact, men who spend a lot of time at home are seen to be controlled by their wife which is viewed as a loss of masculinity as associated with power. Nada explained that when she was first married, she and her husband spent a lot of time separately with their own friends, but more recently, they both spend more time at home together. She related the reaction that this has caused saying, "It has changed and for a man, it is difficult because in the men's society, they used to tease him a lot. 'Your wife is controlling you now, you're not a man anymore'" (*Nada's story*). This example demonstrates the reality that men must also deal with the influences of social discourses.

Laila expressed the opinion that in marriage, women have to adjust to the men's wishes and not vice-versa. Laila said, "I mean local guys are not ready to adjust themselves and compromise, like at the middle. Like, it's my way or the highway" (*Laila's story*). Laila feels that this attitude has developed from the excessively permissive upbringing of boys in society. She also noted that often women are blamed in divorce cases regardless of the facts of the situation saying, "The first thing that comes up in their mind, it's the girl's fault" (*Laila's story*).

In the Arabic world, it is a tradition that men are expected to pay a dowry to their bride. Another more recent custom is the expectation of a very lavish and expensive wedding that is funded by the groom and his family (Kalsi, 2003). While the lavishness of the wedding is seen as a status symbol as discussed in a later section, the amount of the dowry is sometimes seen to reflect the quality of the bride. Many local men cannot afford to meet these high expectations and are delaying their marriages or are marrying foreign women who don't share these expectations. Alia explained, "Because the girls are demanding lots of money plus the men now, the boys now, they don't have to pay all this money to bring whatever the girls is want. They want very big marriage which costs around 500,000. They want, the girl, she want her own house, she want two maids, fancy car. Who will pay for all these things? This man's salary is only 10,000, for example. It's impossible. The men's here, they think, 'Oh, okay if I marry, for example, from the Far East, she will not cost me - only a ticket, only 5000 dirhams" (*Alia's story*). The emphasis on the financial side of the marriage is making some women feel like a commodity to be bargained for reducing their feelings of agency. Fatma recounted a conversation with her fiancé, Ahmed, where they discussed her dowry that made her feel like a commodity. Ahmed noted that a Russian bride would be more beautiful and cheaper. Fatma noted that Ahmed said, "'I could get a Russian, I mean get married to a Russian, at least I will not pay that much for her'. I said, 'I am like a car? Or like a sheep or a goat?'" (*Fatma's story*).

While families would like their daughters to get married, it is not considered appropriate for families to overtly search for a husband. Amna explained, "We cannot go and force the guy, 'Come and marry my sister'. We cannot do this". Searching for a husband may imply that the family wants to get rid of their daughter. Amna noted that if he mentioned them more directly, people might think, "He's fed up with them" (*Amna's story*). There is a clear feeling among the interviewees that society sees an arranged marriage as a rational decision while love before marriage is usually weak and irrational. Although the majority of marriages still appear to be arranged, there is a lot of comparison and discussion about love marriages. Amna was quite cynical about love marriages and suggested that they are impetuous and irrational. Amna explained, "Here arranged marriages works better than

love marriage. Love marriage, nowadays, is because people are looking to serials, to poems, to movies, to these things so they want to try this love". But marriage is not like this; marriage is more big than this. Marriage has so many things, so many responsibilities" (*Amna's story*). In her insistence of the benefits of arranged marriage, Amna is demonstrating her positionality in society as described by Davies (2000). She is well aware that I have a love marriage and she is trying to let me understand her point of view and the importance of the cultural context of this discourse by emphasizing that *here* arranged marriages work better than love marriage. Alia also highlights this point in the following example.

Alia pointed out that while marriages were arranged without love, love would follow. Alia said very casually, "You know how it's here in our culture. There is no love before marriage. But then when you live with him, you have kids, you love him" (*Alia's story*). Nada also reflected the idea that marriage should be a rational and considered process and indicated that her experience in studying in a mixed-gender secondary school helped her to resist the weakness of falling recklessly in love. Nada feels that romantic gestures such as flowers and sweet talk are insincere saying "having kisses and roses and gifts – this is not a relationship" and she is proud that she was mature enough to avoid being influenced by men who use these techniques. Nada explained, "You tend to learn how to deal with them. You know there are some lines that you cannot cross with boys, though we are friends". Nada noted the following about girls who did not have experience in mixed environments, "She would fall in love with the first guy that she talks to. Some of the girls are that weak on that part" (*Nada's story*). Laila supported the view of love as a form of weakness by giving the example of her mother who loved her father despite his poor treatment of her. Laila said, "I always think that I will never reach this point in my life that I will let a man take control over me like this, makes me this weak that I cannot keep my dignity and like defend myself" (*Laila's story*). Laila's feelings reinforce the societal view that equates feminine vulnerability with weakness and disrespect.

Several of the interviewees noted that women need to be able to manipulate men in order to achieve their own goals. Nada explained that although her fiancé initially allowed her

little freedom to go out with her friends, she was able to change him. Nada said, "But I changed him a lot because I was smart at that time" (*Nada's story*). Nada received support from her mother who also claimed to have manipulated Nada's father. Nada said, "She told me, 'You can change him because', she told me, 'I changed your father'" (*Nada's story*). Alia also related an example that demonstrated the strength and cleverness of her grandmother who was able to obtain a divorce for her daughter to escape from an unsuitable husband. Alia noted how strength was valued saying, "my grandmother personality is very strong. She was well known about it, very strong, and everybody respect her"(*Alia's story*).

It seems clear that women in Emirati society have the perception that they have only two choices – get married or stay at home with their parents. Living on their own is not an acceptable option. In addition, marriage is seen as a sacred institution that all women must desire. This parallels Davies' (1990) notion that even our desires and what we see as possible are constructed through available social discourse. Families exert pressure on women to get married, especially as they age. Laila compares her mother's view to her own views on marriage. Laila's mother is pushing her to be married, on the other hand, Laila feels marriage will mean giving up her freedom and her identity which she is not prepared to do. Laila said, "If you marry like a local guy, you are giving up more than your freedom, you're giving up like, I won't say all of yourself, but a huge part of yourself, your personality, your identity, the way you are" (*Laila's story*).

Nada also noted that she had to give up a lot of her freedom when she married, although she feels that she has regained most of her freedom now through trust and compromise. She has been able to negotiate space and develop a sense of power in her relationship with her husband. Nada felt it was difficult at the beginning of her marriage because her husband was very controlling, saying, "he's telling me to do this and not to do that" (*Nada's story*). Nada feels that her marriage is now working due to mutual compromise saying, "This is why things are working out because it's not only me that's sacrificing things, it's also him, he's sacrificing a lot of things for me"(*Nada's story*).

Fatma discussed the pressure that she faces in deciding whether to accept her current marriage proposal. Fatma's mother feels that Fatma is getting older and should get married. Fatma said, "She puts all the mountain on my head, then first she says you're getting older… and telling me all the reasons and then she says, 'It's your choice' (*Fatma's story*). Fatma explained that while she tries to resist the pressures that her family exerts, she must engage in a lengthy debate to convince them of her views. Fatma said, "But Alhamdulilah, they don't force me but sometimes they *push* (*Fatma's story*).

Fatma herself feels that she should get married so that she will have companionship with her husband and future children when her own family grows old. "Sometimes, Miss, I don't want to get married, I feel I'm happy alone. But sometimes you feel, okay, you are young now, later on when you get married, you will need your kids around you, when you are old" (*Fatma's story*). However, Fatma also sometimes thinks that it might be better to be alone than to be controlled by someone else. Fatma lives with her family and will live there until she gets married or indefinitely, if she does not marry. As for most women in Emirati society (Harik & Marston, 1996), it is inconceivable to her to live on her own, however, she said, "I wish" when asked about living alone (*Fatma's story*). In my discussions with Fatma, I am reminded about the dynamic nature of the research process; the fact that I ask these previously unconsidered questions creates the possibility of new ways of thinking for the research participants and for myself.

Overall, marriage is a central issue in society. None of the women saw living on their own as a possibility. The power of this discourse is explained by Adams St. Pierre (2000, p. 485) who noted the difficulty of acting against an accepted discourse. She stated, "Once a discourse becomes 'normal' and 'natural', it is difficult to think and act outside it. Within the rules of a discourse, it makes sense to say only certain things. Other statements and other ways of thinking remain unintelligible, outside the realm of possibility". While all of the women thought that marriage to the right man was highly desirable, there was also a definite sense that staying single was preferable to marriage to the wrong man or being divorced. There was also a clear message that women need to be strong and rational and be able to cleverly manipulate men in order to fulfill their goals

and avoid being controlled by men or treated as a commodity. While marriage discourses tend to privilege men and masculinity, women seem to be identifying and experimenting with tactics that provide them with a sense of agency and empowerment within the realm of society's view of acceptability.

As noted by Mahdi (2003), these marriage discourses can be very constraining for Emirati women. Faced with tremendous societal pressure, limited opportunities to meet men, high marriage costs and a shrinking population of eligible men, many women feel pressured to try to mold themselves into what they feel society will desire in a potential bride. In many cases, this results in women suppressing their sense of selves and experiencing a dissonance between their desires and society's norms. Some women see themselves through the eyes of a potential husband and judge themselves on this basis leading to restricted life choices and inhibiting their sense of agency.

5.1.3. Kinship and ethnicity

Family ties and racial identity are extremely important in Emirati society as stated by Joseph (1996). All of the interviewees felt very strong ties to their families, although their relationships with their families were different. All of the women felt strongly about their race and all of the women felt that at times, their race dictated the type of treatment they received – sometimes positively and sometimes negatively. The women positioned themselves and others in various ways through race and family connections.

All of the participants lived in a family situation and felt strongly about maintaining loyalty to their families. Alia noted the positive role that her family played in her life. Alia said, "I remember, from childhood until now, Alhamdulilah, my family is a very happy family, very close. And I think I'm very lucky that I lived with my grandparents and my parents because we are all in one house" (*Alia's story*). Laila experienced conflicts with her late father, but her loyalty to her mother and her siblings has always been very strong. Laila said, "I was always protecting my mother and my sisters (*Laila's story*). Laila is proud to view herself as a 'protector' for the female members of her family and this forms an important aspect of her sense of self. The importance of this

position to Laila's self image illustrates the power of fictionality described by Davies (1997); whether Laila is in fact a 'protector' or not is not relevant, but rather her vision of herself as a protector which increases her sense of self-esteem and empowerment is the critical value of the spoken narrative.

Nada provided an example demonstrating how family welfare took precedence over personal welfare. She noted that refraining from reacting to negative personal comments from her husband's family, although difficult, was an important way for her to show respect for her husband and his family and to keep the peace. Nada explained, "For example, I had to keep quiet when some of his family members would hurt me and not to answer back, just to respect him. Because later on, they would think that he's not a good husband, because look his wife is making fights with his family" (*Nada's story*).

The previous example also illustrates the pressure to uphold family reputation by maintaining silence or secrecy about behaviour or attitudes that may be perceived to be challenging dominant discourses (Harik & Marston, 2003). In another example, Amna disguises her position in a hotel by rephrasing her job title to reduce criticism by her grandmother (*Amna's story*). Finally, both Laila and Fatma hide relationships with male friends from certain members of their family and the community highlighting the prevalence of the use of secrecy (*Laila's story, Fatma's story*).

As discussed earlier, society supports paternalism in families as well as in leadership. Men are considered to be the leaders in the home and are expected to take care of the women (Al Faruqi, 1988). Laila noted how she felt that her father was useless because he did not fulfill this responsibility while her mother felt that family connections were more important. Laila reported a conversation she had with her mother, "I don't want this kind of father in my house anymore. I don't know what the use of him? He's not taking care of you or us'… And she just says, 'No I cannot divorce him. He's your father" (*Laila's story*).

The idea of the sanctity of family and the dominance of the father extends into the leadership of the country as well. As previously noted, paternalism and personal benevolence are desirable characteristics of an Arab leader (Rahman, 2004; Abbas 1995). Sheikh Zayed, founder of the UAE and beloved ruler for the past 34 years, recently died providing me with the opportunity to explore the women's views of his leadership. It is clear that he was a strong father figure to the citizens of the country. Alia mentioned that Sheikh Zayed was referred to as "Baba Zayed" which means father Zayed. She elaborated saying, "I feel that he is like my grandfather" (*Alia's story*). Nada explained that Sheikh Zayed was loved for his benevolence and devotion to looking after his people. She said, "He treats everyone equally no matter what. He was like a father" (*Nada's story*). The local newspaper supported this view referring to Sheikh Zayed as the "father of the nation" (Rahman, 2004). Sheikh Zayed also revealed his paternalistic view saying that women should work in places "suitable to their nature" (cited in Al-Siksek, p. 110). It is again evident that Arab society reinforces the concept of binary positions for men and women that poses a significant hurdle for creating emancipatory spaces for women.

Paternalism can also be seen in the workplace. Nada explained that one of the directors in her company said to her, 'Don't worry, you're like my daughter' (*Nada's story*). This response helped Nada to decide to withdraw her resignation from the organization because she felt that, "At least they cared" (*Nada's story*). This example illustrates how Nada accepts and respects this assumption of a benevolent father figure as a leader.

Race and ethnic heritage appear to be a critical element in self definition for the women in my study. In the UAE, there are two levels of racial discrimination – discrimination between pure Arabs and non-pure Arabs and secondly discrimination between Emirati nationals and ex-patriots. Laila explained the idea of pure and non-pure Arabs and the discrimination issue; "In our country we have like two let's say like two type of people. You have the pure Arabic people what we call them the Bedu and we have the, it's Arabic but has some mixture from outside. Me, myself like I'm half Iranian, half Arabic". Laila whose great, great grandfather was Iranian, noted that many pure Arabs will not

marry non-pure Arabs (*Laila's story*). Laila explained that a meaningful relationship that she had with a pure-Arab man ended due to racial differences. She told me, "His mother didn't want me because I am not pure Arabic" (*Laila's story*). While Laila expressed regret over this incident, she accepted that this was society's view.

Like Laila, Fatma, who is also part Iranian and part Emirati, has faced discrimination; however, both women are clearly very proud of their racial heritage. When I asked if she considered herself to be an Arab or an Iranian, Fatma replied, "I cannot say. I'm proud of myself being Irani"(*Fatma's story*). Fatma also noted that pure Arabs receive better job opportunities. She noted, "My family name is not considered Arab to them [human resource people responsible for hiring decisions] and especially to those who are very well known families" (*Fatma's story*). Both Laila and Fatma strongly identify with a subject position (Davies, 2000) based on ethnic background. Both women acknowledged that having Iranian ancestry provides them with a less privileged position in society although each woman also expressed pride in defining in herself positive traits associated with this ethnic group.

Alia commented on the discrimination faced by children of mixed marriages saying, "Everyone is, you know, make fun of them because the culture here". Alia also agreed that non-pure Arabs have less marriage prospects. She noted that her husband wanted to be sure that she was pure before they married saying, "Yanni, like for me, when my husband propose to me, my parents ask about his father, his grand, grand, grandfather and his grand, grand, grandmother – are they pure locals?" (*Alia's story*).

In the workplace, there is significant racial tension and discrimination between local employees and certain foreign workers. Currently, the UAE is implementing an "emiratization" program to encourage the hiring of Emiratis. Under this program, companies who do not hire nationals, will face difficulties in obtaining work visas for foreign workers (Gulf News, 2001). While this has increased employment opportunities for locals, it has also created resentment against them in the workplace, particularly from foreign workers who feel their jobs may be threatened by less qualified locals. Alia noted,

"Because I am local they do not think that I know anything and they don't give me any attention in the meeting"(*Alia's story*). Fatma explained her experiences with racial discrimination saying, "Some of the nationalities, they try to bug you, and bother you all the time, they don't want you to learn things. You know, they don't want us to take their position one day" (*Fatma's story*).

Amna has managed to overcome discrimination in her position at the hotel by discussing the issue openly. At first, Amna found that the employees did not interact with her because she was a local. After Amna discussed the issue with her manager, the manager conducted a training session for staff and the situation improved over time. Amna was required to work the same hours as others, was reprimanded when she made a mistake and was included in staff functions. Amna described an incident where she was short AED 500 in balancing her cash. She noted with pride, "So this is a good case. They are not treating me as a local; they force me to pay five hundred" (*Amna's story*).

Fatma who has faced a lot of discriminatory behavior from Indians has found a way to justify her negative feelings toward Indians by ensuring that she does not act on her feelings. She said, "No, well you can hate them, you can have your feelings, but discrimination is only when you act, act, in action" (*Fatma's story*). However, based on poststructuralist theory, the way people think and articulate their thoughts does result in new ways of seeing the world, therefore, racist thoughts may well develop into racist actions.

In summary, all of the women clearly identified with their race and felt that it influenced the way others interacted with them, the way they interacted with others and their view of how they position themselves in society. Racial stereotypes and connections appear to be very strong and have both provided and restricted career opportunities for national women. The emiratisation program, while forming an effective affirmative action approach, also creates greater divisions between races. However, with more women and men of all nationalities working together in Dubai, there is a real opportunity to see beyond racial differences. Both Laila and Amna have found that through working in

mixed racial environments, increased racial tolerance is possible. Through a poststructural lens, we can see that deeper understandings and positive relationships with people from other races, may allow people to reconstruct their perceptions and see themselves and others in new, less restrictive ways.

5.1.4. Meritocracy and individualism

In the West, the tenets underpinning meritocracy are seen as potential impediments to female emancipation since they generally are inconsistent with such social policy provisions as affirmative action that may act to provide advantages to under-represented groups (e.g. Taylor and Henry, 2000). However, historically in Dubai, many employment opportunities and government positions were awarded based on family connections and predominantly to men (Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1993). This resulted in a disadvantageous position for women in general and women from less powerful families, in particular. The recent shift toward a greater emphasis on meritocracy in Dubai, seems to have redressed some of these historical gender inequities, and has created more possibilities for women. Thus, counter to the recent neo-liberal shifts in the West that have disadvantaged many women (Summers 2003), the shift towards greater meritocracy in Dubai has, in many ways, provided emancipatory spaces for women.

All of the women felt that it was important to make significant contributions at work and to receive appropriate individual recognition for these contributions. This seemed to be one of the most motivating or de-motivating factors for most of the participants. For the women I interviewed who are all college graduates, career is very important to their self definition. Several of them started their description of themselves by outlining their area of education and work. Gaining satisfaction from work is also seen to be important although not all of the women are satisfied in their careers.

Amna expressed the importance of gaining satisfaction and career advancement as critical to her sense of motivation. She said, "I found myself here. They respect us. They give us chances to prove ourselves. So salary is not very important" (*Amna's story*).Alia noted that she did not get a sense of personal satisfaction from her job although her salary

and working conditions were good. From her comments, it is evident that satisfaction is important and self-defining to Alia. She said, "I don't want to stay there, really. This is not Alia. I want to do something, yanni. I want to go back home with the feeling that I, you know, achieved something" (*Alia's story*). Both women clearly expressed the idea that their career should be consistent with their sense of self by stressing the need to find themselves in their work.

Not surprisingly, all of the women wished to receive recognition for their work. What I did find worthy of note, however, was the importance of this recognition and the strong motivation that it can provide. Laila finds that her job is very challenging, however, recognition keeps her motivated to complete difficult projects and work extra hours. She said, "You know, like your boss say, 'Good job! Well done! This is excellent job!', I feel myself so happy, I don't know, I feel like I did something nice and people appreciate what I did" (*Laila's story*). While it is natural to enjoy praise, the women seemed to feel a strong need for external recognition and displayed a deferential need to please the boss, perhaps because they are relatively inexperienced in the workplace.

Nada also feels the need for individual recognition at work and was very angry about her supervisor who took credit for her ideas. She explained her frustration at work as follows, "All my ideas were stolen, and put under her name, you know, plagiarized. I've done all the research, all the work, stayed all the night doing them, and getting approval and talking to the people and when the proposal goes to the big people, her name is being signed, as if this was her research and her work"(*Nada's story*). This issue was so important to Nada that she had submitted her resignation after continuing to feel that her work was never appreciated. However, she withdrew her resignation because she finally felt that the managers acknowledged her contribution and she valued their friendship as well. Nada said, "But at that time, see because the way they approached me was really nice and it touched me. Because I felt that they respected me" (*Nada's story*). Fatma stressed the importance of *earned* recognition; she did not want to be given a formal title without the equivalent responsibilities. Fatma noted that the duties and responsibilities that she was promised at the interview, did not happen, "For example they come and tell

you you're an officer and they give you a job that is not an officer's job." Fatma summed it up by saying, "I'm not feeling I'm an employee" (*Fatma's story*).

As described by Cunningham and Sarayrah (1993), wasta is the term used in the Middle East to explain the preferential treatment that someone might receive due to their family name or connections as opposed to their merit. It appears that wasta is still recognized as important but people are more reluctant to rely on it. There is a growing sense of pride associated with forgoing wasta. Fatma feels that her lack of wasta was why she did not have the chance to work in the interesting and challenging banking position that she wanted, "I never had the chance to work there. Some people because they have good wasta so they can have that" (*Fatma's story*). Nada comes from a family with wasta, however, she noted that her father was reluctant to use his wasta unless it was essential. When I asked whether she could receive any funding from the government for her further education, she answered "If you have wasta, you will get so many things in this country". She explained, "I come from a very good family and my family name is high but my father is tired from talking to all of them"(*Nada's story*).

Alia explained how she feels the use of wasta will change and that merit will become more important. She said, "In our country up to this moment, wasta is working. But I think, five years, in the next five years, no. No wasta, no family name, nothing, only your own work because that's what Sheikh Mohamed wants" (*Alia's story*). This seems to suggest a progression toward meritocracy as the country becomes increasingly global and competitive in world markets. As noted earlier, meritocracy can provide emancipatory spaces as talented women may find greater opportunities for economic independence and experience empowerment through hard work and achievement rather than being overlooked or disregarded based on gender or family name.

Generally, career development and individual work performance are essential elements in the construction of these six women's identities. Earned recognition is a key factor to job satisfaction and retention of employees. Finally, while wasta is still an important factor in finding opportunities, meritocracy is felt to be increasing in significance. This seemed to

be a desirable move even to those participants who have benefited from wasta. The importance of career success based on merit is a clear indication that women value their careers as an expression of independent personal achievement and the increased sense of agency and empowerment that is implied. The women in my study desire personal recognition and are very proud of their individual contributions at work. It is an area where they find a positive sense of self outside of their family's control and dominance. These women provide an example of Francis's (1999, p. 384) concept that women can find a sense of power by seeing themselves in an alternative discourse: "if a self is positioned as powerless by one discourse, it is possible that s/he may position her/himself as powerful via an alternative discourse."

5.1.5. Materialism

The citizens of the UAE have experienced a tremendous increase in economic development and personal wealth over the past 40 years (Brinkoff, 2004; Al Baik, 2005). This has had a significant impact on society. As Sherif (1999) and Hijab (1988) noted, many women do not work out of economic necessity but may enjoy the increased status that material goods provide. I explored this issue in the interviews and found that most of the participants felt that materialism was a growing problem in Dubai. They seemed to feel that money buys respect. I asked Alia what she felt about materialism in Dubai and she said, "People just want to buy very expensive things, just to show off" (*Alia's story*). Alia felt that large loans and overspending were a serious problem in Dubai. Alia mentioned that she believes that all household in the UAE have loans. She feels that people spend beyond their means, she explained, "And if I think about it, why are you taking a loan, big loan? To buy a fancy car? Why don't you buy a car with the money which you have?" (*Alia's story*).

Nada feels that the increasing influence of globalization is fostering a greater emphasis on materialism and wealth. Nada explained, "If you have money, then you are respected. This globalization and people coming from all over the world, I mean it's changing the people's mentality, it's changing the people, you know, this tradition [of simplicity] is lost". Nada feels that people nowadays are more envious, more jealous of material things

and success which makes them behave in negative ways (*Nada's story*). Nada gave a specific example of how she feels that carrying a designer brand handbag has increased her esteem in the eyes of her in-laws. When I asked Nada why she bought an expensive handbag, she explained, "If I carry this bag and I go into my in-laws house, they go and show off in front of everybody, 'everyone see, this is our daughter-in-law'. They are so proud and they start treating me well" (*Nada's story*). Nada also emphasized the impact of appearances on status with the following insight, "If you don't look good, didn't wear a good bag, even though you come from a good family, she's nothing" (*Nada's story*).

The amount of salary that a person earns can also be a status symbol. Some of the women reported receiving pressure from their families to search for jobs with high salaries which appears to be related to status as opposed to economic need. Amna noted, "My father said, 'How do you accept a job with 3000 dirhams, it's nothing'" (*Amna's story*). Amna noted that having a high salary and a high position is even more important to UAE men saying, "They want a high position immediately. High position, high salary, less hours and government sector, helas that's it" (*Amna's story*). This attitude is encouraging graduates to join the government sector where the starting salaries are high, even though the long-term career prospects and job satisfaction may be poor compared to the private sector.

Expensive weddings are another status symbol. Weddings and dowries are becoming so expensive that some national men are marrying foreigners who expect only an airline ticket as a cheaper alternative to a lavish wedding to an Emirati bride. Alia explained, "They [local women] want very big marriage which costs around 500,000. They want, the girl, she want her own house, she want two maids, fancy car. Who will pay for all these things?" (*Alia's story*). The two married women in my study both had very expensive weddings which they felt were demanded to fulfill society's expectations.

On the other hand, some men incorrectly presume that women are only interested in money. Fatma discovered that her potential fiancé, Ahmed, thought that she would not marry him if she knew how little available cash he had. Fatma noted, "He thinks that I'm

looking at his money". Fatma felt that this attitude may stem from the fact that Ahmed's brother's wife was very materialistic. She went on to explain how she was offended when Ahmed implied that she was influenced by his financial status saying, "But not all women are the same! So every time, miss, he's trying to say, 'Look at me, I don't have money, eh'. It's not nice, miss. I feel so cheap!" (*Fatma's story*). Fatma's reaction to Ahmed's monetary situation shows an interesting contradiction – on one hand, Fatma says she is not overly concerned about wealth and status symbols, but on the other hand, she also mentioned that she does not feel that Ahmed should buy items such as a car that are significantly cheaper than he can afford.

Cars, especially, are seen as both status symbols and means to freedom. Laila proudly showed me her luxury car in the parking lot. During the interview, she mentioned, "I have this grand new Lexus standing outside the house. I paid about 120 for that car" (*Laila's story*). Amna recently bought a new Honda Accord. I asked her if she is enjoying her new car and she replied, "I feel that I am independent more. I can go there and there" (*Amna's story*). All of the women mentioned their cars. Nada and her husband both drive new model BMW's. Alia also drives a BMW and her husband has a luxury model Cadillac. Fatma, who feels that she has a moderate car, drives a Rav4. It appears that cars act as an important expression of the status and personality of the owner. Since many young people in Dubai live in their family home with their extended family, cars may take on a more important role as a status symbol than homes.

Typically, in Arabic culture, money earned by married women is considered to be for their own use. It is considered to be the man's role to provide for the financial needs of the household (Hijab, 1988; UNDP, 2003; "Women in employment", n d). Women can choose to spend their money as they wish which may include contributing to the household expenses or to the children's educational expenses. I asked Alia whether she felt that it was her responsibility to save for the children's education, and Alia remarked, "I think my husband as well, but you know how womens always feel" suggesting that education is primarily a priority for women.

Nada commented on how she may have to "help my husband" with some mortgage expenses and referred to living in her "husband's house" (*Nada's story*). These phrases suggest the concept that the financial responsibility is ultimately his. Nada said, "So we're thinking to take an interest loan from the bank so that's why I am quite unsure about resigning or not because I have to help my husband with this. We have to pay for the loan together and I have to get my son to school" (*Nada's story*). While the issue of the male's responsibility to provide financial support again emphasizes the constraining division of duties along gender lines, women's ability to direct their own finances, supported by legal and societal norms, greatly facilitates emancipation. Women with control over their earnings have a much greater ability to make independent decisions regarding their spending which can lead to increased life choices. This emphasizes the vital role that women's employment plays in an emancipatory agenda.

Overall, the women's stories support the findings in the published literature indicating that economic need is not critical as a motivational factor for working women. However, the opportunity to purchase material goods does lead to greater chances for independent decision making and reduced economic dependence on others. In addition, while a high salary is perceived to be more important to the community as a status symbol compared to job satisfaction or career advancement, the women themselves do not fully agree with the significance of salary level. Women are willing to work for a lower salary if they perceive greater prospects for career development or advancement. This is a positive step to move away from a discourse that defines employment value by salary level toward a broader view of work as self-fulfilling, thus expanding the range of the definition of meaningful job opportunities for women.

5.1.6. Religious discourses

The UAE is an Islamic country, therefore, the influence of religion on social discourses significantly interacts with how women see themselves. Islam is central to the lives of Emirati people and provides a framework for guiding decisions (Ruff, 1998). While religious discourses can be seen as constraining by once again reinforcing gender divisions in society, women have been able to negotiate spaces for agency within a

religious framework. All of the participants referred to religious principles, however, their interpretations varied widely from more conservative views to more liberal ideas based on broader interpretations.

Amna who has recently decided to adhere to a stricter religious standard reflected the most conservative views. Being religious is considered to be virtuous as Amna noted when she made the decision to follow religious teachings more exactly. Amna explained that her father praised her decision and began to trust her more saying, "My father when he knows that, he knows that I'm planning to cover my face and do this, he was seeing that I'm doing something different, he kissed me and then he said, 'Well done!'. He give me confidence and he give me more trust. Before he was asking me 'At what time you will come?' But now he knows that I changed, my thinking has changed, he doesn't ask me" (*Amna's story*). Amna clearly values the high esteem of her father as part of her view of herself.

With regard to work, Amna noted, "If you go to the religion, deeply in our religion, most females, they have to sit at home. Even if I work, I work in a company that is all females like a school". However, Amna did note that the Prophet promoted a strong work ethic. She explained that her work has improved by following this principle, saying, "Prophet Mohammed say, 'When you work, you have to give all your energy to this work... If you start something, you have to complete it. So I'm doing the same thing and I'm getting a good result" (*Amna's story*). Amna is struggling with her enjoyment at working in a hotel which is considered unconventional by society's norms and part of her motivation in pursuing a stricter religious path may be to help to overcome society's negative views regarding her choice of work place. Alia, on the other hand, defended her beliefs on working with men by emphasizing that despite the opinions of some people, Islam does not prevent women from working with men. She said, "It [Islam] only teach you how to deal with men, not, yanni, tell you don't deal with men at all, or don't work with men. It's only crazy people who have this mentality" (*Alia's story*). Alia justifies her own beliefs by dismissing overly conservative views as crazy.

The issue of women traveling alone without male relatives has been a contentious issue at the college recently. I asked a few of the women about their opinion on this issue. Amna has traveled with her classmates in the past, so I asked her how she felt now about women traveling without a male relative. Amna replied, "I'm not thinking or planning to travel without my brother or my father because if we see it, a female always needs a man, always" (*Amna's story*). Fatma, however, had an opposing view based on a more contemporary interpretation of the Koran. She explained that traveling in the past was more dangerous justifying the rule that women should not travel alone, but that nowadays, travel is safer and the rule is no longer relevant. She said, "But now, even on the TV, those religious people, some strict people, they still say, 'No, it's haram'. They don't think, miss. But some people who are really developing those rules, say what's the haram? We have to look at this now, we have cars, we have planes and it's very safe so why the haram?"(*Fatma's story*). Fatma's comments emphasize the fluid and dynamic nature of social discourse (Weedon, 1987) by suggesting that historical and cultural contexts impact upon what society considers to be acceptable.

Fatma felt that her education shaped her basic thoughts and beliefs and gave her the ability to think for herself and interpret religious principles. She said, "I really like our college – because the staff there, they didn't just taught the material – the books and the handouts – they also built up our personalities and our minds as well – to think in-depth and to see what is right and what is wrong. It's not only – this came in the Koran and you have to do it – you have to think about it." Fatma emphasized the importance of independent thought with the following comment, "You create us and then you send us out and then we live our life. This is life, Miss, we cannot be stupid and continue being stupid like the others" (*Fatma's story*).

The way that religion is interpreted and applied in each woman's life is different and appears to feel equally righteous to each woman which supports Hashim's (1999, p. 8) observation that "Many women are, moreover, interpreting religion in their own way as a means of responding to oppression." The examples of religious interpretation illustrate the typical conflict that exists around the world when examining religious doctrine. There

are those who will insist on a literal, conservative interpretation of religious writings that remains consistent over time and those who feel that a more liberal, critical thinking model where religious teachings are interpreted in new ways to suit today's world is more appropriate. In my study, the women demonstrated both views – Amna is going through a process of re-examination of religious ideas and is attempting to reconcile them with her life. Alia used carefully selected religious sayings to justify her actions. Both Amna and Alia seemed to follow the equity approach described by Foley (2004) where women and men play different but equally important roles in society. While Fatma, on the other hand, chose to follow a broader interpretation of religious guidelines that she felt was appropriate to today and matched her own personal views of right and wrong. Her views seemed to lean toward equality as described by Foley (2004)   when she questioned why there were privileges that men had and women didn't. While religious views do not seem to inhibit the women's choices, they certainly play a part in shaping the women's perceptions of suitable choices. In summary, while religious discourses can certainly be seen as supporting gender divisions, women can choose to use religion to support their own personal views, whether they are conservative or liberal, and this may make their views more acceptable to society (Foley, 2004).

Section 5.2 Interaction with discourses

Evidently, as discussed in section 5.1, there are many social discourses that engage Emirati working women in Dubai. In this section, I will respond to research question two: To what extent and in what ways do these women challenge or resist the socio-cultural discourses? I will consider each participant and analyze how she interacts with the various discourses identified. It will become clear that although the women compare themselves to these ideas in order to gain a sense of themselves, they do not always accept society's discourses. Each woman interacts with the discourses in different ways – some of which are potentially emancipatory and others which strengthen the existence of the dominant discourse.

5.2.1 Alia

Alia follows a traditional life style in many ways and she appears to take up many of the identified discourses in a largely conventional manner; she has made a successful arranged marriage, respects her family, feels that religion is central to her life and takes full responsibility for her children. She sees herself in a positive way in these relationships.

Alia holds a government position which is very acceptable in society. However, she challenges the idea that short working hours and a high salary define an excellent career and she is determined to expand her career despite the possibility that others might not support her. She noted, ""Everybody's telling me, 'It's a good job, you go whenever you want and you leave whenever you want'. Okay, but that's not what I want" (*Alia's story*). Her words challenge society's conventions, however, she has not yet changed careers indicating that perhaps she does not feel the sense of agency needed to make such a controversial move. However, Alia is pursing another avenue to increase her career satisfaction by opening her own business. She is supported in this endeavor by her husband and by society's view that entrepreneurship is acceptable for women. It appears that Alia feels more comfortable negotiating among acceptable societal norms than directly challenging them.

Alia also does not believe that being a mother precludes her from pursing her career. She noted, "She [her mother] tell me, 'okay, helas, you got the bachelor, what else you want? Take care of your kids, your husband and that's it'. But I think, no, I want to do something else" (*Alia's story*). As noted above, Alia has been able to pursue her ambitions while maintaining close connections to her culture again by negotiating within society's prevailing discourses.

Although Alia married an older man who selected her for her youth and pleasing appearance, Alia has been able to develop a very close, but perhaps unconventional, relationship with her husband where he supports and encourages her career plans. Despite saying that she believed that marrying an older man would mean that he would mold her

into the type of wife that he wanted, Alia seems to experience a high level of self-determination and agency. While Alia respects her husband's opinions, she does not defer to him as a patriarch and makes many of her own decisions increasing her sense of agency. Alia lives with her in-laws as society encourages; however, she also expressed the less traditional goal of being financially independent from her and her husband's family and challenges the desire for material wealth, again allowing her to feel a greater sense of agency.

Alia feels that she is very religious and interprets religion in a way that justifies her working relationship with men. She appears to dismiss conservative religious interpretations that would prevent men and women from working together as the thoughts of 'crazy people'. This is a powerful way to negotiate emancipatory spaces while retaining community acceptance. While religion is largely seen as uncontestable, various interpretations are accepted that allow women to rationalize their thoughts and develop agency.

Alia seems to accept racism in the workplace as given. She sees herself as an Emirati and accepts that this means she may not be as well qualified as others. She feels, however, that nationals should be given the chance to prove themselves and demonstrate their skills. She believes that this may lead to a change in society's discourses regarding the ability of nationals in the workplace.

Overall, Alia positions herself within society's discourses in ways that enable spaces for agency and provide her with a positive sense of self. While she appears to willingly perpetuate many of the accepted norms, she pushes for gradual change by gently re-interpreting traditional discourses in ways that enhance her emancipatory space. She seems to deal with the pressures to conform by dismissing her critics as 'crazy'.

5.2.2 Amna

Although Amna is single, she appears to fully take up society's views on the role of women and the importance of marriage. She agrees with society's discourse on the sanctity of arranged marriages and articulates the irresponsible impetuousness of love marriages. However, when faced with a potential arranged marriage or a possible love relationship, her views may change..

Amna strongly identifies herself with her career. She is very proud of her career and made the following comment about the hotel where she works, "I found myself here" (*Amna's* story). Amna challenges society's discourse about suitable careers for women by working in a hotel, however; Amna clearly seems to feel some dissonance between her work and society's view of her. Amna mentioned that she faced a lot of criticism about working in the hotel. One of her ways of coping with this was to disguise her place of employment through a carefully chosen use of words. Amna explained how she changed her initially honest and open approach about her career to a more selective presentation of information. Amna explained, "But now sometimes it depends on the person I'm talking to. So if I notice that he's not the one who will encourage me or not the one who will accept that, I don't tell him that I'm working in the hotel" (*Amna's story*). Amna has discovered the ability to talk herself into a different discourse by redefining her career away from working for a hotel and toward working in the marketing department clearly displaying Davies' (1997) concept regarding the power of fiction to constitute what we see to be real and the use of the rewording of discourse to experience a sense of agency.

Amna has chosen to follow religious ideals more closely than she has in the past and uses these ideals to guide her behavior. She told me that she was not going to go out shopping with her friends anymore or travel without a male relative as she now felt that these behaviours were not appropriate. Amna appears to be re-interpreting religion in a more conservative way that restricts her social activities. (*Amna's story*). She is encouraged in this pursuit by her family and friends who praise her for her renewed faith. Amna is pleased that both her father and her manager are admiring her actions based on her new philosophy. She noted it was "very good to my work" and that her father said "Well

done!" (*Amna's story*). It seems that Amna now sees herself as a better person. It appears that this may be another method that Amna has chosen to combat negative community views relating to her work in the hotel. By adhering closely to religious principles, one of society's most accepted dominant discourses, she has gained approval and been able to develop a positive sense of self and a greater sense of emancipation in other aspects of her life. In fact, Amna noted that her father now allows her more freedom of movement because he now has greater trust in her. Amna's behaviour is in keeping with Francis' (1999) work on developing power and agency through re-positioning oneself in an alternative discourse.

Amna also does not agree with society's idea about the importance of salary. She noted that she accepted a position with a low initial salary because "the important thing is that I have to work in an industry that I like" (*Amna's story*). She also resists the idea of being given preferential treatment in the work place due to her nationality. She said, "I want them to treat me as one of the staff here – not as a local" (*Amna's story*). This statement illustrates clear racist views. There appears to be an assumed dichotomy – either you are an employee or an Emirati, but not both. Amna took offense to this assumption and insisted on equal treatment even when it meant longer hours or a reduction in pay for her. Amna felt that her success in winning equal treatment reduced racist views and allowed people to see one another in new ways. She effectively disrupted a powerful discourse by encouraging people to behave in ways that allowed for the development of new power relationships.

5.2.3 Fatma

Fatma struggles with many of society's views about the role and nature of women. She agrees with her fiancé's view that she has a "different personality" and does not like to be controlled. Although she feels that marriage is desirable for companionship, she has refused many marriage proposals because she feels the need to find love and is continuing to take her time to consider her most recent proposal despite her family "pushing her" and her grandmother's view that she is "crazy" for not marrying sooner. (*Fatma's story*). Fatma does appear to feel a sense of agency in that she feels that she has the right to make this important decision for herself. Fatma seems to find a sense of

agency by identifying more with her Iranian heritage and situating her ideas that may be considered unconventional in Arabic society in an Iranian context. She said, "I'm proud of myself being Irani" (*Fatma's story*). Fatma finds legitimacy in identifying herself within a different discourse based on ethnicity.

Fatma also resists society's views to a certain extent regarding relationships with men. Fatma has male friends which she feels is not acceptable. However, while her actions challenge the discourse, she perpetuates the discourse verbally by keeping her friends secret to those who find them unacceptable. She said, "I have friends who are local guys, just friends. But I cannot tell anybody that I have a local friend. It is not acceptable" (*Fatma's story*).

Fatma also disrupts society's view that she should not meet with her fiancé un-chaperoned. Again secrecy is used to avoid criticism. Fatma does not tell her father about these meetings and Fatma's fiancé feels uncomfortable when his brother sees them together in a coffee shop. Fatma reported that her fiancé, Ahmed, exclaimed, "Oh God, he is my brother!" and then with distress, "He's going to tell my family" (*Fatma's story*). Fatma feels that society should allow people to be more open and she dares to challenge restrictive social discourses through her behaviour.

Fatma feels that it is important to be a "good sister" by acceding to her brother's wishes for her to interview a potential bride for him even though she does not believe that this is a good idea. She said, "I cannot say no, miss. He will say, 'Oh, she is not a good sister. She's not doing what I want. So I have to go there and do the thing which I don't like" (*Fatma's story*). In this example, Fatma clearly feels that being a good sister is more important than standing up for her own views supporting the discourse regarding the subordination of individuals by families. However, Fatma explained that she did manage to convince her brother not to choose a wife based solely on appearances demonstrating how Fatma found a way to work within a social discourse and yet assert her sense of agency by making a small change in her brother's thinking.

Fatma believes that she is a good Muslim and justifies some of her actions and beliefs by interpreting religion in her own way. For example, she feels that the restriction on women traveling alone is based on historical circumstances that do not apply today. With regard to the Koran, she said, "you have to think about it" (*Fatma's story*). Fatma applauds the college for encouraging her to think critically and feels that this approach has shaped how she views religious doctrine. While many Muslims choose to interpret the Koran literally, Fatma feels that thoughtful interpretation is preferable and provides her with the opportunity to merge her own beliefs with religious teachings in ways that provide her with a sense of legitimacy and agency.

Although Fatma is currently unemployed, she feels that her career is very important and is very frustrated that she has been unable to find a satisfying job that suits her. She noted the importance of self-satisfaction saying, "Maybe I didn't like the job but at least I have some self-satisfaction there" (*Fatma's story*). Fatma summed up her view of herself in comparison with society's expectations saying, "I don't have work, I'm not lucky in love, I have problems at home, but sometimes I say, 'Alhamdulilah, I am happy'" (*Fatma's story*). This powerful quote unmistakably illustrates Fatma's enduring positive sense of self even when she admits that she does not meet her perceived view of society's parameters of success.

5.2.4 Laila

Laila initially challenged society's expectation of marriage saying, "Simple issue, I don't want to get married" (*Laila's story*) but in our second interview the reason for this became apparent. Laila suffered a broken heart from a relationship with a man who refused to marry her due to his mother's objection to her ethnicity; "His mother didn't want me because I am not pure Arabic" (*Laila's story*). This incident undoubtedly damaged Laila's positive sense of self although she is now finding ways to reposition herself. She expressed anger that although society would allow a man to make his own decision, this man "had to do everything that mamma said" (*Laila's story*). By attacking the man's masculinity and position in society's discourse, Laila may be able to increase her own sense of self and her sense of agency.

This tragic relationship, as well as Laila's parents' situation, have lead to Laila articulating that falling in love is a symbol of weakness. However, while she was in the relationship, Laila's feelings were so strong that she was willing to disregard society's values. She said, "But I think because I loved him that much, I didn't care about what society will say or what other people will manage to think" (*Laila's story*). Although Laila kept her relationship a secret from her family and friends, Laila dared to challenge the norm by dating a man. Her love for him and desire for male companionship outweighed her need to conform to society's norms. However, when the relationship did not proceed toward marriage, Laila retreated back into society's traditional expectations and suppressed her feelings of love. Over time, Laila then repositioned herself out of a romantic love discourse and back into the "good daughter" traditional family discourse where she regained her positive sense of self showing the process of constructing and reconstructing her world through words as explained by Davies (1997).

Laila accepts society's discourses about the importance of family and the need for a strong paternal figure. However, she felt that her late father did not perform the role that he should have because he divided his time between several wives and was rarely present in the household. Laila encouraged her mother to get divorced and said about her father, "I don't know what the use of him?" (*Laila's story*). Laila also noted how she felt uncomfortable about her secret relationship because it showed disrespect to her family. She noted that since the relationship has ended she feels "I am more in peace of mind, I'm really, because I don't do anything behind my family's back" (*Laila's story*).

Laila challenges society's views about the subservient role of women. Laila admires strength in women and hides her own feelings of weakness from her friends and family. Laila explained how she feels she must be strong in order to help those around her. She said, "And my two friends, Wafa and Noora, they depend on me because I am the stronger among them" (*Laila's story*). Laila also noted that she did not agree with the behavior of some national women at work who felt that they had to portray themselves in a restrained way while at work by being "so tied up, so quiet, so formal, so professional,

so work is work and nothing else" (*Laila's story*). Laila explained that women adopted this behavior to avoid unfavorable gossip or misunderstanding such as "the guy will say that she has a crush on him"(*Laila's story*).

Laila went on to explain that she did not believe in this philosophy and felt that it was more important for her to be true to herself saying, "But me, I don't know, I just try to be myself. And if I cannot be myself, I do not interact with that person because I don't want to create another me" (*Laila's story*). Revealing your true self, particularly to a man, is seen as a very intimate gesture. Laila described the closeness she felt with her boyfriend, "Before, you know, I had this kind of limits and boundaries and didn't let anybody get too close to me, but with him, you know, like I let all my guards down. I really, really gave him my heart" (*Laila's story*).

Laila's career is very important to her and she finds a lot of satisfaction in completing projects at work. She is motivated by her own drive to develop and improve suggesting, "I had to prove myself at something" (*Laila's story*). She also desires recognition by managers. She noted, "So if someone is talking about me, my manager will say, 'Yes, she's a good developer'. That simple statement says more than enough to me" (*Laila's story*). Laila feels empowered at work since she believes that she is competent and with hard work can achieve good results that will lead to desired praise and recognition. By focusing on positioning herself in society's discourses as a 'good employee', 'good family member' and 'good friend', Laila has been able to move away from the hurt she experienced in her romantic relationship and regain a positive sense of self and a strong sense of agency.

5.2.5 Nada

Career is extremely important to Nada's self-definition. She earns a lot of respect from patients and colleagues which inspires her. Unfortunately she has not always been shown appreciation from management which has caused such frustration that she resigned. She was convinced to withdraw this resignation, however, when senior management finally praised her work. She made the following observation, "simple words won't cost them

much but it would really affect your perception and the way you work and how you deal with others in that society. You won't think of leaving them if you were satisfied" (*Nada's story*). While Nada appears to be highly motivated, she feels that external recognition is critical to her sense of self.

Nada also defines herself as a wife and mother. She accepts society's ideas of the dominance of her husband, however, feels that it is equally acceptable for a wife to manipulate her husband. Initially she faced a lot of difficulties with her husband who wanted to control her. Nada yielded to this at first and then, through discussion and compliant behavior, managed to mold her husband's attitudes and rules to better suit her own beliefs. She said, "Whenever he used to tell me, don't do that, I used to listen to him and I didn't do it. I used to tell him, 'I'm not doing it because I don't want to go into fights with you, not because I am convinced of that. You have to understand that life has changed, people are changed" (*Nada's story*). Nada is now content in her marriage and feels that both she and her husband have made reasonable compromises. Nada commented, "This is why things are working out because it's not only me that's sacrificing things, it's also him, he's sacrificing a lot of things for me" (*Nada's story*). Over time, through trust and discussion, Nada has managed to negotiate a comfortable power position and sense of agency for herself within her marriage.

Initially, Nada's difficulty in negotiating an acceptable position of power in her marriage was exacerbated by both her own parents and her husband's male friends. Nada's parents kept encouraging her to obey her husband because this is what is expected in society. Similarly, her husband's friends would tease him whenever he stepped out of society's accepted role for a husband. These pressures exerted by these groups of people illustrate the powerful ways that members of a society use to maintain the dominant discourses when someone appears to be behaving "incorrectly" (Davies, 1990).

Similarly, Nada identifies herself as a good mother and puts the needs of her son first saying, "My son is my priority. If he goes to sleep, then I can go where I like" (*Nada's story*). Nada also subscribes to society's view that men are not suited for child care and

takes her son to her mother's house when she travels. She also shows her acceptance of the societal expectation that men are the primary financial supporter of the family by indicating that she would "help" her husband with a mortgage implying that the main responsibility lies with him.

Nada admitted the importance of appearances and overt displays of propriety in UAE society. Comparing to Western society, Nada said that men and women had to behave properly because, "society sometimes governs a lot of our actions" (*Nada's story*). Nada noted that she needed to be "conniving" to win approval from her in-laws, even by carrying an expensive designer handbag to reinforce their materialistic views (Nada's story). In another example, Nada explained how she had to refrain from expressing her thoughts in order to show respect to her husband and her family. She noted that when her in-laws made hurtful comments, she would "keep quiet because I think it's best for my family" (*Nada's story*). Nada uses these strategies to maintain her sense of agency and power while trying to avoid community criticism.

Nada provided another example of how she tried to conform to society's expectations. After experiencing a very difficult labor and delivery of her first child, Nada was inundated with unwanted visitors. Nada explained, "Then at the third day, I started crying in front of… I was holding myself and smiling to all these people. But by the third day, I told them, 'Please leave the room'. I asked the doctor to request that I leave from the hospital immediately. I don't want to stay" (*Nada's story*). In this example, Nada knows what is expected of her and manages to maintain 'correct' appearances for three days. When she found the effort too exhausting, she was able to negotiate space for herself by distancing herself from the uncomfortable social situation and regain her privacy.

Nada noted the significance of wasta in obtaining advantages in society noting, "If you have wasta, you will get so many things in this country" (*Nada's story*). However, she also noted how many people, including her father, were reluctant to take advantage of wasta. She related that her father explained why he did not like using wasta as follows, "They are my friends, I don't want them to think that I'm misusing them" (*Nada's story*).

Nada believes in working hard to achieve her goals. This attitude has helped her to advance her position in society and increase her sense of self. Nada summarized her optimistic feelings about her life saying, "I'm happy with my life, it's quite good, it's a quiet life. It's not the way I wanted it to be. It's not the way I was dreaming of it but I am moving towards my goals" (*Nada's story*). Nada seems to have found ways to navigate among society's discourses and find a sense of agency for herself.

Overall, the women that I interviewed interacted with society's discourses in varying ways. Alia seems to fully accept her traditional role of wife and mother; however, she resisted the idea of forgoing a career and further education to look after her children and husband. Amna challenged society's views by gaining employment at a hotel. She appears to struggle with her self-concept in this position and has chosen to re-position herself as a strict religious person to maintain her positive sense of self. Fatma continues to fight a primarily inner battle as she tries to decide whether or not to marry a prospective groom. In this decision, she confronts a number of discourses including the importance of marriage and society's expectations of desirable brides. Laila has challenged societal norms by dating a man, however, since the relationship has ended, she is no longer willing to challenge this discourse. For the moment, she appears to feel security and comfort in outwardly maintaining society's expectations. Finally, Nada appears to enjoy her position in society as a working wife and mother. She has negotiated a comfortable place for herself by gradually molding her relationship with her husband and her career into a shape that suits her. She admits that this process will continue by noting that while she has not fulfilled her dreams, she is moving toward achieving her goals.

Each woman appears to have developed a positive self image and sense of agency by rationalizing or interpreting societal discourses in her own way. It was also significant that many of the participants chose to keep secret some of their actions that they felt directly conflicted with society's views. This secrecy may, in fact, be a significant impediment to emancipatory thought since rather than facilitating change by way of role-modeling new ways of thinking and being, secrecy acts to reinforce society's views and

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give the incorrect impression that everyone subscribes to these views. In the following chapter, I discuss the broader implications of the women's stories for promoting emancipatory action.

Chapter 6 Implications

"Freedom does not basically lie in discovering or being able to determine who we are, but in rebelling against those ways in which we are already defined, categorized, and classified" (Sawicki 1991, p. 27).

In this chapter, I discuss how the research findings can be used to help women in Dubai to negotiate social discourses in ways that may lead to greater freedom. This is in keeping with Weedon (1987) who supported the idea that the identification of restrictive social discourses can lead to the opportunity to challenge and/or resist them in order to move toward greater emancipation. As Francis (2002, p.48) noted, "the concept of emancipation incorporates both action (agency) and value"; therefore I will provide suggestions that may require changes in both values and actions.

It must be recognized, however, that change is not easy. The social discourses that I have explored in this study have been in place for generations and are taken for granted in many cases. The discourses form a part of the culture of Dubai and although this culture is evolving, there is a definite desire to preserve cultural traditions which will inhibit change (Harik & Marston, 2003). These changes need to happen at a macro level where government and social institutions adopt new policies as well as at a micro level where both men and women adopt new values and ways of thinking. Despite the challenges, women are beginning to negotiate the discourses to position themselves in new ways and advance an emancipatory agenda. As noted by Adams St. Pierre (2000, p. 484), women need to see that their own acceptance of social discourse serves to perpetuate them. She suggested, "Poststructuralism does not allow us to place the blame elsewhere, outside our own daily activities, but demands that we examine our own complicity in the maintenance of social injustice". Only by recognizing and resisting the discourses can we begin to move beyond them.

I will discuss how this research can inform a number of different stakeholders that can act as change agents to aid emancipation namely, working women themselves, female job seekers, educators, policy makers, employers and the research community.

6.1 For working women

The identification and discussion of social discourses can lead people to question existing power relationships and taken-for-granted assumptions and perhaps move toward greater emancipation. These changes can happen at a micro level within people's minds or within people's individual experiences. Lather (1984, p. 58) suggested the idea that an understanding of social discourses can lead to the ability to transform saying, "We know that the task is self-education through praxis: knowing reality in order to transform it". Improvements can also occur at a macro level with the adoption of new policies and the reshaping of social discourses. Changes at both levels interact with one another to create a sustainable movement toward greater emancipation. Ali (2002, p. 238) explained how disempowered people can cooperate to see the world in new ways, saying that

> Combining this approach [collectivity] with Foucault's notion of resistance can result in a stance that begins with taking the lived experience of a disempowered individual to be a valid form of reality, then connecting this experience to the experiences of other disempowered individuals. Finally new forms of knowledge can emerge by articulating this connection in a politicized and action-oriented manner to work towards more universal emancipatory movements.

In this study, it is evident women are challenging many social discourses in a variety of ways. For example, one participant, Amna, is successfully pursuing a career in hospitality that is considered unconventional. She has challenged her family's views at a micro level to pursue this career. Amna feels that promoting the experiences of women like her, who are challenging the norm, in the media would be a good step to enabling other women to see new opportunities for themselves and promote change at a more macro level. Positive media coverage would also provide examples to families and society of women who are successfully pursuing unconventional careers while not compromising their values. Diana

Moukalled (quoted in Chu and Radwan, 2004, p. 42), the Arab world's only female roving reporter, supported the importance of media saying, "The media has a great role to play in putting the spotlight on issues, providing a platform for women and educating people".

Another social discourse that is being actively challenged is the notion of the dominant position of men in society. Nada described how she has succeeded in gaining freedom for herself from a controlling husband by breaking down his objections through initial compliance followed by discussion and the development of trust. Nada observed, "But I changed him a lot because I was smart at that time"(*Nada's story*). Another participant, Fatma, has made it clear to her potential fiancé that she will not agree to marry him if he insists on trying to control her. She said, "I cannot stand a man controlling me" (*Fatma's story*) and made this fact clear to her fiancé. Since he wants to marry her, she has been able to shift the balance of power in her favor. These women are negotiating new ways of interaction and gaining relative power within their own personal lives by questioning the traditional power structures as suggested by Ali (2002) and Davies et al (2002).

How can the challenging of discourses shown in these examples be used to help these and other women move toward greater emancipation? As mentioned previously, for the purposes of this study, emancipation has been defined as bettering people's lives. This implies gaining a wider freedom of choice and an appropriate degree of power while remaining connected to what is culturally acceptable. One of the key ways for women to help one another in this regard is to share experiences. Through the process of this research, the participants were able to share their experiences with me. This may have enabled them to see themselves and speak themselves in new ways. It is my hope that through this interaction, they may have begun to reflect on the discourses that they interact with in their lives and perhaps initiate a process of questioning them.

A more expansive way to share experiences is through the publication this research and of additional stories about women who challenge social norms published in the media as suggested earlier. Women' conferences, forums and support groups can also play an

important role in helping women to cooperate to encourage change. Hamed and Suleiman (2003, p. 17) noted the importance of women's groups noting that "they must work together strategically rather than competitively, working for the greater good rather than self-interest". Davies (1990, p. 511) described the benefits of a technique of collective memory where women can gain deeper insights by sharing their stories with one another: "Through sharing their stories with each other the group begins to recognize that ways in which their particular stories are *cultural* productions that intersect and overlap with the stories of others." Women's groups, meetings and discussions can provide support to individual women who are facing challenges and can also allow for the opportunity to create awareness and perhaps resistance to restrictive social discourses and policy.

One of the major impediments that I found to greater awareness of restrictive discourses is the notion of secrecy. Many women are reluctant to speak openly about how they are challenging the discourse. The suppression of the existence of relationships with men outside of marriage is a prime example of the secrecy that is practiced. Fatma noted that although she has male friends, she does not tell people about them. Fatma said, "But I cannot tell anybody that I have a local friend. It is not acceptable" (*Fatma's story*). She also explained how embarrassed her fiancé was when his brother saw them together. Laila kept a significant romance a secret from her family for an extended period of time. She noted society's judgmental view on this relationship saying, "Like I'm a girl, I'm not supposed to do this for a guy that I don't have any like kind of relation to him, he's not my fiancée, he's not my husband, he's not anything to me" (*Laila's story*).There may also be more examples but the women may have chosen not to reveal such intimate secrets to me, despite their apparent comfort with me. My position as a Western married teacher may have inhibited or encouraged the sharing of certain types of insights. The use of secrecy may be an effective strategy to avoid the type of negative societal reaction that may hinder individual attempts to gain agency and emancipation. We can see here that their private gender subjectivity constitutes a transgression of expected gender subjectivity when made public. The women may be successfully protecting themselves from the censorship applied by society when a person's position is taken to be "incorrect" (Davies,1990).

On the other hand, while group action can help the emancipatory agenda, it can also inhibit it when women cannot agree on mutual collective action. This disagreement should not, however, be seen as problematic since women with different opinions can push for emancipation in different ways and in different spheres. Worsley Pine (1996, p.6) elaborated on the notion saying,

> Rather than difference being viewed as a site of disunity that dismantles the movement, difference can be refigured as a potential area for political action. Difference can empower voices that are otherwise silenced and marginalized in homogeneous notions of 'woman'. Such recognition of the cultural specificity of woman produces heterogeneous voices, which in turn can produce disagreement. But such disagreement is not the dismantling of the movement. Viewed in this way, difference offers empowerment to women who can otherwise be smothered and disenfranchised by the idea of a universal sisterhood.

The reluctance of women to speak openly about their emancipatory actions does act to constrain emancipatory action for society in general because the discourse continues to operate in public while people resist it in secret. If more women could be encouraged to share the ways in which they are challenging society's discourses, women would realize that their ideas may be more prevalent and more acceptable than society indicates. In accordance with Gavey (1989), change begins at the level of discourse. Greater discussion of various behaviours could in turn lead to new understandings that result in less guilt and greater freedom to follow their desires. Worsley Pine (1996, p.7) stressed the benefit of group discussion noting that "Through critical engagement, feminists can question their own claims to knowledge, and investigate the complex ways in which these claims sustain oppressive practices."

However, keeping in mind society's values, women may be encouraged to pursue emancipatory actions that result in socially harmful relationships. This may also alienate women from men and families who prefer traditional values in relationships. The patriarchal structure of society has been maintained over generations and people strongly

resist change to this fundamental principle. With the prevalence of arranged marriages, thus may result in reduced marriage opportunities for women who challenge the norm. Considering the importance of marriage in shaping social position, the women, in turn, may find themselves in a disadvantageous social position. As Ali (2002) pointed out, emancipation must move forward at an acceptable pace in order to be sustained. Both men and women will need to modify their views to enable new positions for women. Lather (1984, p. 58) agreed that gradual change is needed and acceptable. Referring to the reconstruction of social discourse, she noted,

> Such a task cannot be hurried. This mandates that we transcend whatever horrors of gradualism we might have. As long as our work is both tied to long-term structural change and rooted empirically in concrete situations, our struggles at the ideological level are critical revolutionary work.

Women also need to gain a sense of their own values and need to conquer the fear that may be associated with making their own decisions and living with the consequences. Dowling (1981, p. 2) explained how fear inhibits many women and discourages them from fighting for greater independence:

> But freedom, we soon found out, frightens. It presents us with possibilities we may not feel equipped to deal with: promotions, responsibility, the chance to travel alone, without men to lead the way, the chance to make friends on our own. All kinds of opportunities opened up to women very fast, but with that freedom came new demands: that we grow up and stop hiding behind the patronage of someone we choose to think of as 'stronger'; that we begin making decisions based on our own values – not our husbands', or parents' or some teachers'. Freedom demands that we become authentic, true to ourselves. And this is where it gets difficult, suddenly; when we can no longer get by as a 'good wife', or a 'good daughter', or a 'good student'. Likely as not, when we begin the process of separating from our authority figures to stand on our own two feet, we discover that the values we thought were our own are not. They belong to others.

While poststructuralists acknowledge that a "true" or "authentic" self does not exist, the message contained in this quote is profound suggesting the need to develop ways for women to overcome these fears and talk through their newly forming values to redefine their sense of selves and gain agency. Educational forums, women's associations and support groups for women can also provide opportunities for women to articulate their fears and find new positions for themselves. As mentioned earlier, Ali (2002) noted that sharing experiences can lead to new forms of knowledge and increased emancipatory spaces.

Another important way that women are resisting social discourses is through persistence and perseverance in pursuing new ways of being. In many cases, women are given concessions reluctantly and barriers are put in place to discourage them from succeeding in placing themselves in alternative discourses. For example, a woman may be given a routine position in a company either with little substance or alternatively assigned a high position with little support or training in the expectation that she will quit and return to her 'traditional role' as a homemaker. While it might be tempting to assume that female graduates receive strong support from their families in pursuing their careers, this is not necessarily the case. Alia's mother encouraged her to forego her career to stay home with her children (*Alia's story*) and Nada's in-laws disapproved of her shift work (*Nada's story).* These examples highlight the need for a support group or a mentor system where women can discuss their problems, receive helpful support and formulate strategies to push for greater emancipation.

In my study, the husbands of the two married women strongly supported their career goals. For example, Alia reported, "He [her husband] said, 'Do whatever you want. If you are happy and you feel you can do it, just do it'" (*Alia's story*). In addition, Amna who is single felt that this support was critical as well. She indicated that she would not marry a man who didn't support her career plans saying, "I want my husband to be open-minded. So he has to accept this job. Because if he thinks that this is a bad job, I don't think that I will marry him" (*Amna's story*). Therefore, the importance of discussing and negotiating a commitment to work during marriage arrangements is another way for

women to create a support network for themselves. Hamed and Suleiman (2003, p. 15) also highlighted the importance of family support in overcoming negative social stigmas and innuendos saying, "encouragement of close family and husbands is essentially to counteract any negative social connotations". This again highlights the idea that re-positioning oneself within alternative discourses or modifying existing discourses cannot be accomplished in a vacuum. As Davies (1990) pointed out the evolution of discourse is a collective task involving all members of society.

Since Islam is central to all of the women's lives, it is important for the women to feel that Islamic principles support their career decisions. As Hashim (1999, p. 8) noted, "Religion often gives women a sense of identity and belonging, not to mention psychological support." However, on the other hand, Islamic teachings can also be interpreted in a way that discourages women from working outside the home. As Amna noted, "If you go to the religion, deeply in our religion, most females, they have to sit at home"(*Amna's story*). The important point in this regard is to encourage women to discuss religious interpretations and, wherever possible, embrace those interpretations that support their goals and provide them with agency. The use of religious interpretation to support emancipatory action helps women maintain an important part of their sense of self. Foley (2004, p.70) supported this view saying, "The commitment by Muslim women to reform of their religion means their faith cannot be derided as false consciousness, Islam is part of their identity and without it they are not complete." The concept of re-interpretation resonates with poststructuralist theory that proposes the absence of one static truth, in favor of an ever-evolving truth that we believe to exist (Gavey, 1989). Women like Fatma combine their religious knowledge with an analytical approach to reconcile their beliefs and actions with religious doctrine to create emancipatory space for themselves. Hashim (1999) highlighted that this is a strategy used by many Muslim women to respond to oppression.

6.2 For female job seekers

Women who are seeking work could benefit from many of the ideas presented above but again changes are needed at both the micro and macro levels. According to Tanmia, the

local employment agency for Emiratis, there are over 17,000 job seekers in their database, of which about 70% are women. This group of job seekers will continue to expand as an estimated 300,000 college graduates will enter the work force by 2006, the majority of which are women ('Female presence', 2004). Knowledge and awareness of social discourses and ways to challenge them will help young female job seekers to see greater opportunities for themselves and hopefully, enable them to convince their families to grant them the freedom to pursue their ambitions. As women take on diverse careers which challenge their gendered assumptions, families will also be able to see new possibilities and hopefully broaden their thinking as well. Career guidance will also be helpful to "help women to identify and develop skills that they may never realize existed. Women can become more self-confident and empowered, and achieve a sense of direction and purpose" (Al Marzouki, 2004, p. 1). Career information provided through career fairs and the promotion of positive role models could also help families to expand their vision and perhaps acceptance of a variety of possible career options for their daughters and wives.

From the research, an important point regarding government jobs also emerged. Many young women feel that favorable working conditions and generous salary and benefit packages that are offered by the government sector are key factors when choosing a job, which agrees with previous research findings (Fawzi, 2003). However, the working women in my study have realized that this comes at the cost of an unfulfilling career. Amna who has several siblings working in the government sector made the following comment about government employees; "They didn't do something important" (*Amna's story*). These insights need to be communicated to young job seekers to inspire them to consider the pros and cons of all their options and challenge the discourse that promotes highly-paid unsatisfying public sector employment over lower-paid private sector career paths.

At a macro level, societal norms need to adapt in order to encourage more women to take on challenging careers. As mentioned earlier, strong historical traditions of patriarchal structures where women carry the main burden for child care and household management

are difficult to resist and change will have to progress slowly (Francis, 1999; Hashim, 1999). However, each woman that succeeds in seeing herself in new ways that challenge gendered assumptions and each woman that experiences the sense of agency needed to make her own decisions that question society's expectations moves all women one step closer to greater emancipation.

6.3 For educators in general and the college in particular

What can the college do to push the emancipatory agenda? Many of the participants praised the role that the college played in their career development. It is noteworthy to point out that as I am a college employee, the participants may have been predisposed to express positive feelings. The participants felt that while the college gave them a solid vocational education, the development of 'soft' skills was also very important in their career success. Amna noted that the college helped her to be punctual, meet deadlines and gain self-confidence (*Amna's story*). Fatma felt that the college taught her to develop her personal skills and think critically about all issues including religious doctrine. She explained, "I really like our college – because the staff there, they didn't just taught the material – the books and the handouts – they also built up our personalities and our minds as well – to think in-depth and to see what is right and what is wrong" (*Fatma's story*). Alia noted that the college taught her to be professional even though she does not find her workplace to be similarly professional. She said, "See here in the college, everything was very professional and you educate us in a certain way" (*Alia's story*). These comments validate the role of the college in providing a comprehensive education for women that helps to prepare them with the skills needed for the work place.

Part of this education involves critical analysis of gendered social assumptions and the opportunity for students to discuss and challenge these issues in a supportive environment with Western teachers who come from societies with less restrictive social discourses. Students are increasingly made aware of taken-for-granted gender issues in Dubai and are encouraged to see alternative ways of being. The college is also beginning to provide Dubai students with more interactions with foreign students in a global environment allowing for exposure to a broad range of possibilities and meaningful discussions that

demonstrate how women in other countries may have successfully challenged society's expectations. Davies (1990, p. 503) noted that, " …it is the patterns of desire that we learn in that construction that will hold us there, despite any rational wish that this not be the case". Being taught by foreigners and being exposed to international television may allow for new patterns of desire, constructions and possibilities that were not considered before. Fatma commented on the transformative aspect of her college experience saying that the college "created" her (*Fatma's story*).

Educational institutions can also play a part in building self-confidence in women and developing independent attitudes. Hamed and Suleiman (2003, p. 14) emphasized the critical need for self confidence in Arab women saying,

> Without this psychological boost to self-esteem and belief in their own abilities to achieve, the drive and motivation for these women will be diminished and the mountain that they have to climb to be allowed to play a role in society will become higher.

Female students can be offered increasingly challenging opportunities to perform independently through project work, international travel opportunities, and work experiences that can demonstrate their self-sufficiency to themselves as well as to other members of the community. Amna noted that her self-confidence improved tremendously during her time at the college (*Amna's story*). Continued development of self-confident, independent career women along with public acknowledgment of these achievements can gradually lead to a rethinking of the social discourse that women must be dependent on men.

Providing international travel opportunities and mandating work experience for college students is another powerful way that the college is pushing society's boundaries of tolerance. Many families initially resist these initiatives but gradually begin to consider new ways of thinking through a process of discussion. While some families revert to traditional restrictions and conservative thinking after their daughter's graduation, many families have grown to accept unconventional career choices. For example, Amna's

family came to accept her employment at a hotel after observing her performance at an eight-week work placement in a hotel (*Amna's story*).

On the other hand, some suggestions were made for improvements to the college curriculum. Fatma discussed the need for the college to encourage the students to speak openly about negative issues in local society and in the workplace. Racial discrimination is an example of one issue that she feels should be discussed at greater length in the college. "Why they don't make like a session a week or a month teaching them how to be like… not to have fear, to say the truth". Fatma continued, "I think it will be really good for them to teach them how to speak about their problems honestly without having fear from the others, the other girls" (*Fatma's story*). Fatma feels that the reluctance of teachers and returning graduates to discuss negative issues leads students to unrealistic expectations of the workplace environment. This in turn, creates graduates of the college who are inadequately prepared to face these largely emotional challenges. Fatma's thoughts are echoed by Assilah al-Harthy (quoted in Chu and Radwan, 2004), a prominent female oil executive, who noted that Arab women need to be taught how to speak out, especially since they have not had a public voice for so long.

The college curriculum also does not currently include any religious studies; however, Hashim (1999, p. 12) expressed the usefulness of including the discussion of women's rights in an Islamic context. He felt that this would result in greater acceptance of the ideas by Muslim women asserting that,

> Incorporating the study of rights accorded to women in Islam into the awareness-raising and educational components of development interventions could be very effective in improving women's lives. Addressing these issues from within an Islamic perspective would prevent opportunistic accusations of cultural imperialism (intended to prevent feminism from entering an Islamic culture) and would be more likely to appeal to Muslim women.

Parents have a significant impact on the career choices of their daughters both formally and informally. At the college, parents must provide written approval for their daughter's

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choice of programme of study suggesting a formal mechanism of control. However, even if this practice was removed, it is likely that parents would still influence their daughter's choices. Research in an American setting, shows that parent's involvement in their children's education can promote more positive attitudes toward school (Flouri et al, 2002). This appears to hold true in my study as well where several of the participants stressed the importance of family support in their academic and career plans.

Considering the importance of family guidance, the provision of additional education to parents and society at large about careers for women may advance agency for female students. Parents need to be persuasively informed about the nature of various careers such as hospitality to illustrate how these careers can be suitable for women. Over some time, Amna experienced success in convincing her father that the hotel provided an acceptable work environment by showing him around the hotel where she completed her required work experience and explaining her duties to him. She explained her approach as follows, "I took him around the hotel. I showed him the departments, back offices. So he had a chat with the managers, with the staff. And when we were in the car, he said, 'Okay, no problem, you can work in the hotel after graduation'" (*Amna's story*). Students could be encouraged to invite their parents to their work places to gain a deeper appreciation for their work environment and begin to 'see' their daughters in new ways. As noted earlier, career information sessions, media coverage of women successfully pursing unconventional careers and attendance at Career Fairs could also help parents to broaden their views.

The provision of career guidance to both job-seekers and families is another way to promote greater agency for women. As noted by Al Marzouki, career guidance can help at a micro level by enabling women to "identify and develop skills that they may never realize existed" and at a more macro level where it can assist students to make better informed academic choices, help the labor market to better match job-seekers to employment opportunities and provide practical support to disadvantaged individuals to gain employment (Al Marzouki, 2004, p.2) and develop greater agency.

Fatma questioned the ideology of certain college policies. She feels that there is a conflict between enforcing strict rules that keep the female students segregated and protected from society and yet other rules which force students to work with men during their mandatory work placement positions. In this way, the college is perpetuating the dominant discourse restricting the freedom of women on the one hand and challenging this discourse by forcing women to work independently in a mixed gender environment on the other hand. Referring to the college administration, Fatma explained, "They know the society and they know the culture and they are pushing, I mean forcing, the students to work with the men and they have strict rules. What is this?" (*Fatma's story*). The solution for this situation is problematic. Relaxing college rules could potentially result in some conservative families refusing to allow their daughters to attend the college. While eliminating the pressure for students to complete a work placement in a mixed gender environment, does not allow for students to develop comfort in a typical work situation. Perhaps gradual movements on both sides may be possible where rules are renegotiated under certain conditions and some students are gradually eased into suitable work environments. Again, education for both students and families is critical to help students make the transition from seeing themselves as needing the protection of a primarily single gender educational institution to envisioning themselves performing confidently in a mixed gender work environment.

Nada noted the importance of attaining experience in dealing with men. Nada studied with boys in secondary school and she felt that this enabled her to deal effectively with men in the work place. However, she noted that women who studied exclusively at single gender institutions sometimes faced problems; "At work, since it's a mixed culture, some of the girls are being harassed by boys. Some of the girls, they won't know how to deal with such mentality" (*Nada's story*). This reinforces the idea that mixed gender education, at some stage, may provide the skills and mindset necessary for women to better cope in the work place.

Fatma suggested that more realistic role models are needed to speak to students at the college saying, "So I think, miss, for those new generation, it would be a good idea if you

bring, not a good model, they have to be honest, realistic and honest. They have to talk about the bad things as well"(*Fatma's story*). The college has traditionally selected its most successful graduates to return to the college to share their inspiring stories to foster higher dreams and expectations for students. While this is important, it appears that it is also necessary to invite graduates of all ability and success levels who are willing to speak openly about work place conditions and the strategies they have used to negotiate potentially restrictive social discourses. Role models that the students can relate to may help them to visualize themselves in new, more emancipatory ways. These interactions may also lead to the development of support networks whose benefits were discussed earlier.

Alia mentioned that she felt that her technical skills are deteriorating due to her mundane tasks and lack of professional development (*Alia's* story). This is negatively affecting her self-confidence and her willingness to pursue more challenging positions. The educational system could fill this void by offering a comprehensive programme of continuing education directed to meeting the career needs of working women. Further education also fosters improved self-esteem and provides the opportunity for women to support one another in their career aspirations. To this end, DWC has currently launched a programme to prepare graduates to qualify as Certified Management Accountants. While this is a good start, many more courses are needed. A concerted outreach effort will be necessary to encourage the graduates to participate. In addition, flexible timings may be needed to enable women to balance this training with the demands of their family and careers.

The above strategies relate to education for women, however, education is also important for Emirati men to reduce their objections to working women. As mentioned earlier, men need to rethink traditional social discourses and begin to accept that women may not be able to carry the entire burden of household chores and child rearing while holding a full-time job (Harik & Marston, 1996; Bibbo, 2002). These traditional expectations and traditional role definition need to be adapted to fit the new reality. Educational institutions could facilitate a dialogue where these important issues are openly explored

and considered. Lather (1984, p. 59) stresses the point that since society is composed of both men and women who are interconnected, greater female emancipation requires a new way of thinking by both genders;

> We must continue to work on how to connect with the unconverted, the resistant. This includes the men who very clearly see what they lose when their patriarchal privileges are done away with and who must struggle more than we to affirm what the dominant discourse has seemingly forever denigrated, the power of women to bring about a world in which we can all flourish.

6.4 For policy makers and employers

While steps toward emancipation for women in Dubai move forward gradually at a micro level, changes at a macro level are also progressing. Awareness of the need for women to participate in government is growing. In November 2004, Shaikha Lubna Al Qassimi, was appointed to the Federal Council as Minister of Economy and Planning, the first female minister in the history of the country (Salama, 2004). In addition, selected women are undertaking leadership training including public speaking, lobbying and the creation of political alliances to groom them for leadership positions. Currently, "women only make up 0.3 percent of top leadership positions in the UAE" and it is now recognized by women's groups in the UAE that this needs to change (Hadid, 2005). Similarly, awareness is growing across the Arab region of the need for women to redefine their position in society. Chu and Radwan (2004, p. 38) noted, "all over the Arab world, savvy, ambitious, effective women in all fields – politics, business, arts, sport – are helping to claim a larger space for women in the public sphere". The success of these pioneers will help individual women to see new opportunities for themselves and will help society to view women in new ways;

> As the vanguard knocks down the big hurdles, more and more Arab women – diverse in their ideology, their dreams, their dress – are stepping up, united in their belief that they can do more, and redefining what the Arab woman can become (Chu and Radwan, 2004, p. 39).

As mentioned earlier, economic independence can be a positive step toward greater emancipation since women have a greater chance to make their own decisions if they are not economically dependent on men (Kazemi, 2000). Therefore, promoting greater employment for women can lead to greater emancipation opportunities. Policy makers and employers who are interested in increasing employment for women, need to be aware of the main issues that inhibit work for women. From my research which supported the findings of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2003), it appears that some of the most crucial issues are the importance of career planning and training in the work place; the significance of recognition and career development at work; racial discrimination in the workplace; the need for ways to facilitate balancing work and family; and cultural sensitivity in the workplace. Policy makers can enact legislation to cover some of these aspects such as racial discrimination, but ultimately employers must take responsibility for creating a supportive environment if they are serious about employing and retaining Emirati women. In addition, finding ways to better equip women to cope with these job stresses through education and training as discussed earlier could also be useful in encouraging job placement and retention.

As with any employees, Emirati graduates need to be placed in appropriate departments that match their area of interest and provided with appropriate training. Fatma explained that this was the problem at the bank where she worked and in her opinion, the problem stemmed from the bank's focus on meeting the emiratization quota imposed by the government. Fatma said, "They [the bank] are not successful to put the right person in the right place. They are just working like, you know, fill in the gaps with anybody" (*Fatma's story*). Alia noted the dissatisfaction that she feels due to inadequate work and unprofessional work processes. She complained, "But there, I don't feel like I'm learning or I'm doing a real job" (*Alia's story*). Although Alia has not resigned from this position, she is unhappy and does not feel that she is living up to her potential. Employers need to appreciate the critical need for excellent recruitment, training and development. A recent study conducted by Tanmia, the centre for labour market research and information in Dubai, confirmed the ineffectiveness of many human resource departments in Dubai to recruit and develop their national employees. The report also proposed that this was the

reason for the persistently low level of national employees in the insurance sector (Schiphorst, 2004).

In order to increase retention, employers must realize that employees want to be praised for good work. This was particularly true for the women in my study. Nada was willing to resign from a satisfying career because her managers did not appreciate her work. Nada provided the following advice, "I mean, simple words won't cost them much but it would really affect your perception and the way you work and how you deal with others in that society" (*Nada's story*). Laila also noted the importance of recognition as a motivating factor for her. Laila commented, "You know, like your boss say, 'Good job! Well done! This is excellent job!' I feel myself so happy, I don't know, I feel like I did something nice and people appreciate what I did" (*Laila's story*). Achieving a sense of satisfaction at work is a way for women to position themselves in an alternative discourse that provides them with a sense of power. For some women who feel relatively powerless in a male-dominated family and social setting, this power may develop their sense of agency.

Another aspect relating to the issues of finding suitable positions for women at work and acknowledging their achievements is the use of wasta, or family influence, in gaining employment. While this practice is decreasing in prevalence, it still has an impact in the job market (Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1993). The fact that some people are given desirable positions based on wasta while others are not is very disheartening for job seekers and employees searching for advancement. Fatma noted with bitterness, "I never had the chance to work there. Some people because they have good wasta so they can have that. But a person like me, who doesn't have a wasta, should lose the job and should suffer in the job, a lot and at the end; I cannot fight" (*Fatma's story*).

The effectiveness of wasta discourages people from working hard for promotion and career development although Alia feels that wasta will become less valuable as the competitive economy continues to develop. She said, "In our country up to this moment, wasta is working. But I think, 5 years, in the next 5 years, no. No wasta, no family name,

nothing, only your own work because that's what Sheikh Mohamed wants"(*Alia's story*). The reduction or elimination of wasta will help all people to see the value of hard work and education for career success and will help the prospects and outlook of talented individuals. It will also help to develop women's sense of agency since their career advancement will be based on factors that they can control, as opposed to wasta which is beyond their control.

Racial discrimination at work is a real concern for local women. All of the women noted differential treatment at work based on race. In Fatma's case, the situation contributed to her resignation and subsequent feelings of hatred toward an ethnic group. Referring to Indians, Fatma said, "Because I told him that I hate them" (*Fatma's story*). She went on to explain that the root of her anger at Indians related to the way they treated her at work saying, "You know, they don't want us to take their position one day" (*Fatma's story*).

In some cases, the women were able to overcome racial issues through a combination of management support and personal interaction. Amna noted how her manager was able to initiate an attitude change in the employees noting, "So we had a training, I think, so he discussed this topic with them. So he said, 'Don't treat her like she's a local, treat her as if she is one of the staff, guest service officer in the reception" (*Amna's story*). Laila also noted that she was able to make friends with employees who were initially hostile through developing friendships with the employees and having an empathetic approach. She explained the employee's initial feelings, saying, "He was like working alone and then suddenly a local will work for you so he thought that his job was threatened because maybe they will exchange, they will like replace me instead of him"(*Laila's story*). However, she now counts him as one of her friends (*Laila's story*). The positive experiences of these women can act as powerful examples of the effectiveness of team building and personal interactions in creating a supportive multi-cultural atmosphere. Personal discussions may help to create awareness and initiate the opportunity to confront prevailing destructive discourses. This in turn could lead to a deeper understanding and cooperation among individuals.

Another dominant discourse that was unmistakable in my study was that women were fully responsible for child care, which supports published research (Hijab, 1988; Sha'aban, 1996). The women who were married with children had strong support at home from their extended family facilitating their careers. In both cases, grandparents were available to help with child care. Nonetheless, the importance of some flexibility in working hours is essential to help women cope with this important role. Corporate child care centers could also be beneficial in helping women balance their work and child care responsibilities. Over the longer term, women may be able to stimulate new ways of thinking that might problematize the absent father and the view of child care as women's work, thus encouraging fathers to play a greater role in child care arrangements and alleviating the burden on working women.

It is important for employers to be sensitive to the local culture when designing work for Emirati employees. For example, Muslims are not permitted to eat pork or consume alcohol so many Muslims prefer not to deal with these products in any way. Amna explained how she appreciates the cultural sensitivity of her employer saying, "They have to respect our culture. This is very important. Because now the hotels are respecting us, respecting our culture, our traditions, everything. Even I'm working in marketing, I don't have to touch the food [which would include pork products]. I don't touch these things. They don't ask me to do anything related to these things. For example, the entertainment centre, X [a night club], I don't handle this. My colleague handles this. They respect us" (*Amna's story*). Similarly, mandatory uniforms should respect cultural values of modesty. Amna is permitted to wear her traditional abbaya and shaila to work although the non-national employees wear uniforms with short skirts. Employers need to establish a dialogue with their employees to be aware of cultural issues and should maintain a flexible and open attitude to resolve cultural differences. While the breakdown of some cultural discourses may be advantageous, such as those restricting the rights of women, it is unrealistic for foreign employers to think that all discourses should be challenged. Religious discourses, in particular, are resistant to change and employers may be required to make compromises.

6.5 For the research community

One of the aims of this research was to assess the applicability of the published research to the current situation in Dubai. The research does appear to be applicable where most of the discourses that were described by the participants are either alluded to or fully explained in the published literature such as the importance of family and religion in society. However, overt attempts to resist the most dominant discourses were rarely mentioned in the published research. For example, I did not find research discussing romantic relationships outside marriage or racial discrimination at work. The lack of research in these areas is not surprising considering the admitted reluctance of Arabs to speak negatively about their society (*Fatma's story*). However, some improvements are being made in this area with the local newspaper starting to publish more balanced investigative articles relating to workplace issues (Al Nowais, Feb 9, 2004; Fawzi, 2003;Talwar, 2002). In addition, the government employment agency, Tanmia, is researching and publishing studies highlighting some workplace issues (Schiphorst, 2004) although these reports are not very widely publicized. Therefore, one of the benefits of this research is the insight that it has given to the ways that a select group of women have negotiated the discourses.

Another anticipated implication of this research is the spread of knowledge about the experiences of a select group of Arabic Islamic women. The stories and the analyses that I have presented here may help to increase the understanding of an often misunderstood cultural group. This may in turn lead to improved multicultural relationships and new ways of seeing Arabic women.

The research focused on a group of well-educated working women in Dubai. It is quite likely that the issues and discourses that would be identified by less educated and/or non-working women may be quite different. Also women from less urban geographic areas may have dramatically varied experiences. Therefore, additional research could be conducted with women with different profiles to explore and compare their insights.

Many of the social discourses that were discussed by the participants involve men's attitudes and expectations. It would be very informative to interview a group of men, perhaps the men in these women's lives, in a similar manner and compare their views to those of the women. I would be especially interested to see if the men are also secretly challenging the discourses or if the perceptions that the women hold about the men are supported by the men's thoughts.

This research project has identified cultural discourses that a group of DWC graduates engage with to articulate their sense of selves. The research has generated a detailed description of the women's personal experiences and insights and provided a glimpse into their cultural and social environment. Suggestions have been advanced that may serve to further the emancipatory agenda by exploring ways for women to increase their freedom of choice and career success. Greater economic success may in turn lead to greater empowerment. Cultural sensitivity and appropriateness are critical to the success of any emancipatory movement; therefore, the impetus must come from the Emirati women themselves. As a Western educator located in Dubai, I see my role as a provider of skills, a cheerleader, and a supporter for emancipation and freedom of choice.

However, I am also strongly aware that I must be patient and encourage Emirati women to proceed at a pace and in a manner that will not divorce them from their religious ideals, their community spirit and their family support that remain central to their identity. I agree with Francis (2002) who noted that while people do take up different subject positions, they also maintain consistency in some of their beliefs and opinions. She said, "The challenge seems to this author to be to devise a new theoretical position which can incorporate and explain both consistency and diversity in the construction of the self" (2002, p.48). I feel that this is the same challenge facing the women of Dubai; they need to find ways to work "within and against" their community and culture while struggling to negotiate social discourses that restrict their choices to create emanciapatory spaces for themselves.

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Appendix A: Glossary

Abbaya = long black cloak worn by UAE national women

Alhamdulilah = 'thanks be to God' in Arabic

Baba = father

Bisht = Arabic robe usually made of camel hair, showing high status

Dirhams = the currency of the UAE

Emirati(s) = a citizen of the UAE, also referred to as locals or nationals

Emiratize or emiratization = hiring of Emirati people

Haram = inappropriate or not allowed for religious reasons

Helas = finished

Hijab = as a verb, the act of covering oneself or as a noun, the veil itself

Inshallah = God willing

Kandoora = Arabic robe-style dress

Majlis = meeting room

Mashallah = may God bless him or her

Ramadan = a 30-day period where Muslims fast during daylight hours

Shaila = hair covering worn by UAE national women

Sheikh = title for a male member of the royal family or a very prominent man

Sheikha = title for a female member of the royal family or a very important woman

Sheikh Khalifa = son of Sheikh Zayed, new ruler of the UAE

Sheikh Maktoum = late ruler of Dubai (deceased)

Sheikh Mohamed al Maktoum = current ruler of Dubai and a renowned business leader in
       Dubai and the brother of Sheikh Maktoum

Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed = Sheikh Zayed's son

Sheikh Zayed = the ruler of the UAE who died on Nov 2, 2000

Wasta = influence, usually relating to family status or connections

Yanni = 'you know' in Arabic

Appendix B: List of abbreviations

AICE	The American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise
DDIA	Dubai Development and Investment Authority
DIFC	Dubai International Financial Centre
DWC	Dubai Women's College
ECSSR	Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research
GDP	Gross domestic product
HCT	Higher Colleges of Technology
MOIC	Ministry of Information and Culture
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme