

Emirati Women: Conceptions of Education and Employment

by

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## ABSTRACT

Using a combined quantitative, quantitative approach this study explores the incongruence between educational attainment and labor force participation for Emirati women by posing several questions that revolve around the issue of their motivations and aspirations with regard to higher education and labor force participation. In interpreting the survey and interview responses, a conceptual framework that interweaved constructs taken from three different bodies of research was used. The three areas of research are: the expectations of women in higher education, family in the Arab world, and the importance of social networks in employment.

The findings of the study showed that Emirati women have high educational and occupational aspirations but they are also ambiguous about the role of women in Emirati society. This ambiguity arose from the conflict between what the young women in the study believed they ought to achieve as a result of their education and what they perceived their society expected of them as daughters, wives and mothers. The link between education and employment for Emirati women was also found to be influenced by the close nature of the social networks to which Emirati women belong. Emirati's women's use of family or strong ties deprives them of information from distant parts of the social system and places them at in a disadvantaged position in the labor market.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Background

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is situated along the southeastern tip of the Arabian Peninsula in the Arabian Gulf region. It was formerly known as the Trucial States, but after the British left the region in 1970, a federation was formed between the states and in 1971 the UAE was established as a sovereign nation. It comprises the seven states of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Qaiwain, Ras al Khaimah and Fujairah. The UAE is the world's fifth largest oil producer and has nearly 10% of the world's proven oil reserves and the world's fifth-largest natural gas reserves. The bulk of the federal budget comes from Abu Dhabi and, to a lesser extent Dubai, and the remainder of the states are dependent upon these two states in financing the federal infrastructure.

The country has grown at an extremely rapid pace since its foundation. The population increased from 180,000 in 1970 to about 2.4 million in 2001. This increase has been largely due the influx of foreign workers as a result of the oil boom. Foreign workers and their families constituted 80% of the population in 1995. The numerical domination of foreign workers in the UAE, as a result of the oil boom and the subsequent waves of extensive international labor migration, has led to a population imbalance. In 1995, nationals constituted only 9.1% of the workforce and constituted less than twenty percent of the population as a whole (Ministry of Planning, 1999).

The educational system is split into three stages, six years of primary education, three years of middle school and three years of high school. Public higher education is open to nationals only and is provided in two universities and eleven technical/vocational colleges that provide certificates, diplomas and bachelors degrees. Public elementary through high school education is provided in gender segregated schools by teachers and staff of the same gender as students. In higher education, segregation is maintained in the student population but not in staffing. That is, public higher education institutions employ both male and female faculty in both men and women's colleges and universities.

Numerous private institutions exist in the UAE that cater to the large expatriate population that is not permitted to access public universities. The Ministry of Education and Scientific Research is the federal authority that regulates both private and public education. The majority of private institutions are for profit franchises of American, Canadian, British and now increasingly Australian higher education institutions. Private higher education institutions are becoming increasingly popular among young Emirati males whom now have difficulty obtaining student visas into the United States and who wish to obtain an American education. Yet, Emirati women are underrepresented in co-educational private institutions due to nature of the culture that discourages mixes of the sexes.

Leaders of the UAE consider education as a key element in the social and economic development of the country and therefore free accessible education (K through 16) is

provided to all its citizens. This commitment has led to a dramatic rise in the literacy rate and increasing educational attainments. In 1987, women constituted only 47% of high school graduates but this percentage rose to 62% in 1996. A similar increase from 38% in 1977 to 79% in 1997 was noted in women enrolled in higher education institutions compared to men (Ministry of Planning, 1999). Studies done in the Middle East have shown that the UAE has the highest student gender ratio in post secondary education in the region where it stood at 6.08 women for each man in 1995 compared to .94 women in Jordan, .80 in Tunisia, .64 in Egypt, 1.35 in Kuwait and 1.87 women to every man in Bahrain (Mazawi, 1999). Tables 1.1 and 1.2 show the dramatic increase in the number of women that finish high school and enroll in higher education institutions. No data is available on the numbers of women that graduate from higher education institutions in the UAE, but in my experience as an administrator at a Technical College approximately seventy five percent of students graduate.

**Table 1.1: Numbers of Emirati's that graduated from high school 1988/96**

	80/81	85/86	90/91	91/92	92/93	93/94	94/95	95/96
Female	611	1750	2773	3297	4005	4009	4953	5216
	(47%)	(53%)	(61%)	(62%)	(63%)	(63%)	(63%)	(62%)
Male	685	1547	1755	1996	2359	2340	2975	3221
Total	1296	3297	4528	5293	6364	6349	7928	8437

Figures in brackets refer to percentage of women in total

Reproduced from TANMIA report June 2001- Ministry of Education and Youth

**Table 1.2: Numbers of Emirati's enrolled in higher education institutions 1993/97**

	93/94	94/95	95/96	96/97
Female	11441	13641	16641	18736
	(65%)	(66%)	(67%)	(66%)
Male	6103	6898	8225	9654
Total	17544	20539	24866	28390

Reproduced from TANMIA report June 2001- Ministry of Education and Youth

Although no data are available on the graduation rates of Emirati women, it is clear from the enrollment data that unlike their mothers' women in the UAE now have the potential to break the traditional boundaries imposed upon them by their culture, which compels them to achieve social status solely through the traditional roles of marriage and motherhood.

The vast majority of young women in higher education today are first generation college students and it is very likely that their mothers are less educated than their fathers because Emirati men had access to education and diverse employment opportunities well before their female counterparts. The first school for men was established in early 1950's while women's schools opened their doors approximately a decade later. Despite their late start by 1995, 47% of the Emirati women in the labor force had completed a university degree or some level of post secondary education compared to only 12% of Emirati men (Abdelkarim, 2001). Although no published literature is available on the

reasons for the lower achievement rates of men, guaranteed employment in the defense and law enforcement sectors of society has been cited as the prime reason in the popular press. In the past a military career offered decent pay and the ability to progress in terms of rank without any set requirement for a minimum educational level, thus attracting a great number of young men. Recent changes in military and other law enforcement requirements which provide higher ranks and monetary compensation to individuals with higher education along with limits on promotions, salaries and benefits for those that lack educational qualifications are likely to have an impact on educational enrollments of Emirati men.

Despite their apparent success in the educational arena, the percentage of women in the labor workforce remains low, increasing from 9.6 % in 1985 to 11.7 % in 1995, with the majority of women employed in the education sector as teachers or in clerical work (Abelkarim, 2001). The unemployment rate of Emirati women was at 8.3% in 1995, the highest among all groups in the UAE labor market, compared to 6% for Emirati men, 1.7% for non- Emirati women and 1.3% for non-Emirati men (Baud & Mahgoub, 2001).

The bleak picture of women and employment is not unique to the UAE but is a major issue in the Middle East and North African region (MENA), which has the lowest female labor participation rates in the world. A report published by the World Bank in February 2004- Gender and Development in the Middle East and North Africa: Women in the Public Sphere- stated that for the past decade, MENA governments have spent an

average of 5.3 percent of the GDP on education – the highest in the world. This huge investment in education has closed the gender gap with women outnumbering men in higher education institutions in several countries and has resulted in the largest percentage of increase in employment in the last decade. Despite this increase, the female labor force participation in the year 2000 was at 32 percent - the lowest in the world (see table 1.3). Various sociocultural, economic and religious reasons that will be discussed in detail in the following chapter have been blamed for the region's low rate.

**Table 1.3 Regional Working Population Age 15-64 and Female Labor Participation**

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	% change between 1990 & 2000
<b>East Asia</b>							
% female working age population	48.4	48.6	48.5	48.3	48.4	48.6	0.2
Female labor participation rate	65.7	66.8	68.5	71.7	76.3	77.3	1.0
<b>Latin America</b>							
% female working age population	50.0	50.1	50.2	50.3	50.6	50.7	0.1
Female labor participation rate	22.3	23.6	26.7	33.3	41.4	45.2	3.8
<b>Middle East &amp; North Africa</b>							
% female working age population	49.5	49.6	49.8	49.1	48.5	48.8	0.3
Female labor participation rate	21.2	21.9	22.8	24.6	26.3	32.3	6.0
<b>South Asia</b>							
% female working age population	47.4	48.0	48.2	48.1	48.1	48.2	0.2
Female labor participation rate	51.2	50.3	49.1	48.0	43.9	46.5	2.6
<b>Southeast Asia</b>							
% female working age population	49.9	50.1	50.2	50.2	50.1	50.1	-0.1
Female labor participation rate	52.0	51.7	53.8	57.7	61.5	63.9	2.4
<b>Sub Sahara Africa</b>							
% female working age population	51.1	51.0	50.9	50.7	50.6	50.3	-0.2
Female labor participation rate	66.6	65.5	64.6	63.3	62.5	62.5	0.0

Source: ILO 1996 and UN Population Prospects 2002.

The reason for this disparity in the UAE has not been studied but it has been explained in various ways in the popular press. Some have argued that this is due to prevalent custom and traditional values, which do not value female employment, or that economic prosperity also means that employment is a matter of choice, rather than of necessity. Others argue that the educational qualifications obtained by many of the women are not always those most in demand in the job market because of the large numbers of women in the humanities, social sciences and education fields (Jarardhan, 2001). No concrete evidence is currently available to support these notions, but they will be carefully explored in this study.

This inquiry aims to explore the incongruence between educational attainment and labor force participation by posing several questions that revolve around the issue of the motivations and aspirations of Emirati women with regard to higher education and labor force participation. The questions posed are as follows:

- a) Why do Emirati women pursue higher education?
- b) What do they intend to do with their degrees?
- c) What are their perceptions of how their families and society view their career choice and future goals?
- d) What factors do they identify as important for goal achievement? And what factors do they perceive as obstacles to goal achievement?
- e) What kind of work environments do they prefer to work in?

Another set of questions revolve around the issue of social networks and the role of these networks in the educational attainments and labor force participation of Emirati women

- a) What kinds of social networks do Emirati women belong to?
- b) How influential are these networks in educational and employment decision making?
- c) Whom do they approach for assistance in securing employment?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The rationale of this study is to present and bring to life the driving forces behind the discrepancy between education and employment for Emirati women. This study aims to fill the existing gap in the literature in relation to the meaning of higher education for Emirati women. The study was designed with several purposes in mind. The first is to explore the educational and career expectations of Emirati women using their own voices so that personal perspectives on why they enroll in higher education institutions and what they hope to attain as a result of their education are identified. Second, the study aims to explore and develop an understanding of perceived obstacles and enablers for Emirati women's goal achievement, including work environments that they consider ideal. And the third goal is to examine the role of social networks in relation to educational and employment decision making and access to employment. This research is important because despite the near universal access for women to post-secondary education, they continue to have limited presence in the labor market. Information generated from this study in will be helpful to policy makers in the UAE and the Gulf region that are working

on strategies to reduce dependency on expatriate workers and to increase national labor workforces.

### **Theoretical Framework**

I do not draw on a single framework or theoretical perspective to examine the career and occupational expectations of Emirati women. In the United States, various combinations of race, class and gender perspectives are generally used. However, these perspectives cannot be easily applied to the UAE because of cultural and demographic differences among Emirati and US populations. As a result this study will draw on and interweave constructs taken from three different bodies of research: research on the expectations of women in higher education, research on the family in the Arab world, and research done on the importance of social networks in employment. The following constructs, taken from literature, will be used in the study's conceptual framework: the influence of social reproduction on the lives of young college women (Holland & Eisenhart, 1990), the changing role of family in Arab society (Barakat, 1985; Sharabi, 1988) and the strength of weak ties in increasing access to employment and career mobility (Granovetter, 1973).

### **Social Reproduction Theory**

Since its inception, social reproduction has been a major theme in the sociology of education. In recent years, ideas about social reproduction have gone beyond the basic notion that the process of schooling in capitalist societies primarily serves the interests of

the ruling class. Since the mid 1980's, there has been a shift in the educational literature in the centrality of class as the primary basis for social reproduction, as other context sensitive theories have emerged. These theories address a wider range of interconnected social issues including race, class, gender, disability, sexuality and ability (Gewirtz & Cribb, 2003).

Many feminist researchers have studied the impact of reproduction in terms of gender inequalities; blaming schools for determining the fate of women in the labor force through the feminization of professions and the lower economic returns women receive from their education. I am particularly drawn to the construct of romance presented in Holland and Eisenhart's book *Educated in Romance*, which illustrates the importance of peers in perpetuating existing gender roles and norms because it provides a useful and appropriate framework from which the expectations of young Emirati women with regards to education, marriage and work can be addressed.

In this study, the authors trace the lives of twenty-three women from 1979 to 1987, beginning with their entry into two Southern universities, one historically black and the other white. They expose a pervasive "culture of romance" on campus, which is defined as a high-pressure peer system that propels women into a world where their attractiveness to men counts most and in which most females are more interested in attracting males, or just getting by than they are in mastering knowledge or skills. In their longitudinal study,

the authors found three main interpretations for the reasons why the young women in their study were pursuing higher education or “school work” as it was called in the study.

The first motivation was work for “Getting Over” which was the interpretation of most of the Black students in the study. Students with this outlook viewed going to college and getting through as important because it could lead to a good job. The work done in college had no significance in and of itself. Work was merely seen as a set of activities that need to be completed in order to obtain a college degree. These young women came into higher education with the “getting over” view, which they carried through, from high school. This sense of marginalization was due to their insight into the nature of the system in which they lived. Like the “lads” in Willis’ *Learning to Labor* (1977), which illustrated how the rebellion of poor and working class kids against school authority prepared them for working class jobs, these young women did not see the link between college performance and life after college and therefore discredited school. The authors also used Ogbu’s cultural ecological theory to explain the existence of this phenomenon. This theory states that Black Americans accurately perceive that success in school will not enable them to overcome the obstacles blocking their access to societal rewards. The authors use this theory to explain why many of the young women with the “getting over” interpretation of schooling dropped out of school or took jobs that fall far below their original aspirations.

The second interpretation identified by Holland and Eisenhart was work in exchange for “Doing Well”. Students with this interpretation were mainly White and viewed college as a way of getting recognition for their natural abilities and skills. Education was also viewed as important to their parents and their performance in school was linked to wanting to please them. These young women believed in their abilities due to past successes and assumed that college should be as easy as high school. They were disappointed when their perceptions of their natural abilities were challenged in college, which led them to change their majors to others that they considered easier in an attempt to prove themselves. They also become more engrossed in the culture of romance as they began to lose confidence in their academic abilities.

The third and final group was ascribed to by young women from both racial groups (three White and two Black women). This group viewed college as an environment in which skills could be acquired from experts. They focused on skill acquisition and constantly worked to improve themselves. Although they too were drawn into the culture of romance, they were not completely consumed by it and some actively resisted this culture.

At the end of their period of study the women in the first two groups, work for “getting over” and work for “doing well”, had invested very little of themselves in their identities as learners in school, and had what the authors called “marginalized worker identities”. Although unlike the “getting over” group who came into higher education

with little belief that education would make a major difference in their lives, the “doing well” group had become discouraged and distracted during their years in college and began to reconsider their commitment to their goals. In a way, they developed an understanding similar to that of the women in the “getting over” group. That is, they began to doubt that they would be able to achieve what they intended to achieve. Only the women in the “learning from experts” group who saw a relationship between their education and future occupations and who did not buy into the culture of romance went on to live up to their potential in the workplace.

For the purpose of this study, it is posited that due to differences in the social and cultural context between Emirati women and the women in Holland and Eisenhart’s study, Emirati women may not be occupied with the western concept of romance as in dating or living with a boyfriend. However, due to the strict segregation of the sexes, marriage may emerge as the substitute for romance among young Emirati women. Marriage is very important in the Middle East. It is often seen as the foundation for the continuance of the family unit and the single most important event in the lives of both men and women. Adulthood, autonomy and self realization as achieved as a result of marriage (Hoodfar, 1997).

It can also be hypothesized that due to the closed nature of their environments Emirati women form close relationships with peers in the educational settings. These peers like those in the two southern universities studied by Holland & Eisenhart could be using the

construct of vulnerability imposed on them by their culture to construct similar notions of the inevitability of marriage, perhaps with views of the husband as protector and provider, thus reducing the need to aspire to prestigious careers.

### **Family in the Arab world: Democratization or Neopatriarchy**

Despite the importance of family in the reproduction of gender norms, peer relationships emerge as the single most important arena where this culture of romance is reproduced in Holland and Eisenhart's study. However, the importance of family as the basic unit in traditional and contemporary Arab society cannot be ignored in any analysis that involves gender (Joseph, 1999).

The Arab family has been undergoing significant changes in response to globalization and the formidable challenges that it has faced and continues to face in the twenty-first century. These changes have been discussed and theorized by different Arab researchers. Some of these scholars have used western critiques of Arab culture and others developed their writings as a result of intense identification with the Arab family. The constructs that are used in this study present two conflicting sides to the issue of patriarchy and change within the family unit in the Arab world. Barakat (1985) presents change within the structure of the Arab family as positive in its move towards a democratization of family relations. Sharabi (1988) is less optimistic about these changes and states that the Arab world is in a state of neopatriarchy in which nothing has really changed in terms of gender relations. I am drawn to Barakat's more optimistic model as a member of an Arab

society and as a witness to the changes that it has undergone. However, I was compelled to use both constructs to analyze study findings because they represent an internal critique of Arab society and are appropriate for this context because they may help to explain the influence of family on the educational and career expectations of Emirati women.

The typical or ideal type Arab may be described as the socioeconomic unit of production at the center of Arab life. It is patriarchal, pyramidally hierarchical with respect to age and gender and increasingly nuclear in many parts of the Arab world. However, these characteristics are changing as a result of Western influence, the challenges of decolonization, education and oil. It is a socioeconomic unit in the sense that all its members cooperate to secure its livelihood and improve its standing within the community. It was only recently that states began to provide services such as education, welfare and defense for its citizens. Prior to these provisions, the family undertook those responsibilities. The family constitutes the primary social institution whereby individuals inherit their religion, social class and cultural identities. The success or failure of an individual member becomes that of the family as whole and every member is held responsible for the acts of every other member. Any inappropriate act on the part of a young woman reflects on her father, brother and her family as a whole (Barakat, 1985).

The Arab family is also said to be patriarchal. The term patriarchy refers to a specific kind of socio-political structure, with a specific value system, forms of discourse and practice and which is based on a distinct mode of economic organization (Sharabi, 1988). In the traditional Arab family, the father held responsibility and authority even though it was the mother that exercised power over the children and who was in charge of raising them. This hold of authority by the father was traditionally maintained because of his role as provider. Barakat (1985) states that changes in the socioeconomic structure of the traditional family through the employment of women, the movement from rural to urban areas and subsequent education and employment of children has led to the democratization of this relationship. Sharabi's (1988) theory of neopatriarchy refutes the notion of democratization and states that the changes presented above have not changed the structure of the Arab family and that Arab society is neither modern nor traditional but neopatriarchal. The concept of neopatriarchy states that the conditions of patriarchy in Arab society have not been displaced or comprehensively modernized. That is, its basic pyramidal structure that places women and children at the bottom of the hierarchy has not been dismantled. Instead, it has been reinforced and sustained in distorted, somewhat modernized forms as a result of the rise in fundamentalism, wars and the widening gap between the rich and the poor. For Sharabi, the concept refers both to macrostructures such the society, state and the economy and microstructures namely the family or the individual. Neopatriarchy has also been explained as the product of the encounter between modernity and tradition or a form of modern patriarchy. Regardless of

the outward modern forms of the neopatriarchal family, society or state, the internal structures remain rooted in patriarchal values (Moghadem, 2004)

### **Social Network Theory**

Social network theory is a branch of social science that applies to a wide range of human organizations, from small groups of people to entire nations. The term network refers to a set of objects, or nodes, and a mapping or description of the relationship between the objects. In the case of social networks, the objects refer to people or groups of people. For example, a network might consist of a person and a mapping from that person to each of his or her friends and relatives. These mappings can be directional or bi-directional. An example of a directional mapping would be if person A liked person B, but person B did not like person A. This is a directional mapping from person A to person B. An example of a bi-directional mapping would be if person A and person B both liked each other (Kilduff & Tsai, 2003).

One of the reasons social network theory is studied is that by understanding the mappings connecting one individual to others, one can evaluate the social capital of that individual. The term social capital refers to the network position of the object or node and consists of the ability to draw on the resources contained by members of the network. Basically, the more mappings a person has in the social network and the more mappings these people have, the more knowledge, influence, and power the original person will control. Social capital can have a substantial influence on a person's life, affecting such aspects as job searches and potential for promotions (Lincoln, 1982).

In his theory “The strength of weak ties”, Granovetter (1983) asserts that our acquaintances (weak ties) are less likely to be socially involved with one another than are our close friends (strong ties). Therefore, individuals with a few weak ties will be deprived of information from distant parts of the social system and will receive news and views only through their close friends and kin. Thus placing them in a disadvantaged position in the labor market compared people with many weak ties. In his first article *The Strength of Weak Ties* (1973), Granovetter states that

“ The overall strength of this argument can be seen by considering the situation of some arbitrarily selected individual- call him Ego. Ego will have a collection of close friends, most of whom are in touch with one another-a densely knit clump of social structure. Moreover, Ego will have a collection of acquaintances, few of whom know one another. Each of these acquaintances, however, is likely to have close friends in his own right and therefore to be enmeshed in a closely-knit clump of social structure, but one different from Ego’s. The weak tie between Ego and his acquaintance therefore becomes not merely a trivial acquaintance tie but rather a crucial bridge between the densely knit clumps of close friends. To the extent that the assertion of the previous paragraph is correct, these clumps would not, in fact, be connected to one another at all were it not for the existence of weak ties” (p 1363).

Research studies done using the concept of tie strength showed that some individuals, particularly those with less power by virtue of their social class, low socioeconomic level or low educational level, used “strong ties” to obtain jobs because they lacked “weak ties”. Although these ties did produce employment opportunities, these opportunities were less likely to produce social mobility and reduce social distance because “strong ties” are less likely to produce connections with high status individuals whom can improve occupational status (Davern, 1999).

Studies done on the reliance of immigrant workers on social ties have shown that immigrant job seekers use ethnic ties to secure employment and to enhance their social mobility within the host community. The importance of ethnic ties in the development of ethnic enterprises is widely documented. Research shows that competitive advantages secured by reliance on social solidarity in the ethnic community enable immigrant entrepreneurs to dominate specialized niches and sometimes even large sectors within the host community (Light & Karageorgis, 1994; Chua, 2003). In a study of Asian immigrants in Los Angeles, Sanders et al (2002) confirmed the findings of other researchers which found that ethnic ties contribute to the employment of immigrants in metropolitan labor markets through the use of ethnic contacts that work in the larger social system and who have a large base of ethnic and non-ethnic ties.

For women, social networks are especially important to consider because the social roles of women limit their network composition, thus causing them to gain fewer network benefits than men (Crowell, 2003). Studies done in the United States have found that the social networks of women are partially defined by their roles and degree to which they have access to the labor market. Labor force participation is a major factor which provides social integration outside the home and neighborhood. (Thoits, 1986; Duck, 1990). Granovetter (1992) posits that women lack substantial contacts with people who can make needed referrals or contacts. That is, the contacts often used by women lack the ability to mediate the passage of important information. He argues that weak ties can act as a bridge that can link women and other subgroups to unique resources.

It can therefore be hypothesized that Emirati men have a greater potential for joining wider networks of other Emirati and non- Emirati men, thus enabling them to have greater access to both employment and improved occupational status. Likewise, Non-Emirati women and men belong to ethnic networks that can influence their employment opportunities. It is the Emirati woman that is disadvantaged by virtue of the restrictions placed upon her movements which confines her to “strong network ties” in circles that do not extend beyond the immediate family unit.

### **Summary**

Although Emirati women constitute the majority of all college graduates in the UAE, they continue to be underrepresented in the work force. No published study has been done on the educational and career aspirations of Emirati women. This exploratory study is designed to provide insight into the perceptions and aspirations of these young women using relevant constructs from the literature.

An overview of the United Arab Emirates along with the research questions, purpose of the study and the study’s theoretical framework were presented in Chapter One. Chapter Two will present relevant literature used to inform the study. In Chapter Three a detailed discussion of the data collection methods as well as the various techniques used to analyze data will be provided. Chapter Four will present the demographic and family characteristics of the participants. Chapters Five and Six will use the research questions

to present the study findings. Finally, Chapter Seven will provide a summary of the findings along with implications for practice and future research.

## **CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This chapter will present four areas of research relevant to the study: educational and occupational expectations of women, women and employment in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the changing role of family and social networks and their use in the Arab world.

### **Educational and Occupational Expectations of Women**

Educational and occupational expectations have often been linked to socioeconomic status, gender, cultural/social capital, race and ethnicity. Anyon (1980) draws on Bowles & Gintis Schooling in Capitalist America (1976), in which schooling is explained as a means of reproducing the existing system of unequal social relations in society, to illustrate what she calls the hidden curriculum in schools. In her study she explores the “hidden curriculum”, which refers to the attitudes and values embedded in school experiences that are often inconsistent with written curriculum and which reflect existing class and gender structures.

Similarly, in the Middle East, schools often reflect social and gender norms and they serve to reinforce the notion that males are achievers whereas females are destined to be facilitators. Studies done on the “hidden curriculum” in Syria and Lebanon found that despite government calls for sex role equality in the curriculum, textbooks continue to convey sex role stereotypes. Males are portrayed as brave, strong, achievers and adventurous while females are beautiful, kind and motherly (Alrabaa, 1985; Mikati, 1987).

Despite its reproductive role, schooling in the Third World also has the appearance of having a transformational role. That is, it brings about significant social change particularly in societies such as in the Gulf nations where large scale education for women is relatively recent. A study on the “hidden curriculum” in Kuwaiti girls’ schools found that the organization of the school through sex-segregation of students from elementary through high school only to integrate them at the university level serves to reproduce gender relations within the family and other dominant social institutions such as religion. In the school that was studied “feminine education” was introduced through home economics but the attitudes of teachers and administrators favored academic rather than feminine subjects. This was exhibited through better equipped and situated physics and chemistry laboratories compared to the home economics room and the fact that home economics did not figure in the GPA calculation for high school graduation, illustrating the low esteem given to the subject and hence “feminine education”. The school employed women only, which implied that women could attain complete power within their domain, thus illustrating the reproductive function of school. The schools potentially transformative function was demonstrated in the students’ high expectations for both further education and employment. Although some wanted to be teachers like their role models, many students aspired to overcome the gender differences in education and employment. However, the majority of students wished to work in sex segregated environments and although they valued education, they valued marriage over work. According to the researchers, the students expressed similar contradictory attitudes

throughout the study. For example, they stated that motherhood is highly valued, but so is autonomy and control over one's life (Massiaslas & Jarrar, 1991).

Studies done in the Gulf Arab states document findings similar to the study on Kuwaiti high school students, with participants presenting ambivalent and somewhat contradictory responses in relation to attitudes about the role of women. Sanad & Tessler (1988) found that Kuwaiti women voiced contradictory attitudes about the family, education and work. For example, the majority supported the economic participation of women, but they also stated that preferential treatment should be given to men in hiring, pay and promotion.

Other studies in Arab countries confirm the proposition presented by Massiaslas & Jarrar (1991) that schools serve both transformational and reproductive functions. A study done in the early 1970's in Iraq showed that Iraqi women were outperforming their male counterparts in high school examinations. They were also found to be more optimistic about work and education than their mothers and teachers (Al Kadhi, 1978). Even in the most conservative country in the region, Saudi Arabia, the number of women in higher education institutions and the labor force is on the rise, albeit in traditional occupations that do not involve contact with men (CAWTAR, 2001).

No published studies have examined differences in achievement and aspirations between students in sex segregated versus coeducational schools in the Middle East.

Studies done in the US have produced two opposing and contradictory arguments for and against gender segregation. Those in favor of segregation have argued that women have different learning styles, use different moral reasoning and develop emotionally and physically at a different rate and should therefore be educated in feminist pedagogy. They cite data that shows that women who attend women's colleges have higher success rates particularly in non-traditional areas because of the absence of stereotypes, the strong presence of female role models and greater support from faculty (Smith, Wolf & Morrison, 1995; Miller Bernal, 2000). Those apposed to gender segregation state that the segregation of the sexes leads to subsequent difficulties with intimate relationships and that men tend to behave better in coeducational environments (Epstein, 1997).

Educational and occupational expectations have also been linked to the educational level of parents and in turn, the levels of cultural and social capital that students possess in the educational settings. In his article, "Forms of Capital" Bourdieu (1986) expands the notion of capital beyond its economic notion which emphasizes material exchanges, to include "immaterial" and "non-economic" forms of capital, specifically cultural and symbolic capital. He explains how the different types of capital can be acquired, exchanged, and converted into other forms. In view of the fact that the structure and distribution of capital also represent the inherent structure of the social world, the author argues that an understanding of the multiple forms of capital will help reveal the structure and functioning of the social world.

The term cultural capital represents the collection of non-economic forces such as family background, social class, varying investments in and commitments to education and different resources, which influence academic success. Bourdieu classifies cultural capital into three forms. The embodied state is directly linked to and incorporated within the individual and represents what they know and can do. Embodied capital can be increased by investing time into self improvement in the form of learning. The objectified state of cultural capital is represented by cultural goods, material objects such as books, paintings, instruments, or machines. They can be appropriated both materially with economic capital and symbolically via embodied capital. Finally, cultural capital in its institutionalized state provides academic credentials and qualifications which create a "certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to power." These academic qualifications can then be used as a rate of conversion between cultural and economic capital. The author asserts that an individual's ability is largely determined by the cultural capital invested by his or her parents.

Research in the area of college aspirations and career expectations have used the notion of "capital" to understand and explain why students with educated parents have an advantage over first generation students both in education and in socioeconomic attainment. Those with college-educated parents have better access to human and cultural capital through family relationships. Consequently, compared to their peers with highly educated parents, first-generation students are more likely to experience difficulty in accessing and understanding information and attitudes relevant to making the right

decisions in relation to the importance of obtaining a college degree, which institution to attend and what to major in (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004). Other studies done in the US found that parents' schooling and father's occupational prestige have highly significant positive effects on educational attainment (Sander, 1992).

In the Middle East, socioeconomic status has been closely linked to access, particularly in poorer, more populated countries. Studies done in Egypt have shown that parental educational level and income are directly linked to both access and success in schooling. In Egypt, middle and upper middle class children are more likely to be educated in private schools and are also more likely to enroll in universities as opposed to technical colleges and vocational schools. They were also more likely than low income students to choose majors that lead to professional careers (Massialas & Jarrar, 1991).

Although social mobility is a universal factor in the pursuit of higher education, the literature shows that the developing world has another factor that is perhaps unique to it and that transcends class and gender. The concept of "greater good for all" was explored in a study by a Swedish researcher who studied differences in the educational aspirations of Middle Eastern high school students from Syria and Jordan and compared them to students in Sweden. The study findings showed that the Middle Eastern students aspired to professional degrees, such as medicine, pharmacy and engineering, irrespective of their gender. These professions were sought, not only because they were identified as prestigious but also because they were seen as beneficial to the country's development

(Rabo, 2000). The author attributes the relative recent creation of nation states in the developing world and the close connection between education and development in these new nations as the main reason for the existence of this phenomenon.

Regardless of their race, ethnicity, social class, nationality and rigidity of their environment women all over the world seem to be surpassing men in education attainment. However, even in the most industrialized nations they continue to lag behind men in the returns that they receive from their education. Why then do women continue to pursue higher education? A study done by Mickelson (1989) presents four hypotheses as possible explanations.

The first hypothesis is based on reference group theory which states that women are aware of their own diminished status in relation to men but when they evaluate what a just return on their education might be they look to women and not men as a point of reference. In this context, they are likely to believe that their education is rewarded. The “Pollyanna hypothesis” is the second proposition presented by the author and it states that young women are likely to be optimistic about their future and that although they may be aware of the difficulties inherent in their society they attribute it to a problem of the “older generation” such as their mothers and grandmothers. This view is reinforced by the strides women have made in all fields. As a result young women develop a “Pollyannaish” worldview where they believe that they will be treated like men and that their careers will not be compromised by family responsibilities because their husbands

will be equal partners in a dual career marriage. The “social powerlessness” hypothesis is the third explanation for the failure of sexism to affect women’s aspirations and motivations. This explanation posits that marriage is consciously sought as an alternative to a career. That is, as a result of an awareness of the structural inequalities in the occupational world women seek husbands in order to be socially and financially secure. College viewed as a means for finding a suitable husband. Basically, women with this view seek marriage as the return on their education. Mickelson’s fourth hypothesis with regard to what she calls the anomaly of women’s achievement comes from sex-role socialization theory. This theory states that boys are socialized to be motivated by the desire for mastery and intrinsic rewards while girls are directed towards winning social approval and extrinsic rewards. Women’s motivation for achievement evolves from the need for love and approval from others. Therefore, girls perform well in school because good performance is consistent with the “good girl” role into which they are socialized.

### **Women and Employment in MENA**

Paid employment appears to be a major issue for women across the globe. In the US, it was not until the mid- 1960’s with the advent of the civil rights and women’s movements, and the passage of the equal employment legislation that women were able to increase their access to both higher education and employment. Data from the 1990’s shows that like women in UAE and various countries around the world, women in the US constituted the majority of associate, two year and bachelor’s degree recipients. They also constituted fifty percent of master’s degree recipients and forty percent of doctoral degree

recipients. Despite their achievements, women in the US continue to experience a wage gap compared to their male counterparts. They trail behind men in their presence in elite institutions and continue to be segregated from men in the areas of study that they pursue (Jacobs, 1999).

In most countries of the developing world, the disparity between male and female representation in paid employment is wide. Men have unequal access to high status and high paying executive positions while only, an insignificant number of women occupy key decision making positions. The dearth of women in positions of power has undermined their ability to exert influence over economic and social decision making structures, which in turn has led to the development of policies that widen the inequality gap because policies tend to reflect male perceptions and orientations (UNIFEM, 2003). At the same time research done on women in the developing world, has shown that the education of women transcends the acquisition of knowledge and skills. It allows women to access the political/economic system thereby enabling them to recognize their economic power. The extent to which women access higher education when opportunities are available has been directly linked to their self- concept, ambitions and expectations (Youssef, 1977).

Despite their access to education, the unemployment rate of Emirate women was at 8.3% in 1995, the highest among all groups in the UAE labor market, compared to 6% for Emirate men, 1.7% for non- Emirati women and 1.3% for non-Emirati men. The

limited research done on the reasons for the high unemployment rates of Emirati women cite the focus on securing federal jobs as an important factor to rising unemployment rates. According to a study done by Baud & Mahgoub (2001) in 1997 seventy- five percent of Emirati women were employed by federal ministries, particularly the ministries of Education, Health & Labor. The ministry of Education has the highest percentage of Emirati employees (both teachers and staff) because women can avoid all contact with men in gender segregated schools. Public sector employment in general offers Emirati women good pay, generous leave and short working hours (6-7 hours). The competition of women for public sector employment has had an adverse effect of their employment rates. Throughout the 1990's, the government experienced decreased revenues as a result of falling oil prices, which led to the introduction of policies that limited the expansion of public sector employment, thus sharply reducing the number of new hires and the possibility of employment in this sector. Private sector employment has been largely dominated by male foreign workers, with only 1.3% of Emirati women and 7.3% for non-Emirati women employed by this sector in 1995 (Baud & Mahgoub, 2001). The problem of female unemployment and the concentration of women in feminized fields in the public sector are not unique to the UAE, but are fairly well documented in the Middle East and North African region (MENA). A recent report by the World Bank (2004) showed that female labor force participation in the MENA region stood at 32%- the lowest in the world. The same report agrees with the above study and states that although women in the MENA region have benefited from public sector employment in the past, those benefits will not be as significant for the next generation of female

workers because of two reasons. The first is the marked reductions in bureaucracy and public sector employment worldwide due to privatization and automation. The second is the shift in the demographic bulge in the MENA region, which is moving beyond school age and will result in a declining need for teachers- traditionally an important public sector job for women. (World Bank, 2004).

The report also presents three fundamental reasons for concentration of women in the public sector in the region:

- The fact that public service professions such as teaching and nursing have been considered socially/culturally acceptable for women
- The public sector's egalitarian policies of hiring and firing increasing women's chances of gaining employment in this sector
- Work conditions are more favorable for women than those of the private sector

The MENA region covers nineteen countries of the Middle East and North Africa: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian Territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates. It is a region with diverse populations including a significant number of ethnic and religious minority groups. Countries in the region also differ in their economic and labor resources. Three quarters of the population in the region speak Arabic and the majority are Muslim.

Numerous studies have been done on the labor force participation of women in the Middle East and North Africa region. Almost all these studies were commissioned by international organizations such as the World Bank, United Nations Development Fund and the Center for Arab Women Research and Training. The rationale and framework used by these organizations in advocating the employment of women has generally been economic in nature. That is, they advocate female employment to increase family purchasing power and hence standard of living.

The most recent studies on the issue by the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (2001) and the World Bank report (2004) cite the traditional gender paradigm in MENA as the root cause of low labor force participation rates in the region. This paradigm is based on the notion that men and women are different biologically and that these differences determine social function. That is, they have different but equitable responsibilities, with men in charge of the public sphere or paid employment and women in charge of the private sphere or the home. This paradigm assumes that women will marry early and that their recognized contribution to the family will be that of homemaker. Men on the other hand will retain the highest authority as the provider and protector of women and children. According to the report the traditional gender paradigm has four elements:

- The first element is the centrality of the family as the primary block of society. Family interest overrides individual interest for both men and women and the family has a great deal of influence on the individual's attitude and choices. A

woman's ability to combine both work and family responsibilities was identified as key to increasing labor force participation.

- The second element is the establishment of the male as the sole breadwinner which is written into law in some MENA countries. These laws call into question a women's right to work and in times of high unemployment leads women to be perceived as taking jobs away from men. Women's work is also often viewed as a sign of the inability of male kin to provide for the family, which puts social and psychological pressure on men whose wives work outside the home. It also makes some women reluctant to seek employment because they believe that accepting responsibility for a share of the family income will worsen their condition because of the double burden (work and home) and because of fear that employment will decrease male responsibility for providing for the family. The authors of the report recommend that any change in the current male breadwinner model needs to demonstrate benefits to both men and women.
- The third element is the imposition of social conditions on women by the "code of modesty", which calls for the segregation of men and women in the quest to guard family honor. This code is adhered to in varying degrees by different countries and by groups within the countries. Women in countries where segregation is crucial tend to avoid areas that are predominantly male. The authors recommend that work environments needs to be less engendered to allow for increased participation.

- The fourth and final element identified by the study is the presence of an unequal power structure within the private sphere through the existence of family laws that treat men and women differently. In some countries, women can lose financial support and custody of their children in the case of divorce and need approval from their husband's to obtain employment. Thereby making interaction with the public sphere without spousal consent a serious risk.

Studies that have been done by independent researchers confirm the findings presented by the international organizations. The two most commonly cited reasons for the high unemployment rates include (1) the general gender ideology in the Arab world which idealizes women as wives and mothers and places them at the center of the family unit with men as their protectors. (2) Laws that were designed to protect indigenous men and women workers that make it difficult for employers to dismiss them without a legal battle and that award women a guarantee of employment even in cases of long absences due to sickness of immediate family members and minimum of two months of paid maternity leave (Doumato, 1992, Longva, 1993, Seikaly, 1994).

Findings from the studies presented above show that although women are discriminated against based on the laws that govern divorce and child custody and the "code of modesty" limits their employment opportunities, they also have rights as indigenous workers particularly in the public sector. In the UAE civil service laws in the public sector prevent managers from disciplining and dismissing employees, provide two

months of paid maternity leave and allow women to take paid family leave to care for sick family members. These laws do not apply to the private sector which makes the sector a less than ideal place of employment for Emirati's.

### **Family in the Middle East**

The Middle Eastern family is often described as a patriarchal unit. However, patriarchy is not unique to the Middle East. In the industrialized world, the family is viewed as the only social institution that is natural and essential. This historical conceptualization is bestowed on the family due to women's reproductive capacities and the biological basis of kin ties. The importance of kin ties and the emphasis on biology led to functionalist perspectives like that of Talcott Parsons, who argued that the modern family has two functions: to socialize children and to provide a stable environment to shield the male provider from psychological damage. These functions are carried by the wife who plays the role of nurturer and supports her husband. This Parsonian view of the family is similar to that of a contemporary Middle Eastern family (Moghadam, 2003). Many feminist theorists have argued that industrialized societies are also patriarchal but that patriarchy has evolved to other forms. Walby (1996) distinguishes between what she calls "private patriarchy" which was practiced by the pre-modern family and "public patriarchy" which is in existence today and refers to the power exerted on the family by the state and labor market in industrial societies. Others argue that patriarchy has its origins in ancient times before the advent of the three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). Tillion (1983) argues that the origins of women's oppression can

be traced to ancient times and the beginnings of patrilineal society. She identifies endogamy, the practice of marrying within the lineage as the root cause of the oppression of women. Endogamy kept property within the lineage and protected the rights of men. With the advent of Islam women in endogamous societies of the Middle East were given the right to keep their family names, own and inherit property independent of their husbands and male kin and contract to their marriage. These rights were absent in pre-Islamic, Christian and Jewish societies.

Eastern feminists view patriarchy in relation to the importance of the family unit, which is and continues to be (in the majority of societies) traditionally patriarchal. In her book Arab Women: Between Defiance and Restraint, Sabbagh (1996) states that ancient cultures cannot be judged in the same manner that women's issues in the industrialized world are judged because early on Arab culture evolved into a social system in which the extended family offered each individual all the amenities the state currently offers its citizens in the west, such as unemployment benefits, protection etc. and that patriarchy is only a facet of the extended family structure.

Regardless of its origins and the meaning ascribed to it, patriarchy is undergoing change in large urban cities such as Cairo and Istanbul and is rapidly evolving in the oil rich Gulf States. More families are in nuclear living situations and live away from extended family members. Women are surpassing men in academic achievement throughout the region and outnumber men in higher education institutions in many

countries. Socioeconomic development and increasing education and employment of women have affected family size as well as women's gender consciousness. It is anticipated that these changes will have a serious impact on the classical patriarchal family (CAWTER, 2001; World Bank, 2004; Moghadam, 2003).

The conflict between modernity and traditionalism in the Arab world is presented in the form of ambiguity which was seen in the responses of Kuwaiti women in the studies presented above. This ambiguity is more pronounced in the Gulf region because of rapid modernization. The transition from poverty to riches and the change in the status of women has been rapid and dramatic. Traditionalists argue that the rising educational level and the subsequent employment of Emirati women coupled with satellite television and the decline of family values has led to the increasing divorce rates among the national population which is said to be at about 33%. The following passage from a local magazine presents a traditional perspective:

“In the past ----a bride could be as young as 12 but, even at that age, she was aware that there would be no turning back, that she was entering into a relationship she was bound forever, in good times as well as bad. Break-ups were rare - and, when they did occur, it had more to do with tribal and sub-tribal conflicts than husband-wife relations. So strong was the system that even considering divorce was looked upon as a shameful act. Then things changed, almost overnight. With the discovery of oil and the ensuing development and affluence, tradition started taking a back seat. People began moving to urban areas, resulting in the near-disintegration of the joint family system; education opened doors which were hitherto closed; and foreign influences crept into every aspect of life. With the increasingly modern outlook to life came the hazards of westernization as well. The fallout is there for everybody to see. What's more upsetting is that marriage as an institution is being put to test. Divorce - a subject that was often put on the back burner and labeled a 'Western' problem - has now come to the forefront in the UAE. The rate of divorce among UAE nationals,

especially among couples in their first or second year of marriage, is fast catching up with those prevalent in the West. The estimates vary depending on reports, but according to Dr. Saeed Abdullah Hareb, vice-president of UAE University for Social Affairs, the divorce rate among UAE nationals is around 33 per cent (Friday Magazine, June 2000)

Non-traditionlist's assert that rising divorce rate is due to the apathy of the Emirati male and the inability of the educated Emirati female to "put up and shut up"

"Generally speaking, Arab women will not break up the family, he says. Sometimes they carry their problems with them and live with the difficulties in the marriage in order to keep the family intact. The men, on the other hand, find it easy to opt out, especially in a country where there is an abundance of foreign women. They have more money and, therefore, have more options." Obaid goes as far as to say that some national men 'use' religion to divorce and remarry for no other reason than to fulfill their desires while some others bow to parental pressure and marry the woman chosen for him. It is equally true that the changing attitudes of many national women has also played a big role in the rising divorce rate. They are resisting the social structures that render them faceless and voiceless, and bind them socially and financially to male relatives. And although they are less visible in public life than women in some Arab countries, they are still making gains in employment and achieving economic independence. Moreover, with their gains in education, they are less willing than their mother's generation to "put up and shut up" and are instigating divorces, even though they risk losing custody of their children"(Friday Magazine, June 2000).

The dichotomy between traditionalism and modernity and the resultant ambiguity was demonstrated in a study by Dhaher & Al Salem (1987) on Gulf women's attitudes towards modernization and their perceived place in society. Data was collected through questionnaires and interviews with women from five Gulf Arab countries (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain and the UAE) over a three year period. Participants were asked to

rate and express their agreement or disagreement to several statements pertaining to the status and role of women. Some of the findings of the study were as follows.

- Age group- More women over the age of twenty expressed a greater sense of equality with their male counterparts compared to women who were younger than twenty years of age. The younger group believed more strongly they were able to make their own decisions and both groups stressed that want to be financially independent. However, they also overwhelming agreed that their families should make educational and employment decisions for them.
- Nationality- Emirati women indicated the strongest equality with men (75%), followed by Kuwaiti women (70%), the Bahraini's (67%), the Qatari's (60%) and Saudi's at 50%. When asked if there was a difference between men and women in their freedom to make decisions concerning their lives, in contrast to previous responses the Emirati women felt the most difference (75%), followed by the Saudi's (70%), Bahraini's (67%), etc. For reliability purposes a third question was asked in relation to equality-Are women obligated to listen to their families in personal matters such as marriage, divorce and education? The Saudi women remained consistent in their responses and answered in the affirmative (90%). The majority of Kuwaiti (68%) and Qatari women (66%) also answered affirmatively. Yet, only half of the Emirati women and 33% Bahraini women agreed.
- Marital status- married women indicated a marginally greater sense of equality compared to single, divorced and widowed women. However, they all agreed

regardless of marital status that decisions should be made by male heads of household.

- Socioeconomic status- SES was not found to be significant in terms of attitudes
- Education- Education was found to be linked to the feeling of equality with men. Educated women complained of greater family interference in their lives compared to uneducated women.

The authors conclude that women in the Gulf States insist that they want more independence but that they are also willing to accept dependence. They are dissatisfied with some parts of their lives but that they are largely satisfied with their position in their societies. The authors use the term “society in flux” to describe the women’s views and they state that women in the Gulf are aware of various options but seem hesitant to embrace them.

This article was presented in a confusing manner with participants contradicting themselves in every turn. I am not sure if it was written in this manner to convey the ambiguity of participant responses or whether it was poorly presented but many questions remain unanswered. Why are Gulf women confused about their role in society? Is it false consciousness or is it genuine ambiguity in response to the mixed messages they are receiving from their society, that requires them to be traditional yet exposes them to modernity?

### **Social Networks and their use in the Arab world**

To access information, resources, and opportunities individuals often rely on personal contacts. These contacts comprise one's social support network, and in turn, constitute one's own social system. Social scientists have used the term social network to refer to the complex set of relationships between persons in the social system. The network is instrumental in providing emotional and informational assistance and it can also impact the degree to which physical, mental, social, economic, and spiritual needs are met (Crowell, 2004). In his theory "The strength of weak ties", Granovetter (1983) asserts that individuals with a few weak ties are deprived of information from distant parts of the social system and receive news and views only through their close friends and kin. Thus placing them in a disadvantaged position in the labor market compared people with many weak ties.

Research studies done using the concept of tie strength showed that some individuals particularly those with less power by virtue of their social class, low socioeconomic level or low educational level used "strong ties" to obtain jobs because they lacked "weak ties". Although these ties do produce employment opportunities, the opportunities were less likely to produce social mobility and reduce social distance because "strong ties" are less likely to produce connections with high status individuals whom can improve occupational status (Davern, 1999).

Others researchers have also linked Granovetter's theory to the strength of social resources that an individual possesses such as occupational prestige. Lin & Dumin (1986) used the Granovetter's theory of tie strength to posit that weak ties are helpful only to the extent that they serve as a bridge to social resources (prestige, power, position, high SES). For example, high status individuals possess strong ties that can provide social resources that are as good as or better than resources available through weak ties. On the other hand, a low status person's weak ties should provide better social resources than his/her strong ties can provide. Therefore, the lower the initial position the greater the influence of weak ties over strong ties. They also suggest that women can potentially reach more contacts through males than females.

In a study on the use of contacts to forward packets (send envelopes with information from one person to another), it was found that reaching the target was more likely if the packets were transmitted from male to female rather than from female to male. Reaching the target person was also more likely if packets were transmitted from a person with higher occupational status and prestige (Lin et al, 1978). In another study on the job seeking behaviors of New Yorkers, the authors found that women tend to have a better chance of finding high status jobs through males rather than females (Ensel & Lin, 1981).

The theory of weak ties has also been used to by Feld & Carter (1998) to demonstrate the importance of interracial contacts developed in schools through desegregation in increasing the likelihood that Blacks would interact within interracial contexts later in

life. The authors suggest that if Black and White students do interact and become acquaintances, then those weak ties can be important for connecting Blacks to White employers who control most of the high paying jobs.

Although no studies related to tie strength have been published in the Middle East, it is not uncommon for social contacts to be used for everything from securing a university seat to getting a job. For example, in the UAE students qualify for admission to various public higher education institutions based on their high school examination results. Students who score below a seventy percent are denied admission into the country's universities but can access technical colleges. However, it is not uncommon for students to gain admission into a university without fulfilling this requirement because of the use of contacts both from within the university or through the ministry where all admission papers are processed. Contacts are also used in the ministerial level to obtain scholarships abroad or to transfer smoothly from one university to another.

Social networks in the Middle East are based on tribal, religious and familial ties. The use of contacts to attain a set goal is known as "wasta". In the only book published on the topic, Wasta: The Hidden Force in Middle Eastern Society, Cunningham & Sarayrah (1993) conduct a detailed study of the phenomenon in Jordan. The authors claim that no research has been done on this concept by both Western and Middle Eastern social scientists. They explain the absence of literature on the topic in the following paragraph:

“Except for the occasional scandal, newspaper reports ignore wasta and respondents are reluctant to discuss their wasta involvement or practices with interviewers because it implies personal powerlessness as well as disrespect for the law. Perhaps, Western social scientists fail to provide a detailed treatment of wasta because the concept does not lend itself readily to normal science methodology. Middle Eastern social scientists can avoid writing about wasta because the topic rarely appears in Western books and journals. As a result, outsiders have difficulty obtaining information about this process and insiders can avoid an emotionally difficult topic (3)”

The term wasta, is derived from the Arabic word “yatawassat” which means to mediate or intercede. Wasta always seeks to achieve what is assumed to be unattainable by the petitioner. According to the authors, the use of wasta is very common in Jordan and the Arab world. Its origins can be traced to the use of mediators to settle tribal and family disputes and even disputes between Arabs and other nations. They cite family as the primary mediator in resolving conflict and family loyalty as the foundation of the wasta system in the contemporary Middle East. Families provide emotional and material support to extended members particularly those of those that are low income. For the middle class, wasta is used among family members and friends to obtain goods and services that are otherwise difficult to obtain and for the elite it is used to ensure their continued advantage. Beyond the family wasta can be sought from members of the ethnic or religious group, political parties or social clubs. Traditionally the head of the household performed wasta services but in today’s urban society, anyone who has access to resources can practice wasta within their sphere of influence. This sphere can sometimes be narrow and so wasta seekers must search widely for the mediator.

I believe wasta is not very different from the use of social networks which is documented widely in Western literature. Wasta is viewed as sinister in the Middle East because it pervades the culture and is sometimes associated with corruption. However, in theory it does not appear to be different from the use of social contacts.

### **Summary**

Throughout the world access to education and employment are influenced by gender, social class or income level, race etc. The literature reviewed for the purpose of this study shows that women's access to education and employment has increased in every region of the world but women continue to have fewer options than men. Reasons for this disconnect has been attributed to multiple factors, the most prominent of which is social reproduction of women's role in society which begins at the family level and is reinforced in school.

### **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

The goal of this study is to explore some of the reasons for the discrepancy between the higher education and employment of Emirati women by addressing the two key factors discussed in the first two chapters- career expectations and social networks. The educational and career expectations of Emirati women were explored using the following research questions:

- f) Why do Emirati women pursue higher education?
- g) What do they intend to do with their degrees?
- h) What are their perceptions of how their families and society view their career choice and future goals?
- i) What factors do they identify as important for goal achievement? And what factors do they perceive as obstacles to goal achievement?
- j) What kind of work environments do they prefer to work in?

The role of social networks in educational and employment decision making was explored using the following research questions:

- d) What kinds of social networks do Emirati women belong to?
- e) How influential are these networks in educational and employment decision making?
- f) Who do they approach for assistance in securing employment?

In this chapter an overview of the research design and methodology will be presented along with a discussion of how participants were selected for inclusion in the study and a

brief summary of the institutions from which the participants were recruited. Finally, a discussion of the quantitative and qualitative methods used to gather and analyze data will be presented.

### **Design**

The study used a combined quantitative/qualitative approach to answer the research questions. The quantitative portion involved a survey of junior and senior undergraduates in two urban women's educational institutions to assess the employment expectations of young Emirati women and ascertain factors that led to the development of these expectations. The survey also helped to identify the types of social networks they belong to and to what degree these networks influence their educational and career decision making. It was administered electronically and was made available to all students in their junior and senior years at Technical College (TC) and at both sites of Urban University (UU). The survey was followed up by twenty one in-depth phenomenological interviews with select students from various departments within the two institutions.

The advantages of using this two step approach was as follows: 1) the questionnaire allowed the researcher to target a larger pool of participants and to get a broader view of the phenomenon 2) the interviews provided personal narratives that involved pursuing a more in-depth consideration of the issues that shed light on the reasons why Emirati women enroll in higher education institutions and what they expect to gain from their education.

### **History of Higher Education**

Education (K thru16) is provided to all UAE citizens free of charge in sex segregated environments. The educational system is split into three stages, six years of primary education, three years of middle school and three years of high school. Public higher education is provided in two universities and eleven technical/vocational colleges that provide certificates, diplomas and bachelors degrees. The United Arab Emirates University (formerly known as the Al Ain University) was established in 1976.It was modeled after universities in the Arab World particularly the University of Cairo. Arabic was the language of instruction of all the faculties. Today both Arabic and English are used in most departments and English is used exclusively in the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences.

The university was the only public higher education institution in the country for twelve years until the establishment of the Higher Colleges of Technology in 1988. Located in six of the seven Emirates, the colleges were developed in response to the inability of the university to physically accommodate the increasing numbers of applicants and the need to develop a technical workforce. The establishment of the colleges allowed students to access post secondary education within their home communities. The colleges were modeled after British colleges and English was therefore chosen as the language of instruction.

Zayed university the newest of the three higher education institutions in the UAE, was established in 1998. This university was modeled after the higher education system in the United States and was established to accommodate the disproportionately high numbers of Emirati women seeking higher education. It has two campuses in the capital city- Abu-Dhabi, and in the second largest and most populated city in the Emirates- Dubai.

### **Diversity of the Student body**

As discussed in Chapter one, the population of the UAE was at 2.1 million in 2001 with foreign workers and their families constituting eighty percent of the population. The national population or the Emiratis' as they are generally called consist of two main groups- naturalized immigrants and indigenous tribes. Although no published information is available on naturalized citizens, it is widely known that they are generally from the neighboring countries of Iran and Oman. Other Arab nationals such as Palestinian's and Yemeni's are also naturalized in smaller numbers.

The ruling families of the Emirates represent the major tribes in the country. The Al Nahayan and the Al Maktoum families which rule Abu Dhabi and Dubai consecutively are both from the Bani-Yas tribe while the two of the rulers in northern Emirates belong to the Al Qawasim (Peck, 1986). Despite the decline of tribalism in the region as a whole due the movement from rural to urban settings the importance of the family identities and ties continue to have prime political and social importance. Individuals affiliated with or

related to prominent families control a great deal of influence. In his book, The United Arab Emirates- A Venture at Unity, Peck (1986), mentions that the majority of prominent families in Abu Dhabi were of Arab descent, unlike Dubai where the majority of influential families were of Iranian descent due to Dubai's tradition of external mercantile contacts.

Students in higher education institutions represent the diversity of the Emirati population with the concentration of individuals of Arab descent (both tribal and naturalized) in the Abu Dhabi and Western region and a higher percentage of individuals of Iranian descent in Dubai and the Northern Emirates.

### **Context: The Institutions**

Technical College (TC) and Urban University (UU) are pseudonyms used for the two institutions in which the study was conducted. Technical College is located in the largest city in the northern Emirates and is situated in a new educational development complex. It is surrounded by other colleges and universities with which it shares large common spaces, such as a women's sports complex and a large auditorium used for special events. Technical college is a federally funded institution that is a part of a college system that provides technical and vocational education exclusively to Emirati men and women in gender segregated campuses throughout the Emirates. The college system is reputed for the employability of its graduates because of its strong connection with employers and a focus on the development of a strong work ethic. The first college was founded in 1988 but the sector has since expanded to eleven colleges in six of the seven Emirates. The

primary purpose of this institution is to train a cadre of technically savvy workers who are ready for the job market through close ties with employers in their communities. This college system was also intended to produce a vocationally and technically competent workforce that could reduce the dependence on foreign workers.

TC is located in the largest city of the Northern Emirates and its catchment area includes two adjacent emirates and numerous distant rural communities within its territories. It provides over twenty five concentrations in six departments (Business, Education, Health Sciences, Engineering Technology, Communication Technology and Information Technology). Students have the option of various tracks depending on their choice and their high school grade averages. Degrees offered include Certificates in vocational programs that can be followed up with Diploma's or more professional Higher Diploma's with the option of additional study to attain Bachelor's degrees in Applied Arts or Sciences. Enrollment at TC was at 2000 students in the 2003-2004 academic year with a faculty of 240.

Urban University has two sites which are both located in large urban cities. It was founded in 1999, in response to the growing number of Emirati women that were applying to public higher education institutions. Unlike Technical College, this university is for women only and does not have an affiliated male campus. Its mission is to prepare students for the twenty first century, promote leadership and to help support the economic and social advancement of the country. Like Technical College, it has a strong emphasis

on technology. All students are required to purchase a laptop and both students and faculty are required to use technology. For example, students submit all assignments online and faculty post all course requirements on the university portal. Urban university has five colleges (Arts and Sciences, Education, Social and Behavioral Sciences, Communication and Media Sciences and Business Sciences), seven degrees and over twenty concentrations. It has also recently begun an Executive Masters in Business Administration program for working women. Student enrollment at UU was at approximately 2000 students for the 2003-2004 academic year. No additional information on graduation and employment rates are presented because the institution declined to share this information with the researcher.

Although different in their focus and program offerings, the language of instruction in both UU and TC is English, and the majority of faculty are non-natives. The over representation of foreign faculty in academe is due to the lack of Emirati faculty that are both western educated and English proficient. Western education and English proficiency are required for employment in both the institutions studied. Both UU and TC are public institutions in the same federal system; consequently, they have similar admission policies and funding formulas. However, these institutions differ in attendance requirements and in regulations governing campus life. Neither campus offers residential facilities although TC shares a dormitory facility with a neighboring university which is used by students from rural areas or students that chose programs not offered at their

home technical college. At UU, all students are commuters and some students travel a considerable distances to access the university.

Students both UU and TC are generally bused to campus by a private transport company, unless they drive or are driven by family members or personal chauffeurs. On observing the students at both campuses, it appeared that only a small percentage of them drove themselves to school. The majority were driven there by family members or used the bus to get to and from school. Both institutions had security guards at the door to check the identification of all individuals accessing the campus. UU appeared to have stricter rules for access. All guests had to identify the purpose of their visit, were subject to a bag search and a form of ID had to be retained to allow the guest to access the premises. TC was less strict about their security measures particularly with women; however, all men were subject to the same measures applied at UU.

At TC all students were required to submit a form signed by their guardian that provided information such as, the plate numbers and the names of all individuals authorized to pick or drop them off. This was not the case in UU because students were dropped off and picked up outside the university gates.

The institutions were similar in the daily routines of students. The day generally began between eight and nine in the morning and lasted until after four in the evening, with two short breaks that were staggered to prevent overcrowding in the eating areas.

Students that rode the bus had to wait until after four in the evening to go home regardless of when their classes ended. Those at TC who drove their own cars or were picked up were not allowed to leave campus unless they used their timetable to prove that they had no remaining classes, or if they had a note from administration that authorized them to miss classes. This was not practiced at UU and students were free to leave when they wanted to.

The use of mobile phones was prohibited at TC and students that used their phones on campus ran the risk of having it confiscated. Students at UU were allowed to use their cellular phones beyond the classroom. Students at both institutions had access to the internet. At TC students could access the internet and other computer applications in computer labs throughout the campus and at in the Information Commons area which was located in the Integrated Learning Center or library. All students at UU had their own laptops. Classrooms, lounges and eating areas were internet wired and wireless technology was sometimes used to allow students to access both the internet and the intranet from multiple areas throughout the campus.

Students in both institutions wore some variation of the national dress of the Emirates which consists of the abaya's (a long black robe made of silk or polyster that is worn over clothes) and shala's (a head scraf that is wrapped around the head to either conceal the hair or is worn loosely around the head and neck area).

A significant number of students wore fashionable skirts, slacks or jeans under flared abaya's with colorful shala's that covered part of their heads and often slid down to their shoulders. Others wore more conservative abaya's that were loose and dress like, which made it impossible to see what they were wearing underneath along with matching black shaya's that covered their hair. A few students wore conservative abaya's and also covered their entire faces only revealing their eyes. Since there is no government edict (unlike in Iran or Saudi Arabia) that governs the mode of dress for both men and women in the Emirates it can be ascertained that the conservative forms of the national dress denotes religious conservatism.

### **Data Collection, Part I: The Survey**

A survey is a quantitative information collection technique that is used to obtain information from respondents. When surveys are given by a researcher they are called researcher administered surveys and when they are administered by the respondent they are called self administered surveys or questionnaires (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). This study used an online self administered questionnaire. It elicited information regarding student demographics, reasons for their persistence, future goals and general attitudes about women and work. The primary reason why this form of data collection was employed was to increase the response rate by enabling respondents to complete the questionnaire at any time and any place. This method also allowed the survey to be administered in large numbers and in an anonymous and private manner that might elicit more candid and honest responses. Another important advantage to online surveying is

that it is less costly than traditional paper and pencil ones and the results can be obtained and analyzed relatively quickly.

The survey used in this study was designed specifically for the target population and was tailored to answer the research questions posed by the researcher using relevant literature and the researcher's own experience as an Emirati educator. It was divided into three sections. In the first section of the survey, respondents were asked to provide basic demographic information about themselves such as age, major, the degree they are pursuing at the institution, parent's/husband's educational level and whether they received financial assistance from social services—this was used as an indicator for socioeconomic status. This section was created using literature on first generation college students in the US and the Arab world which showed that the educational level and the socioeconomic status of parents influence educational and career expectations in (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004; Massialas & Jarrar, 1991). Assistance from social services was used as proxy for SES because of the researcher's awareness of the inappropriateness of asking questions about income in the Emirates.

In the second section of the questionnaire respondents were asked questions related to their expectations for the future such as whether they intended to graduate from the institution and seek employment. Respondents were also asked questions related to influences on their decision making. Questions in this section were drawn from research done by the World Bank (2004) that showed that women in the Middle East and North Africa region do not seek employment after obtaining post secondary education because

of “traditional gender paradigm” in the region that does not allow women to make their own decisions and restricts their employment opportunities.

In the third and final section participants were asked to rate statements that measured their general attitudes about women and work such as “a woman’s place is in the home”, “women should not work in predominately male work environments” and “women ought to receive the same pay as men for the same work”. A five point Likert scale was used to rate the level of their agreement or disagreement with these statements. In this section respondents were also asked to rate certain factors according to how important or unimportant they believed they were to the employment and career advancement of Emirati women. Some of the factors listed included “family support”, “flexible work environments” and “childcare provisions at work”. Statements in this final section were developed using information acquired through conversations with students during the researcher’s tenure as an educator in the Emirates. For example, students often complained that they would like to work but that their fathers or brothers forbid them from working with men. Others had to discontinue their education or employment because their husbands did not want them to work or because they had problems with childcare. The questions in the final section of the questionnaire were designed to obtain general information about Emirati’s women’s attitudes about work and to identify factors that they might assist them in accessing and maintaining careers.

Once the first draft of the questionnaire was developed it was reviewed and modified repeatedly after obtaining feedback from members of the dissertation committee and other faculty members both within the department of Higher Education and the college of Education. The questionnaire was then translated into Arabic and reviewed for accuracy by faculty members of the Arabic department at TC. It was then piloted online using a group of twenty students, modifications were made upon receipt of student feedback and it was then sent to all junior and senior students at both institutions along with information about the study, an interview recruitment script and a disclaimer form. All information that was sent out to students was in both English and Arabic and these documents were reviewed by the Department of Institutional Research at UU and approved by the Human Subjects committee at the University of Arizona. A total of 1476 students (all juniors and seniors) received the email soliciting survey completion at the two institutions. The questionnaire response rates were 19% at UU and 29% at TC, with a total response rate of 25%. Table 3.1 presents the number of students that received the email and those that responded.

**Table 3.1 Questionnaire Response Rates**

	<i>Sent</i>	<i>Responded</i>	<i>Response Rate</i>
Technical College (TC)	1013	289	28.5%
Urban University (UU)	436	84	19.3%
Total	1476	373	25.2%

### **Quantitative data analysis techniques**

Data from the questionnaire was generated in Excel format and was moved to SPSS 12.0. through which it was analyzed after all variables were identified and values were entered and repeatedly rechecked to ensure accuracy. The researcher was able to use all the data generated because the questionnaire was programmed so that only questionnaires which had 60% or more of questions answered were saved. The surveys from the two institutions were initially run separately to determine the unique characteristics and attitudes of each student population. Descriptive statistics and Chi-squares were run to determine if differences were of statistical significance and to gain an understanding of the similarities and differences between the two student groups. The data were later combined and run together to provide an overview of the entire sample.

### **Data Collection, Part II: Interviews**

Interviews are used in research to provide in depth information about a particular issue or answer specific research questions ((Marshall & Rossman, 1999). They can also be described as “a conversation with a purpose” (Kahn& Cannell, 1957). The study used a modified version of Seidman’s phenomenological interview style. This method was modified into a single interview during which a life history, the purpose of higher education to participant and what they hope to achieve in the future were explored. Semi-structured interviews or an interview guide approach was used to gain insight into the reasons for the disconnect between the educational levels attained versus the employment rates of Emirati women. The use of the interview guide allowed the researcher to provide

some structure to the interview process while remaining open to pursuing topics that the participants brought up. (Cannell & Kahn, 1983).

The interview questions were developed by the researcher in a manner similar to that of the survey. That is, the interview schedule was developed with the research questions in mind and using the literature presented in Chapter Two and the researcher's personal experiences with young Emirati women. Literature on the importance of family in the Middle East and the researcher personal knowledge and experience as an Emirati led to the development of various questions related to participants perceptions about how their families viewed educational and occupational aspirations. Literature on social networks helped to formulate questions related to types of networks participants belong to, and the kinds of benefits provided each network. The schedule was reviewed by committee members and then piloted and modified to ensure that the information sought could be obtained.

The final version of the interview instrument contained twelve basic questions. Follow up probes varied from one interviewee to another and depended on individual responses to questions. I refrained from stopping participants when they were speaking as that is viewed as a sign of disrespect in Emirati culture. The first portion of the interview involved introductions and answering any questions the interviewee had about the study or the interview. The next step involved asking the interviewees to complete the demographic portion of the survey, followed by a discussion of the responses. This

allowed the interviewee to stop focusing on the tape recorder, which was a source of anxiety for some because they felt uncomfortable with being recorded. I was able to reassure participants that the tapes would be reviewed only by the researcher and that no individual whom could identify them by listening to the tapes could have access to them. I also spent the first few minutes chatting and making small talk, with the participant. I found that this technique to be useful in building rapport and in presenting the interview as an informal chat.

The first question on the interview guide was “tell me about yourself and your family?” This question allowed the participant to provide the researcher with a glimpse of their life history and family structure (Seidman, 1998). It was usually followed up with questions relating to the number of siblings in the family, their educational levels and whether or not they were employed. I believe this part to be the most important question on the interview schedule because it allowed me to obtain a broad overview of the participant’s life and their perceived position within it. For example, they always identified their birth rank- “I’m the fourth” or mentioned if they were the only daughter or the eldest daughter etc.

More specific questions related to expectations and social networks were explored. Those related to expectations explored why they were in college, what they hoped to achieve, how they thought their families and society viewed their goals etc (e.g.: “can you explain why you decided to pursue higher education?”, “what are your goals for the

future?”, “under what circumstances would you change your plans?”). Questions aimed at obtaining information related to social networks were preceded by a brief definition of social networks---“the relationships an individual has with family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and people in groups to which the person belongs” (Kilduff & Tsai, 2003) (e.g.: who are the people in your social network?, can you draw a diagram of the people in your network? Can you rank these individuals/groups depending on how influential they are in your educational decision making? who would you ask for assistance in securing employment?). Questions from this section were drawn from the theoretical framework and from my experiences as an educator in the UAE where I met students who complained about the tyrannical control that brothers had over educational and employment decisions. Identification and ranking of individuals/groups in order of importance could shed light on the occurrence of this phenomenon.

Due to the exploratory nature of the study and because the researcher wanted to ensure that the interviewees’ were given the opportunity to provide any additional information, the final question was structured to allow participants to add anything to the discussion or to present any other question they believed I should have asked. Leading questions were avoided and responses were clarified throughout the interview process (Seidman, 1998).

I had initially intended to interview family members to help map the social networks of participants and to assess family expectations for their daughters. However, the participants objected to their families being interviewed because they didn’t feel

comfortable permitting me into their homes. Some mentioned that they wouldn't even mention the interview to their families because what they did in school was irrelevant to their lives at homes. This separation between the public realm of the university and the private realm of the home is not uncommon in the Middle East where there is a strong emphasis on the preserving the dignity and privacy of the family to all outsiders and avoiding any critique of the family.

A total of twenty one participants were interviewed-eleven from TC and ten from UU. At TC participants were recruited through classroom visits in which the researcher presented her research project to students and selected students that were willing to be interviewed. This technique was suggested by campus administrators who reported a low response rate to email requests for interviews. Participants from the UU were selected by an administrator from/through the student council because of the difficulty faced by the researcher in gaining access to students from all colleges within the university and the poor response rate to interview requests that went out with the questionnaire. Interviews were all conducted in person and lasted for approximately ninety minutes. All participants chose to speak Arabic during the interview although some English was used. A signed Arabic/English consent was obtained from participants. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

Table 3.2 provides the background characteristics of the participants. The names used for the participants are pseudonyms chosen by them for the purpose of this study. Assistance from social services is a proxy for socioeconomic status, which means that

students that receive social services assistance are likely to be of lower income than those who do not receive assistance.

**Table 3.2: Summary of background characteristics**

<i>Name /Age</i>	<i>College/Major</i>	<i>Father's education/occupation</i>	<i>Mother's education/occupation</i>	<i>Assistance from social services</i>	<i>Residence</i>
<b>Technical College</b>					
Salha 21yrs	Health Sciences/Health Information Management	Elementary School/Military	Elementary School/Homemaker	Yes	With both parents
Azza 21 yrs	Health Sciences/ Medical laboratory Technology	Elementary education/ Military	No formal education/Homemaker	Yes	Father deceased-lives with mother & siblings
Mona 20 yrs	Health Sciences/ Health Information Management	No formal education/Postal Worker- Deceased	Elementary School/Homemaker	Yes	Father deceased-lives with mother & siblings
Shaima 22 yrs	Education	Elementary School/ Civil servant	No formal education/Homemaker	Yes-mother gets assistance - estranged from husband who has another wife	Married lives with husband
Sara 20 yrs	Education	Some post secondary/ Businessman	Bachelor's degree/Homemaker	No	Married lives with husband

Asma 22 yrs	Information Technology	Intermediate School/Civil Servant- Deceased	Elementary School/Homemaker	Yes	Father deceased lives with mother and siblings
Yasmine 22 yrs	Information Technology	Elementary School/Store owner	No formal education/Homemaker	No	Lives with both parents
Maryam 22yrs	Business/Fin Services and Banking	No formal education/ Military	Intermediate school/Homemaker	Yes	Father has another wife. Lives with mother and brother
Ayesha 21yrs	Business	No formal education/postal worker	Intermediate school/Homemaker	No	Lives with both parents- Engaged
Maitha 21 yrs	Graphic Arts	Bachelor's degree/owns a advertising &marketing firm	Some post secondary/ was a preschool teacher	No	Lives with both parents
Aliya 22 yrs	Graphic Arts	Some post secondary education/administrat or at oil company	Secondary school/Clerk postal service	No	Lives with mother- parents are divorced

<b>Urban University</b>	Education	Intermediate school/civil servant	No formal education/Homemaker	Yes- parents receive assistance	Married lives with husband's family
Reem 21yrs					
Hamda 23 yrs	Education	Intermediate school/Police man	Secondary school	No	Lives with both parents
Salma 21yrs	Information Sciences	Bachelors degree/Marine Biologist	Some post secondary/preschool teacher	No	Lives with both parents
Amal 24 yrs	Information Sciences	Elementary school/civil servant	Elementary school/Homemaker	No	Engaged- Lives with both parents
Shurooq 20 yrs	Family Sciences	No formal education/civil servant	Intermediate school/Homemaker	No	Lives with both parents
Hind 21yrs	Biological Chemistry	Secondary school/store owner	Intermediate school/Homemaker	No	Lives with both parents
Maysoon 21yrs	Communication and Media Sciences/Integrated Marketing	Bachelor's degree/self employed businessman	Elementary school/Homemaker	No	Married lives with husband's family
Jawaher 21yrs	Communication and Media Sciences/Integrated Media	Secondary school/ex military-deceased	Bachelor's degree/Social worker	No	Engaged- lives with mother- father is deceased
Layla 22 yrs	Social and Behavioral Sciences	Elementary school/Driver	Elementary school/Homemaker	No	Lives with both parents
Lubna 21yrs	Business/Accounting	Graduate degree in law/Attorney	Bachelor's degree/high school teacher	No	Lives with both parents

No published research has been found on the demographic characteristics of Emirati college students and the institutions studied do not collect demographic data (which was the case in TC) or they do not wish to share it with the researcher (true for UU).

However, using the survey data from this study it can be ascertained that the participants are representative of the student populations at both institutions in terms of age, parental educational levels. Table 3.2 shows that 74% of students were between the ages of eighteen and twenty one and the remaining 26% were between the ages of twenty two and twenty five. Respondents at UU were more represented in the twenty two to twenty five age group. This was also noted in the participant group, with more UU in the older age group.

**Table 3.3: Age distribution of survey respondents**

<b>Age</b>	<b>%TC</b>	<b>%UU</b>	<b>% Combined data</b>
18-21	81	51	74
22-25	18	49	26

As presented in the tables 3.4 and 3.5, the majority of students in both institutions were first generation college students, which was also congruent with the interviewee sample. However, these tables also show that UU parents had higher levels of post secondary education compared to TC parents which was also found to be the case in the participant group.

**Table 3.4: Comparison of survey respondents fathers educational levels**

<i>Father's educational level</i>	<i>%UU</i>	<i>%TC</i>	<i>%Combined data</i>
No formal education	31	21	23
Elementary school	13	25	23
Intermediate school	11	16	15
Secondary school	14	23	21
Some post secondary	4	6	5
Bachelor's	22	4	8
Graduate degree	5	5	5

**Table 3.5: Comparison of survey respondents mothers educational level**

<i>Mother's educational level</i>	<i>%UU</i>	<i>%TC</i>	<i>% Combined data</i>
No formal education	29	34	33
Elementary school	17	28	25
Intermediate school	8	16	14
Secondary school	30	16	19
Some post secondary	7	3	4
Bachelor's	7	2	3
Graduate degree	2	0	1

I assumed that the socioeconomic status of students at UU would be significantly higher than those at TC, because both UU campuses are located in the two largest and most affluent cities where as TC is located in the Northern Emirates and is the institution of choice for students from more distant and less urban communities. However, results of the survey revealed only a slight difference between the two institutions in terms of social service assistance, with 20% of TC respondents receiving assistance compared to 18% at UU (see table 3.6). The participant group reflected the predicted difference in socioeconomic status more accurately with six of the eleven participants from TC (55%) stating that they receive financial assistance compared to one of the ten at UU (10%).

**Table 3.6: % of respondents who receive financial assistance from social services**

<i>Assistance from social services</i>	<i>%TC</i>	<i>%UU</i>	<i>%Combined data</i>
Yes	20	18	20
No	80	82	80

### **Qualitative data analysis techniques**

As recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) data from the interviews were analyzed inductively by reading and rereading the transcripts and underlining comments believed to be relevant. The next step was the creation of a profile of each participant using the research questions. The purpose of the profile was to present and maintain the voice of the participant so that the researcher can learn from hearing and studying what the participants are saying (Seidman, 1998). The subsequent reading and rereading of the profile led to the identification of concepts, influences, terms and phrases used to develop themes and categories (Charmaz, 2003). These themes and categories were ranked according to their frequency, those that overlapped were collapsed. This study used three of Bogdan & Biklan's (2003) coding categories to help with coding the data. These codes were assigned depending on the nature of the questions posed in the study. "Situation" codes were assigned to the first group of questions relating to reasons for pursuing higher education and what they hoped to gain from their education. The aim of situation codes is to combine and illustrate units of data that allow the researcher to gain insight into the participants' worldview in relation to phenomena of interest. "Participant' ways about thinking about people" was the second category under which codes were assigned. This family of codes was used to provide information about the participants' understanding of

how their families and society viewed their career choice and future goals. The third and final coding category was “social structure” under which the researcher placed all information relating to the types of social networks the participants belonged to and whether or not they perceived these networks as important to their educational and employment decision making.

### **Limitations**

1. The study focused on juniors and seniors and did not include representatives from all levels which could have been helpful to detect differences in educational and occupational expectations throughout the undergraduate experience. Including other groups of students could have also helped to identify the influence of schooling on decreasing or increasing the aspirations of these young women.
2. Data was collected over a four week period in May and June, very close to the end of the academic year (the academic year ends the last week of June). Although I do not believe that the timing had an influence on participant responses perhaps I could have gotten a better survey response rate if I had conducted the survey at an earlier time.
3. The fact that I am a western educated Emirati woman may have caused some participants to question my motives. Women in the Arab world are skeptical of the women educated in the west because they perceive that they may be pushing the western feminist agenda. Feminism as it is known in the West does not sit well with the majority of women in the Middle East because it is perceived as the primary method employed by both academe and the media to demerit and tarnish Arab and Islamic culture (Ahmed,

1992). To limit the effects of this assumption, I chose not to use feminist theories but other constructs in the literature to attempt to explain the disconnect between education and employment for Emirati women. I also made a conscious effort to listen very carefully to the voices of the women who are the primary audience to whom this project is addressed.

4. Implicit knowledge of the culture may have led me to omit or ignore details when translating the data. On the other hand, Brayboy and Dehyle (2000) consider being an insider as a distinct advantage and they argue that both insiders and outsiders should guard against lack of objectivity in gathering, analyzing and reporting data by being aware of their positionality in relation to the participants.

5. The study focused on participants from two institutions thereby limiting the ability to generalize the results to all Emirati women in higher education.

6. Although the study used both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data, in both cases it relied on self-reporting which is a technique that may be problematic because participants may not be candid in their responses.

### **Data Presentation**

The next chapter will present a brief overview of the life histories of the participants' to reveal the factors that shape the lives of these young women and affect their educational and career aspirations. In Chapters Five and Six the researcher will weave the quantitative and qualitative data together to present the reasons for the disconnect between education and employment for Emirati women using the research questions to organize and present findings. Constructs presented in Chapter One and literature

presented in Chapter Two will be referred to throughout to help explain participant responses.

Chapter Five will present findings related to the educational and occupational expectations of participants along with their perceptions of how their families and society view their goals and their general attitudes about work and ideal work environments. Chapter Six will present all findings relating to the types of networks that the participants belong to and the influence exerted by the networks in participant decision making and access to employment. The voices of the participants will be presented throughout the study to ensure that their voices are heard. In their article “Insider-Outsider” Brayboy & Deyhle (2000) discuss the importance of using the participants own words because it allows the participant to give their analysis of what is going on.

Finally, Chapter Seven will provide a discussion of the data in relation to research questions and the theoretical framework. Research and practice implications will also be presented.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: THE PARTICIPANTS**

This chapter will present a brief overview of the participants with a particular emphasis on the demographic and family characteristics and parental educational levels. The data was gathered to enable the researcher a glimpse into the home environment and to determine influences on educational and occupational decision making. It is also important because in the United States parental education and father's job prestige are associated with college attendance and persistence (Hout, Raffery & Bell, 1992).

### **Family Characteristics**

The participants were between twenty and twenty-five years of age, with an average age of twenty-one years. They had between five and fourteen siblings, with an average of seven. The participants were particular about mentioning their birth rank which was not unusual considering the pyramidally hierarchal nature of the family in the Arab world. Those that were the eldest usually mentioned the importance of being role models to younger siblings while those that had many older siblings complained of having to obtain feedback from numerous siblings to make decisions.

“I have one brother and eight sisters of whom I'm the eldest. I want to have a higher education degree to be successful-- And also because I 'm the eldest in my family and want to set a good example for my sisters----- I think that my sisters look up to me and want to be like me”- Salha

“I'm the youngest of eleven children -----It's difficult being the youngest in a large family because everyone tells me what to do. I really want to get a Masters degree in the UK but all ten of my siblings and my mom have a say in what I should or shouldn't do. Some of them think I'm too young and inexperienced and

that I wouldn't be able to handle being alone overseas others are supportive and they encourage me"- Azza

The participants' socioeconomic status was ascertained based on whether or not the family received financial assistance from social services. In the UAE only widows, the elderly/disabled and the working poor (particularly those that have many children) receive such assistance. Seven of the twenty-one (30%) participants in the study stated that their families received such assistance. In all the cases the parents' had less than a nine grade educational level. Six of the seven attended TC and resided in the northern emirates. As presented in chapter one, Dubai and Abu- Dhabi are the two richest emirates and the largest contributors to the federal budget.. The other five northern emirates have very little oil or gas and are largely dependent on the federal government funding for education, health and safety. They also have higher percentage of lower income groups because of the relatively cheaper cost of housing and lower wages.

In five of the seven low income families the father was absent from the household. In three cases the father was deceased and in the other two cases the father had another wife and was estranged from the participant's mother. In the two families which the father was present the reason for receiving assistance was that the fathers did not make enough money to support their large families which consisted of ten to twelve children.

In four of the five families in which the father was absent the male siblings took over the responsibility of the economic upkeep of the family. Some participants felt

guilty because they were able to get an education because of the sacrifices of their siblings. However, the young women in this study viewed their roles as financial contributors to their family as temporary and not viable after marriage. Two examples are presented below:

“There are three girls and two boys in my family; I’m the fourth child. Only the youngest who is a boy is still in school, all my other siblings have high school diploma’s and are employed (brother and two sisters). My father died four years ago so my brother and sister support the household. My brother is married and he and his family live with us. I’m the first to go to college in my family--I plan to get my higher diploma this semester and work right away because I really feel bad about not contributing to the household and supporting myself. All my older siblings went to work after high school and didn’t go to college so that they could survive and so they that they could help us. I feel its time for me to contribute I’m twenty years old now and I haven’t worked a day in my life. I really want to complete my bachelor’s degree but I’m torn between what I want to do and what I need to do to help my family. If my second sister gets married like the first one then she can’t contribute to the household and help my brother out like she’s doing right now---she’ll have her own family to take care off and maybe she wouldn’t work anymore like my eldest sister did after she got married----- because her husband wanted her to stay home and take care of their baby. But you see my brother is married and has twin daughters, his wife doesn’t work and so he really needs help”- Mona

“I have four brothers and I’m the only girl in our household, I’m also the eldest. My father left my mother and married another woman many years ago. I have four sisters and two brothers from my dad’s side. My mother had to get social service assistance to raise us because my father gave us very little to live on. I am the first to go to college in my family. Three of my younger brothers are working to help my mom and the youngest one is still in elementary school. One of my brothers got a job right after high school and the other two never finished high school when they started working. I’m the only girl and my mother didn’t want me to leave school and work.----she thinks it’s really important for me to get an education. She never wants me to lead the life of dependence that she led.----- My brothers take care of my mother and although I’ll help my mom after I start working, they all understand that that I have my own family now”- Shaima-married with one child

Only one participant stated that in her family female siblings contributed more of their earning to the household than her male siblings. She attributed that to the fact that four of her six female siblings were not married and lived at home while the male siblings were all married and lived outside the home. The fact that her sisters did not marry did not sit well with this participant, she stated that her sisters were from an era when many Emirati women placed education and employment before marriage. The economic role for the support of the family was blamed for what the participant called “loss of femininity”. The following paragraph presents Azza’s story:

“I’m the youngest of eleven children, my father died when I was four years old. My mother never had any formal education other than learning to read the Koran. My dad had some elementary school education----- approximately three or four years. I have four brothers and six sisters. My eldest sister has been married for a long time, she has a high school diploma and works at a women’s association. The second and third are also females and they both have degrees in social work from UAEU and are both employed as social workers. The fourth is also female and she has a degree from Kuwait University in health care administration and she now runs the radiology dept. of a major hospital. The fifth is a male and he went into the military after high school but is now completing a distance degree. The sixth is also male, he didn’t finish high school—and is in the military. Both the seventh and eighth are females—one has a bachelors degree in the humanities and the other has a MBA from the UK. The ninth and tenth are both males and in the military and I’m the youngest. My mother receives some assistance from social services but it’s very little now that I’m the only one that is not working, so my sisters contribute to household expenses. Four of six sisters are not married----I think they were deceived by the movement towards education. It was new at their time, women getting an education seemed very romantic and so they put marriage aside until it was too late. They are now in their late twenties, and late thirties. I think women can have it all----why not? I want to be able to get married and get an education and work. I would change my plans if my future husband didn’t want me to get a Masters from overseas. I would try and get one here. Marriage is really important in our society and there is no use denying that -----it’s the main reason they (my sisters) are bitter now ---- they feel cheated. They are angry and they are constantly trying to be men and they resent that. They never tell me that they are angry or bitter but I know they are because of the aggressive way in which they behave. I’m so aware of the loss of femininity in my sisters that I’m determined that I don’t want to be like them---

-I don't know perhaps it's the hardship and the responsibility that they took on that made them that way"- Azza

Of the twenty-one participants only four were married (19%). Two of the husbands had bachelors degrees and the other two had high school diplomas (one of the two was attending Community College through his employer). Of the seventeen participants that were not married, ten lived with both parents (59 %), three lived with mother and siblings because the fathers were deceased (18%), two lived with mothers because the father had other wives (12%) and one lived with her mother who was divorced (6%).

Three of the four married students had lived with their in-laws in the same household at some point. One of these three participants stated that she had a lot of problems with her mother-in-law, who believed that she needed to stay at home and take care of her son and grandson instead of going to college.

"My husband's family have not been supportive, his mother in particular has not been very happy with my husband's willingness to allow me to continue my education after we got married and particularly after the birth of my son. She wanted her son to marry someone who would stay home and focus on taking care of him. She's not that way about her daughters----they're all in college and she wants them to get an education but she wouldn't extend that to me. I had to move out of her family's home because she was beginning to influence my husband negatively----I almost had to quit school at one time. I'm so much happier now that I don't live with them"- Shaima

The other two stated that they did not have any problems with their in-laws and they generally stayed out of the couple's business.

“I have my own quarters and so I don’t interact with them too much because I’m at school for most of the time. They don’t really interfere in our life either so I haven’t had any problems at all”

“My husband is the eldest and he helps to take care of his family. Unlike his sisters who went to university right after high school, he had to work and help to support them. He’s working on a diploma at one of the junior colleges in the evenings -----Both my husband and his family want me to get an education and to work----I get along well with all of them”.

### **Parents Education and Occupation**

As presented earlier the majority (71%) of the participants were first generation college students. Only six of the twenty-one participants (29%) had at least one parent with some post-secondary qualification. In all but one of the six, both parents had some post secondary qualification and only one parent (a father) had a graduate degree. Among the remaining fifteen participants, 67% of mothers and 62% of fathers had not completed tenth grade. Thus, the majority of participants came from homes where there was no patterning for higher education.

It was interesting to note that the educational level of the parents’ had a direct relationship to the educational level of male siblings. In other words, all participants whose parents had some post secondary qualification stated that their male siblings were either currently pursuing higher education or had obtained some post-secondary qualification. First generation participants who were not low income had a higher number of female siblings who were either currently enrolled in higher education institutions or had obtained a post secondary qualifications compared to their male siblings. In

comparison to both groups (second generation college students and first generation students who were not low income) low income participants had the lowest educational levels for siblings generally but more so for male siblings because they joined the workforce to contribute to their households.

Eight of the twenty-one participants stated that their father's were civil servants (38%), six were in the military (29%), four owned their own businesses (19%), two were postal workers (10%) and one was a policeman (5%). Only five participants (24%) stated that their mothers worked. Of the five, three were teachers, one did clerical work and one was a social worker at a school.

### **Educational Experiences**

Twenty of the twenty one participants (95%) attended a public high school prior to enrolling in higher education. Only one participant had attended a private high school and was proficient in English upon enrolling in college. Arabic is the language of instruction in the public school system and although English is taught as a second language from fourth grade through high school, students in all public institutions undertake two semesters of English instruction prior to enrolling in freshman classes. Successful completion of English is a prerequisite for entry into the first year of college. Some of the young women in the study were critical of the English instruction they received in high school and believed that it did not prepare them adequately for the college experience.

“I had so many years of English in school but I didn’t really benefit from it. Everything I said or wrote in English was wrong when I first came to college. I didn’t even understand what the English teacher was saying because he spoke English differently from the way I’m used to hearing it----- I think he was from Australia” – Mona TC

“I’m hopeful that the new curriculum changes that the ministry of education is now applying will make it easier for future generations because it’s such a waste of time to study English for an entire year. I have friends that haven’t been able to get the TOEFL score the university requires and who just didn’t want to keep trying”- Hamda UU

Two participants from UU spoke of the lack of role models among faculty and a perceived sense of insecurity about the quality of education that they were receiving because of comments made by faculty members about their potential for graduate education.

“-----I guess what I’m trying to say is that I’m not against working but I’m particular about where I want to work----for example, I’d love to teach and do research in a university like this one but I don’t know what’s its like and I can’t even ask anyone----you know someone like me. There are no Emirati women faculty here at UU and I think it’s a shame because it would be nice to see an Emirati woman teaching science and doing research at the university” – Hind – Biological Sciences Major

“When I ask faculty about which graduate programs in the US or the UK I should apply to. They often make comments about how difficult it will for me to go to graduate school because what we do here is so watered down. They make it sound like graduates from universities in the UAE can’t make it in the West because our education is not as rigorous” – Salma Information Sciences

## **Summary**

The young women who volunteered to take part in this study were from large families and had similar educational experiences prior to attending college. In the majority of the families the father was the primary breadwinner. Only 24 % of mothers were employed

and the majority worked in schools. When the fathers were absent from the household due to death or estrangement from the family, the participants' spoke of the sufferings of their mothers and the sacrifices of their older mainly male siblings. A higher educational level of male siblings was noted among participants whose parents had some post secondary education.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS PART ONE EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER EXPECTATIONS**

The next three chapters will present the findings and conclusions of this exploratory study of the disconnect between education and employment for Emirati women. This chapter will present findings from both quantitative and qualitative data that illustrates the meaning/purpose of higher education to the participants along with an overview of their career expectations and the factors that they identify as helping or hindering their goal achievement. Chapter six will be devoted to social networks and chapter seven will summarize findings and discuss the implications of the study for research and practice. The researcher will use the research questions to present findings and will intersperse both qualitative and quantitative data using relevant quotations from participants to allow the reader to hear the voices of the participants (Bogdan & Biken, 2003).

### **Why do Emirati women pursue higher education?**

In coding and categorizing participant responses to this question from the participant profiles, four reasons for pursuing higher education were identified:

- Education as a family expectation for social and economic mobility
- Education as an “insurance policy” or “weapon”
- Education to achieve a set goal
- Education as an acceptable thing to do

The most common response by the participants to the question “why did you choose to pursue higher education?” was family expectation. Thirteen of the twenty-one (62%) women interviewed stated that they enrolled in a higher education institution because their families expected them to. Reasons why they believed higher education is important to their families and particularly their mothers, can be categorized into two groups. First, higher education is seen as an opportunity for social and economic mobility and parents want their children to have access to education because they didn’t have access to it. Second, mothers in particular believed higher education could ensure against future hardship-“education as a weapon” and “education as an insurance policy”.

### **Education for social and economic mobility**

“I felt that I was capable of doing more with my life and it (HE) was available. I’m the first in my family to go to college because my siblings all went to work at the age of 17 or 18 right out of high school and I didn’t want a clerical job that didn’t pay well, so I decided to get a degree of some sort so that I’ll be more employable and have a chance of getting better pay”- Mona- father is deceased, had no formal education and mother has elementary school education.

“I never thought of not going to college. I guess I never had a choice because if I said that I didn’t want to go my mother wouldn’t have let me. I don’t think that I would want to stay at home or work with a high school diploma because people with high school diplomas don’t make any money so I think college is a good choice- Jawaher-father is deceased, mother has a bachelors degree

“My parents really want us to get an education. They did not have the opportunity to get an education and so they focused on us and they encouraged us to pursue an education”- Shurooq- father has no formal education and mother has an intermediate school education

“In my family it was expected that I join a higher education institution upon finishing high school. All my sisters went to higher education so I never thought that I had an option not to pursue higher education”- Azza father deceased, had elementary school education and mother has no formal education

This quest for social and economic mobility and the influx of first generation students into higher education institutions is not unique to the UAE. In the United States the number of women, minorities, low-income and first generation students in higher education has been on the rise. In the 1970's a bachelor's degree was considered a passport into the American middle class (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). More recently in a study by Terenzini (1995) on "First Generation College Students: Characteristics, Experiences and Cognitive Development" showed that first generation college students join higher education institutions to gain upward mobility and that higher education institutions aim to influence policy towards increasing access, to improve social and economic equity for traditionally disadvantaged groups.

The low educational level of Emirati parents and mothers in particular is an important reason for their insistence on higher education for their daughters. The parental education of current students in higher education institutions in the UAE is low compared to other countries in the western hemisphere because education is relatively new to the UAE. It was not until many years after the discovery of oil in the early 1960's that education became widely accessible. Emirati men had access to education and diverse employment opportunities well before their female counterparts. Boys schools were established many years before girls schools, which explains the gap between mothers' and fathers' educational levels.

Tables 5.1 and 5.2 compare the parental educational levels of freshmen women in public four year institutions in the US in 2001 (obtained from the Higher Education Institute-

HERI) to the parents' educational level of freshman women entering Urban University in 2003.

**Table 5.1: Comparison of Father's educational level HERI\* and UU**

<i>Father's educational level</i>	UU	HERI*
Less than high school	43%	12%
High school diploma	18%	27%
Certificate, diploma, higher diploma	7%	4%
Some college	7%	19%
Bachelor's degree	14%	23%
Graduate degree	10%	14%

**Table 5.2: Comparison of Mother's educational level HERI and UU**

<i>Mother's educational level</i>	UU	HERI*
Less than high school	58%	10%
High school diploma	20%	27%
Certificate, diploma, higher diploma	7%	5%
Some college	3%	22%
Bachelor's degree	9%	24%
Graduate degree	2%	11%

\* Freshman women, Fall 2001, Public Four-Year Colleges

These tables were published with permission from the Office of Institutional Research at UU

As shown above the educational levels of mothers' at Urban University are much lower than that of fathers' compared to the US sample. However among study respondents, Urban University has a higher percentage of parents' with bachelors and graduate degrees compared to Technical College. Among the participant group only six of the twenty one participants (29%) had a parent with a bachelor's degree, which

indicates that most of the students both participants (71%) and respondents are first generation college students (see tables 3.4 & 3.5 in Chapter Two).

### **Education as an “insurance policy” or “weapon”**

“My mother has always said that “your education is your weapon”. I’m lucky that my husband has been very supportive of my education. ---Our financial situation as I was growing up and my mom’s inability to obtain respectable employment was always a driving force for me”-Shaima-mother has no formal education

“She (mother) sees education as really important for all of us because she says I live at home now and all my needs are taken care of, but who knows what will happen in the future. Perhaps it wouldn’t remain that way and there’ll be a time when I’ll really need to depend on myself---who knows what could happen in the future and so she says education is kind of an “insurance policy for the future”. She always says that if she had an opportunity to be educated her life might have been very different”- Asma – mother has an elementary school education

Only two of the twenty-one participants’ responses clearly fit the “Education as an insurance policy or weapon” category. The lower educational attainments of Emirati mothers (presented in the tables above) due to their lack of access to education could be the cause for their insistence on education for their daughters. Another reason why mothers in particular are emphasizing education, is that education could mean less dependence on husbands’ for financial support can be very beneficial in cases of divorce, abandonment or widowhood. With the high divorce rate (33%) among Emirati’s documented in the literature it is surprising that only two participants provided comments that fit this category.

The first two categories are consistent with Holland & Eisenhart's (1990) theme of school work for "Getting over" which was the most common reason for pursuing and persisting in higher education cited by women in their study. The authors used this theme to illustrate that going to college and getting through was important because it led to a degree that could be used to secure employment. The young Emirati women in this group were expected to access higher education and encouraged to persist so that they could better themselves.

### **Education to achieve a set goal**

The second most common group of responses were related to a more personal drive to succeed but a lack of support from families. Six of the twenty-one participants (29%) stated that they entered higher education with a set purpose in mind, to obtain a degree/qualification in a field that they were drawn to, or that they felt they would be good at. All six downgraded or changed their majors to something more acceptable to their parents. According to the participants' the main reasons for lack of family support were, distance from the university in which the desired major was offered, inappropriateness of the career for the young woman's' future responsibilities and financial constraints. The majority of participants spoke of not being able to leave home to travel overseas or to live in dormitories as the primary reason for their family's disapproval.

“I really wanted to be a dentist and I wanted to apply to the only dental school in the Emirates which is a private school but my parents didn’t encourage me maybe because it’s not public and it costs quite a bit. So then I joined (TC), my older sister was here then so it made sense---she talked me into it. I think she had a major role in my being here”- Aliya- Graphic Arts major

“I wanted to be a physician but I didn’t want to leave the UAE or join the Dubai Medical College because I don’t think it has a good reputation. I guess I could have gone to UAEU but my family encouraged me to go to (UU) and I didn’t want to leave home either so I stayed. (UU) is close to home and it was offering science related courses so I enrolled in it. My brother who is a physician didn’t encourage me to go to medical school because he said-- it’s a difficult career for a women and it takes her away from her family for long periods of the time”- Hind- Biological Chemistry

“I wanted to be a physician at first but when my now husband proposed I changed my mind and decided to do something else. Arts was my second choice after medicine but then I thought that it may be too narrow and that I might have problems with finding suitable work so I decided to major in Communication and Media Sciences instead”- Maysoon- Integrated Marketing Communications major

“I’ve always wanted to do chemistry but my family wouldn’t let me go to UAEU in Al Ain and live in the dorms so I had no choice but to join (UU). I was always been attracted to chemistry because my high school chemistry teacher really made an impression on me and convinced me that chemistry is an important field---- now I’m an education major but maybe I’ll teach chemistry”- Reem- Education major

This group was somewhat similar to Holland and Eisenhart’s work for “Doing Well” group, who viewed college as a way of gaining recognition for their natural abilities and skills, but were then discouraged by the grades that they obtained which caused them to transfer to majors that they perceived to be more manageable. However, the key difference between the two groups is that unlike the young women in Holland and Eisenhart’s study Emirati women were not discouraged by their grades. Instead they were

never given the opportunity to do what they had set out to do because their families did not permit them to leave home.

The main reason for the family's insistence that young women remain at home is closely related to the notion of "honor" which is paternalistic notion that is largely determined by ones own personal behavior and by the behavior of ones kin. Women's behavior in daily life particularly in interactions with men beyond her immediate family bears heavily on her own personal honor and that of her family. The main reason for segregation of the sexes and the inability of young Arab women to leave home prior to marriage is the preservation of the chastity of women and hence family honor (Delaney, 1987, Abu-Lughod, 1999). The following quotes illustrate this concept:

"I was always an A student and I was really good in the sciences----I really wanted to go to medical school in Ireland. My parents never objected to that when I was in high school but when I graduated they said that it would not be appropriate for a young single girl to live alone away from her parents in a foreign country. They didn't even think it was appropriate for me to go to the American University here because its co-educational and they didn't want me mixing with men"- Lubna- Accounting major

"I came into higher education wanting to be a social worker. I was really interested in that field. I started of in the college of Family Studies and then moved to education -----Family Studies seemed like a dead end because I was not going to end up being a social worker. My family would never allow me to do that kind of work, so I moved to education----they liked that because with an education degree I'd never have to work with men"- Hamda- Education major.

### **Education as an acceptable thing to do**

Two of the twenty-one participants (10%) indicated that higher education was the only choice that they had since there was nothing else that they could do. One clearly stated

that her family allowed her to enroll in a higher education institution only because she did not receive a marriage proposal. The other participant stated that she enrolled in higher education because she did think that she had the option of doing anything else.

“I was the only daughter that didn’t get married before getting to high school and I always wanted to get an education so I did---My family don’t really value education, as a girl my family wanted me to continue going to school because I didn’t get any marriage proposals if I did I wouldn’t be here today”. Yasmine- IT major

“Well, like I said it was not a matter of choice for me, my parents expected me to go to college. I never really thought about not going. I couldn’t travel for a year or work so education was the only option available to me.”- Sara- Education major

Considering the importance of marriage in the Middle East which is cited frequently in the literature, and the fact that most participants identified marriage and motherhood within their goals for the next five years, it is interesting that only one participant clearly articulated that her family perceived higher education as a waiting station for marriage. This ambiguity about the role of education in relation to marriage was also illustrated in responses to the statement “women have a better chance of finding a husband if they have a college degree” which was posed in the survey. Responses revealed that like in Holland and Eisenhart’s study women from middle to upper incomes were more likely to pursue higher education to obtain suitable husbands more so than lower income women. In the survey 30% of total respondents agreed with the statement, 44% were neutral and 26% disagreed. There was more agreement among UU (35%) students compared to those at TC (27%), probably because of the higher socioeconomic status of UU respondents (see table 3.6).

This finding would also be consistent with literature that posits that some women particularly those of middle class seek marriage as a consciously sought alternative to a career. These women are generally aware of structural inequalities in the occupational world and they seek husbands in order to be socially and financially secure. By choosing a husband instead of a career after acquiring an education they know that they can use their education if they need it.

**Table 5.3: Relationship between marriage and college degree**

<i>Women have a better chance of finding a suitable husband if they have a college degree</i>	<i>%TC</i>	<i>%UU</i>	<i>%Combined data</i>
Strongly agree	11	11	11
Agree	17	24	19
Neutral	46	39	44
Disagree	13	19	14
Strongly disagree	13	7	12

### **What do they intend to do with their degrees?**

Participant responses to questions related to where they saw themselves in five and ten years can be categorized into four themes-

- Want it all- want further education, a career, marriage and children. Some were not sure they could achieve all their goals
- Work until children- would like to work for a short time but family is the priority
- Education for nurturing- don't plan on working but want to continue with schooling to raise children that can better contribute to society

- Work for financial gain and independence -want to work right after graduation to contribute financially to their households and to achieve financial independence

### **Want it all**

Of the twenty-one participants, nine (43%) said they want to further their education, establish a career, get married and have children.

“Five year plan---- I see myself with a bachelor’s degree and a good job. I plan to get a Masters degree after getting my bachelor’s and working for a few years. I want to start at the bottom and work my way up because I think it’s important to know what people are doing at the lower level if you want to become a leader. So five years from now I hope to be in middle management at least and to be working on my Masters. Ten year plan---- I hope to be a manager by then. In my personal life—I’ll be married and have kids by then”- Salha- Single

“I want to get my bachelor’s and maybe a Masters degree in Animation or Marketing. My dad really wants me to get my bachelor’s before working so I think that’s what I want to do. Finishing my bachelor’s is my most important goal at the moment. If I can find a job then I’ll work in the mornings and go to school in the evening. Five year plan: Still working and married---I just don’t see myself staying at home but who knows, I haven’t really thought about it. Ten year plan: I’ll have a good career with a few children”- Maitha-Single

“I intend to work---- I also want to get a masters and a doctorate. Five year plan: I hope to have at least started if not completed a Master’s degree. I hope to have achieved a high rank in my place of employment. I should have 2.5 children by then (laugh). Ten year plan: I’ll be working, finished with my Masters and thinking about the Doctorate”- Sara- Married

Among this group there were some who were not sure if it would be possible for them to achieve all they intend to achieve. They spoke of the choices they will have to make between what they want to achieve and their roles as mothers, daughters and wives and the societal constraints they will face.

“I really want to get a masters degree in a technology related field but as you know it’s not available in the UAE and the culture doesn’t really allow for women to travel overseas, so I’m going to have to do something right here in the Emirates. If I can get into a suitable Masters program----like maybe get a scholarship to attend one of the private universities then I’ll go to work. I’d really like to work in a place where I can keep my skills current because of the nature of the field IT. Five year plan: I’ll have finished my masters I hope---perhaps I’ll be working on my doctorate. I’ll be married and I’ll have a career that I can be proud of. Maybe I’ll be an administrator at one of the local colleges. Ten year plan: Maybe I’ll be a stay home mom. I mean really how realistic are my goals-----sometimes I think they are not realistic for me. What I want is so different from what my society and sometimes I want. I guess this is confusing but maybe as a stay at home mom I can help my children achieve what I couldn’t achieve”-  
Salma- Single

“Five year plan: I’ll be an employee but not in a bank at least not with costumers. I want to be in corporate banking which is very different from retail banking. I would like to do something in corporate banking but I know that I can’t because the hours are so long and its an intense job which wouldn’t allow me to perform all my duties as a daughter, wife, mother etc. Ten year plan: I hope to establish my own business and work for myself which will allow me to set my own schedule and spend more time taking care of my family. I’d love to do it (corporate banking) but I also know it’s not feasible for me”- Ayesha- Engaged

The high expectations of Emirati women are consistent with those of other young women in the Middle East. The literature shows women’s education in the Middle East has both reproductive and transformative functions. A study of Kuwaiti high school seniors revealed that the young women had high expectations for both further education and employment. Although some wanted to be teachers like their role models at school, many students aspired to overcome the gender differences in education and employment. However, the majority of students wished to work in sex segregated environments and although they valued education to marriage they valued marriage over work. The Kuwaiti women continuously expressed contradictory attitudes. For example, they stated that they

highly valued motherhood and saw motherhood as a primary role for women but that they also valued careers and financial independence (Massiaslas & Jarrar, 1991).

This ambiguity was also seen in this study as evidenced by survey respondents' agreement with statements related to the role of women. In response to the statement "A woman's place is in the home", twenty three percent of total respondents were in agreement, twenty nine were neutral and forty eight percent disagreed. The difference between the institutions in response to this question was statistically insignificant (see table 5.4). However in response to the statements "As heads of households men should be given greater work opportunities", seventy four percent of total respondents were in agreement, eleven percent were neutral and only fifteen percent disagreed (see table 5.5). This response is congruent with the gender paradigm gives males authority over the public sphere and situates them as the primary wage earners in the family unit. Responses to the statement "Women ought to receive the same pay as men for the same work", showed that the majority seventy two percent were in agreement, thirteen percent were neutral and while fourteen percent disagreed (see table 5.6). More respondents from TC (17%) disagreed with the notion of pay equity for men and women compared to only 6% from UU. In contrast the vast majority (67%) agreed that women should be allowed to run public and private corporations (see table 5.7).

**Table 5.4: Role of women**

<b>A woman's place is in the home</b>	<b>%TC</b>	<b>%UU</b>	<b>%Combined data</b>
Strongly agree	14	5	12
Agree	9	17	11
Neutral	28	30	29
Disagree	18	29	20
Strongly disagree	31	19	28

**Table 5.5: Access to work**

<b>Men should be given greater work opportunities</b>	<b>%TC</b>	<b>%UU</b>	<b>% Combined data</b>
Strongly agree	62	27	54
Agree	15	37	20
Neutral	10	15	11
Disagree	5	16	7
Strongly disagree	8	5	8

**Table 5.6: Pay equity**

<b>Same pay as men for the same work</b>	<b>%TC</b>	<b>%UU</b>	<b>% Combined data</b>
Strongly agree	55	57	55
Agree	14	26	17
Neutral	14	11	13
Disagree	10	5	9
Strongly disagree	7	1	5

**Table 5.7: Opportunity to run public and private corps**

<b>Women should run public and private corps</b>	<b>%TC</b>	<b>%UU</b>	<b>% Combined data</b>
Strongly agree	39	46	41
Agree	23	35	26
Neutral	26	13	23
Disagree	7	4	6
Strongly disagree	5	2	4

Other studies in the Gulf Arab states document findings similar to the study of Kuwaiti high school students with participants presenting ambivalent and somewhat contradictory responses in relation to attitudes about the role of women. Sanad & Tessler (1988) found that Kuwaiti women voiced contradictory attitudes about the family, education and work. For example, the majority supported the economic participation of women but they also stated that preferential treatment should be given to men in hiring, pay and promotion.

The literature states that the conflict between modernity and traditionalism is the main cause of ambiguity which is more pronounced in the Gulf region because of rapid modernization. The transition from poverty to riches and the change in the status of women has been rapid and dramatic. The effects of these changes were presented by Dhaher & Al Salem (1987) in a comprehensive study on Gulf women's attitudes towards modernization and their perceived place in society. These authors found that among women in the Gulf states studied Emirati women believed they had the most equality with men but their responses to other questions indicated that they were also believed they had the least freedom to make decisions concerning their lives.

### **Work until children**

Five of the twenty-one participants (23%) made responses that fit this category. That is, they intend to work for a short time until they have children. The majority of participants in this group didn't see themselves in a career or work situation in the next ten years.

“Five year plan---I’ve not thought about it---but I’ll definitely be done with school, I’ll be married and working. I’ll have a good career by then. Ten year plan---I don’t plan to work for too long. When I’m done with getting as much education as I can and I’ve worked for a few years to get some experience then I’ll probably stay home and take care of my kids”- Asma-Single

“Five year plan: I’ll work for a few years and try and get paid time off to get a Masters degree. I also hope to get a doctorate eventually. So in five years I’ll probably still be working on my Masters. I also help to have my second child by then. Ten year plan: I’ll probably have more kids and who knows where I’ll be career wise in ten years with a family to take care off. I’ll just be doing whatever it takes to take care of my family even if that means not working or getting a doctorate”- Shaima Married with one child

“Five year plan: I hope to have launched a good career by then-----maybe I’ll have had a few promotions by then. Hopefully, I’ll be married with a few kids----I don’t intend to sacrifice my personal life for my professional life. Ten year plan: I don’t think I’ll be working in ten years if I’m married----I don’t want to have to work two jobs, one at home and the other at work. Unless maybe if my husband needed my income and in that case I wouldn’t want anything challenging or time consuming. I’m realistic and try to be honest with myself so that I would not be disappointed”- Lubna- Single

Caregiving is primarily a women’s responsibility in most countries of the world. The literature presented in this study shows that the responses of the young women in this group are consistent with the traditional gender paradigm in the Middle East identified in the 2004 World Bank study. This paradigm is based on the notion that men and women are different biologically and that these differences determine social function. That is, they have different responsibilities, with men in charge of the public sphere or paid employment and women in charge of the private sphere or the home. The following quote illustrates the Emirati women face problems if they fail to balance their primary responsibilities at home with work.

“I think many people in our society respect women who work and try and support their families while taking full responsibility for raising their children and their households. The woman that fails to maintain her family responsibilities (taking care of her home, her husband and her children) gets no sympathy from society. I know that my husband’s family and some of his friends will say that I’ve been in school for five years and now I’m off to work -----they’ll say I should spend some time at home with my husband and my son. They ask him why he lets me go to school, drive and do as I please. But my husband really believes in me and what I can offer society as a teacher”- Shaima

### **Education enhances nurturing**

Four out of twenty one participants (19%) stated that they don’t want to work or would not be allowed to work by their families and therefore do not consider employment as a future goal. All five want to obtain graduate degrees because they believe it will help them to raise children who can contribute to society. This group like the latter is consistent with the traditional norms in the Middle East that value the role of motherhood above any other role.

“None of the women in my family work and it is not something that I can do while I’m living at home, my family would not approve. Five year plan----I’ll have a bachelor’s degree, I’ll be married and I’ll have children. I don’t see myself at work, but I’ll be working on my son’s career. Ten year plan: I see myself as an educated mother of three children who dedicates her life to helping them achieve their goals and as an important member of the community through my status as mother who is raising children that are aware of the world”-Yasmine

The comment made by Yasmine, pertaining to working on her son’s career is another example of the gender paradigm in the Middle East which places the responsibility of paid employment on the male and childrearing on the female. Yasmine sees it as her

responsibility as a mother to ensure that her son has the means to provide for his family.

She also sees her education as an advantage to achieving her nurturing goal.

Other participants in this group also discussed the importance of obtaining an education to raise children that can benefit society by being better citizens. These comments are consistent with the revered role of motherhood in the Middle East and the centrality of the mother's role childrearing.

“I don't want to work after I graduate I want to continue going to school. I do not know what I will do yet but that's what I want to do. I might even get a second bachelor's in something else if I can't find a graduate program that I like in the country. I have friends who have done that gone into another field altogether and got another Bachelor's. Five year plan: I'll be married and I'll be using everything I learned to help my family”- Shurooq.

“I'll will probably be a homemaker although I don't mind working if I need to. I do intend finish my degree--- because I'm getting married this summer and I have three semesters to graduate. Five year plan----I'll be married, hopefully I'll be done with school and maybe even go to graduate school, if it's available in the UAE. (why?)-- “Education is enlightenment” so I guess that's one reason, the other reason is that I see myself as a happy homemaker who can really be an active member of society by affecting my children and making them better citizens”- Amal

### **Work for financial gain and independence**

Three participants (14%) stated that they intend to work after graduation and remain at work for the foreseeable future to assist their families financially and to achieve a certain degree of independence from the primary wage earner in their family. Two of the three participants' receive assistance from social services and in all the cases the father was not the primary wage-earner.

“I plan to get my higher diploma this semester and work right away because I really feel bad about not contributing to the household and supporting myself. All my older siblings went to work after high school, so that they could survive and so that they could help us. I feel its time for me to contribute. I’m twenty years old now and I haven’t worked a day in my life. I really want to complete my bachelor’s degree but I’m torn between what I want to do and what I need to do to help my family”- Mona- father deceased- receive assistance from social services

“I want to work right after I get my higher diploma because I need to help my mom, she doesn’t make a lot of money and I want to help her. Five year plan---- I’d like to work in education. So perhaps I’ll be at a place like this. I’m not in a hurry to get married so I don’t see my life being very different from what it is now. Ten year plan---Still working probably as a free lancer to give me more flexibility. I hope to be married –maybe even have a few kids by then”- Aliya- parents divorced- mother is the primary wage earner

The responses of these participants are only partially consistent with literature on low SES and first generation students in the United States which shows that students with college-educated parents have better access to human and cultural capital through family relationships. Consequently, compared to their peers with highly educated parents, first-generation and low SES students are more likely to enroll in community colleges, drop out or experience difficulty in accessing and understanding information and attitudes relevant to making the right decisions in relation to the importance of obtaining a college degree (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004). The responses are consistent in that both the young women quoted above decided to work after obtaining a higher diploma and would not wait for an additional three to four semesters to get a bachelor’s degree because immediate work and financial independence was important to them. Unlike non low SES students who were more likely to state that they intended to continue with their education and obtain bachelors and graduate degrees. The key difference between low SES students in the US and those in the Emirates is that unlike their

counterparts in the US, who experience difficulty accessing higher education because of the lack of both economic and cultural capital. Emirati women of low- income do not have the economic barrier because higher education is provided free of charge and they are therefore more likely to access higher education but are still disadvantaged because they may be forced to exit prior to attaining bachelors degrees.

Data from the questionnaire confirmed interview findings and showed that majority of respondents (89%) intend to graduate and the same percentage (89%) plan to seek employment after graduation. Survey respondents also stated that their families supported their choice to work (91%). As seen below in Table 5.8 a larger percentage of students at UU intend to graduate compared to respondents for TC. However, a larger percentage of TC students intend to work upon graduation, have greater family support for work and plan to remain at work for the foreseeable future.

**Table 5.8: Intention of graduate**

<i>Intention to graduate</i>	<i>%TC</i>	<i>%UU</i>	<i>%Combined data</i>
Yes	87	96	89
No	3	0	2
I don't know	10	4	9

**Table 5.9: Intention to work upon graduation**

<i>Intention to work</i>	<i>%TC</i>	<i>%UU</i>	<i>%Combined data</i>
Yes	92	80	89
No	1	1	1
Maybe	7	19	9

**Table 5.10: Family support for work**

<i>Family support for work</i>	<i>% TC</i>	<i>% UU</i>	<i>% Combined data</i>
Yes	93	84	91
No	2	7	3
Not sure	5	9	6

**Table 5.11: Length of time planned for work**

<i>Length of time planned for work</i>	<i>%TC</i>	<i>%UU</i>	<i>%Combined data</i>
For the foreseeable future	93	83	91
Only until I get married	3	8	4
Only until I have children	3	9	5

Three reasons can be found in the data to explain the difference between the two student bodies and hence their responses. First, students at UU have slightly higher socioeconomic status than TC students and may therefore be less likely to translate their education into paid employment (see table 5.9). Second, TC's strong mission to meet the markets needs for a technical workforce may draw students that want to use their degrees in the work place. Finally, the higher parental educational levels of UU participants could be an important contributing factor in their intention to persist. Studies done in the United States has shown that parents' level of formal education was the single most powerful predictor of persistence and degree attainment (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004).

In comparing responses from women in this study to those studied by Holland and Eisenhart, similarities and differences emerge. In both studies the socioeconomic status of the participant had an effect on their future goals. Women from Southern University (predominately white- middle to upper class) were similar to the participants in the “work until children” group, in their view that they would give up their careers to raise a family and that men should provide primary support for the family, while women took care of the children. Women at Bradford (predominately black and low income) were similar in their responses to “work for financial gain and to achieve independence” group in their need to look out for their own economic positions.

Two key differences emerge in relation to future goals between the American women in Holland and Eisenhart’s study and Emirati women in this study. The first is the notion of “benefiting the country”, “giving back to society” and “serving my country” which were mentioned by participants in this study either in reference to work or in reference for caring for the family but was not discussed by participants in Holland and Eisenhart’s study. This philosophy of “greater good for all” was presented in the literature as a phenomenon that is unique to new nation states like the Emirates where there was a clear and strong link between education and development (Rabo, 2000). The second difference between the two groups of women is the exceptionally high expectations of Emirati women. The majority of women in the study, both interview participants and survey respondents had high educational aspirations. Table 5.12 shows the educational aspirations of survey respondents, UU students have significantly higher educational

aspirations which can be explained by the higher educational levels of their parents. The majority of TC respondents aspire to bachelors degrees because unlike UU from which students exit with a bachelors degree, TC has numerous programs that don't lead to a bachelors.

**Table: 5.12 Educational aspirations by institution**

<i>Aspired degree</i>	<i>%TC</i>	<i>%UU</i>	<i>% of Combined data</i>
Bachelors	46	11	38
Masters	27	39	30
Doctorate	16	45	22
Post doc	11	5	10

**What factors do they identify as important for goal achievement? And what factors do they perceive as obstacles to goal achievement?**

The two most frequently cited factors were marriage and family. Family was generally perceived to be a source of support, while marriage and childbearing were overwhelmingly cited as a possible cause of major changes in future plans. As shown below in table 5.13, 85% of survey respondents confirmed that family support was important for the career advancement of Emirati women.

“I think family support is the most important thing for achieving educational and career goals”- Salha

“Family support is really important for me. If my family sees that I'm doing well in school they'll encourage me to continue my education”-Asma

**Table 5.13: Importance of family support**

<i>Importance of family support for career advancement</i>	<i>%TC</i>	<i>%UU</i>	<i>%Combined data</i>
Very important	72	84	75
Important	11	10	10
Somewhat important	8	4	7
A little important	3	1	2
Not important	6	1	5

Considering the importance of the family in the Middle East participant responses related to the importance of family support for educational and career advancement is expected. The family is viewed as the most important unit in society. Family interests' overrides individual interest for both men and women and the family has a great deal of influence on the attitudes and choices of its members (World Bank, 2004)

The availability of childcare and part-time work was also cited as important for goal achievement by the interview participants and survey respondents (Table 5.14 & 5.15). The importance of a personal drive to succeed and the need to work hard are also mentioned by participants as being essential. Data from the survey showed that 88% of respondents believe in hard work and 69% agree that a personal drive to succeed is important for career advancement (see tables 5.16 & 5.17 ).

**Table 5.14: Flexible work environment**

<i>Flexible work environment</i>	<i>%TC</i>	<i>%UU</i>	<i>%Combined data</i>
Very important	60	66	61
Important	23	21	22
Somewhat important	11	11	11
A little important	2	2	2
Not important	4	0	4

**Table 5.15: Importance of childcare provisions at work**

<i>Childcare provisions at work</i>	<i>%TC</i>	<i>%UU</i>	<i>%Combined data</i>
Very important	39	45	40
Important	26	25	26
Somewhat important	20	24	21
A little important	8	5	8
Not important	7	1	5

**Table 5.16: Willingness to work hard**

<i>Willingness to work hard</i>	<i>%TC</i>	<i>%UU</i>	<i>%Combined data</i>
Very important	70	69	69
Important	16	19	19
Somewhat important	4	4	4
A little important	5	4	4
Not important	5	4	4

**Table 5.17: Personal drive to succeed**

<i>Personal drive to succeed</i>	<i>%TC</i>	<i>%UU</i>	<i>% Combined data</i>
Very important	37	30	36
Important	30.5	43	33
Somewhat important	21	17	20
A little important	6	8	6
Notimportant	5	1	4

Interview participants clearly believed marriage to be the main obstacle to goal achievement. Some women narrated the stories of mothers, sisters and friends, whom upon marriage were not able to continue with school or not able to work, either because their husbands didn't approve or because they voluntarily gave up their interests for the interest of the family.

“From my perspective I think marriage would derail my plans for achieving my educational goals. I have a firm belief that the woman’s role is to take responsibility for the children---childrearing is the single most important role that women can perform in any society. I think it’s a role that’s really important for the well being of the society as whole. I would stay home to raise my children----perhaps if my kids are older or if I have a lot of free time then I’d work outside the home”- Yasmine

“Marriage is the one reason that would make me change my plans. I have this opinion based on what I have seen happen around me----friends, cousins, and friend’s sisters all change their minds after they get married and focus on being good mothers and wives”-Salma

“-----Marriage, particularly if my husband is not understanding of my interest in work or in completing my education. Right now my fiancée is okay with my plans to work and complete my education but he could change his mind----and so that’s the only circumstance under which I would change my mind”- Ayesha

Participants’ views of marriage as an obstacle to goal achievement is congruent with the responsibilities placed on women as wives and mothers and the centrality of male authority within the household in Middle Eastern society.

### **What are Emirati women’s perceptions of how their family’s and society view their career choices and future goals?**

#### **Family**

Participant responses to questions related to their perceptions of how their families view their career choice and future goals can be grouped into two categories: Positive and supportive and Ambivalent. For the participants, the term family was associated with all the individuals that the participant resided with. Since the majority of participants (89%) were single the term family is generally associated with at least one biological parent. For

married participants (19%) the term family included husbands and in-laws. In both cases, participant responses show that attitudes about education and employment were generally influenced by the degree of segregation in the job environment and the educational level of the parents.

### **Positive and Supportive**

The majority of participants who perceived their families to be positive and supportive of their career choice and future goals were in Education.

“My family and my husband’s prefer teaching because it does not involve any mixing with the opposite sex”- Reem-UU Education

“My family was happy with my choice to be a teacher because it means that I never have to work with men”-Sara-TC Education

Participant responses in this section are consistent with the literature on the importance of gender segregation in the work environment. Studies have shown that the inability of women to work in close proximity with men is an important factor in the low labor force participation rates in the Middle East. The acceptability of teaching to participant families is not surprising because girls’ schools are the only areas that provide an all female work environment and also because teaching is a public service profession that is considered socially and culturally acceptable for women (World Bank, 2004).

Participant responses in this category also included participants who were in non traditional fields but who believed that their families valued higher education and were therefore positive and supportive of the participant’s career choice and goals. These

participants were not first generation college students, which shows that parental educational levels play a role in the perceived value of education and hence the support provided to participants'. Based on the literature cited in Chapter Two parental education levels have been linked to higher levels of social and cultural capital and support for college education (Bourdieu, 1986).

“I think I have a lot of support from my family and friends. I would have gotten a lot more criticism if I chose not to go school or work. I always did well in school so my family really encourages me. My dad is really into graphic arts and so he was excited that I wanted to do that”- Maitha-TC Graphic Arts- Father’s educational level: Bachelor’s degree- Mother’s educational level: Some post secondary

“My family and my in-laws have always been supportive of my choice of career and my interest in employment. They value education and see it as important”- Maysoun-UU Communication sciences major.- Father’s educational: Bachelor’s degree  
Mother’s educational level: Elementary school- Husband’s educational level: Bachelor’s degree

### **Ambivalent**

Some participants in this category perceived their families as disinterested in their education and their careers because they viewed education as something that the participants could use if the need arises.

“My family don’t want me to work. They think since everything is provided for me, I should have no reason to work. They just don’t see work as necessary for women. Attitudes about education and work vary among urban and rural populations. I’m from a rural background and so my family sees education as a thing that I can use only if necessary”-Amal- UU Information Sciences

Others in this category use the terms “disinterested” and “they don’t understand”. This could be due the fact that the majority of participants are first generation college students and their parents’ lack of knowledge about the experiences and processes of being in college which alienates them from their daughters.

“My family has never interfered in what I want to do in terms of my education. I don’t think its fair of me to say that they are disinterested, but I know that they don’t really understand what I do in college, and if told them that I don’t want to go any more, they’d be fine with it. I am the first one in my family to go to university”-Layla- UU Social and Behavioral Sciences

Quantitative data from the survey also illustrated that respondents believed that their families overwhelmingly support the choice to work (91%). There are differences among the two institutions in relation to support for employment which was also seen among participants. UU students had less family support for work compared to TC. This can again be attributed the higher SES levels of students at UU (see table 3.6).

### **Society**

In response to questions related to societal support it became clear from participant responses that segregation was an important factor in how positively a career was viewed by society. The more a career is perceived to involve working with men, the less it is regarded positively. Teaching reemerged as a profession that is regarded positively and is encouraged by society:

“Education is a great profession for women in the UAE. Its encouraged by society because its service related and women get to deal with children”- Sara- Education major

‘Teaching is considered a noble profession and its something that he (Husband) will never be ashamed off”- Shaima Education major

### **Not supported and discouraged**

Some majors such as Graphic Arts/ Design Arts, Banking and Information Technology/Sciences were perceived by the participants as “Not supported and discouraged” generally because of the degree of mixing between the sexes in these fields.

“My friends and particularly my family always say that it would be great if I could find a place where I won’t have to work with men. They are concerned with what people may say if I work with men, because it’s really likely in the IT sector. I don’t really see it as a problem----if I respect myself and dress appropriately then I don’t anticipate any problems at work”- Amal

“Society doesn’t see graphic arts as a serious profession; they see it as something women do to pass time, a hobby almost. Maybe because my dad is in a field where he works with artsy people---he appreciates the arts and understands that it’s more diverse than people think”- Maitha

Banking in particular was not perceived to be very acceptable because of three reasons: 1) it involves working with men 2) it involves working with interest which is prohibited by Islam. Prohibition of interest covers all kinds of interest on money borrowed or lent, by banks, other corporate bodies or individuals. Employment in a bank is viewed as inappropriate because it involves assisting the bank in taking interest 3) and it has long working hours.

“The UAE is a conservative country and so education is a good choice for a young woman. It’s respectable unlike a bank as an example where one would have to deal with clients---education will allow me to practice without any rules crowding me. I understand society’s discomfort with women being in non segregated environments because our religion and culture prohibits it---so I believe it is best for women to remain within the realm of what is considered acceptable”- Sara

“I don’t think banking is considered a respectable place of employment in the Emirates. Many families don’t like their daughters to work in banks because they have to work on Thursday (first day of the two day weekend in the Emirates). The fact that their income will be tainted with interest money, which is religiously unacceptable, is another factor. It’s also a private sector job so it’s not as stable as public sector work and the hours aren’t as good.”- Ayesha

### **In Transition**

Participants in the fields of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Communication and Media Sciences, Family Sciences and Accounting perceived that societal attitudes about their career choice were in transition. Either because they were relatively new to the country or because they believed attitudes were changing.

“Our country has changed so much in the last thirty years-----norms and values have changed that it’s bound to create an impact on the community----Social and Behavioral Sciences is an important area of study and attitudes are going to change as more women work in this field”- Layla

“When I first told my friends/cousins that I was doing Accounting they all told me, it’s a male dominated profession and that I would find it difficult to attain a career in it. But I just completed an internship at a company and they offered me a job so I think societal attitudes sometimes lags behind what is actually happening in real life”- Lubna

### **What kinds of work environments do Emirati women prefer to work in?**

Responses related to the kinds of work environments the participants prefer to work in or those that they consider ideal showed that the majority of participants preferred to work in female only environments or in places where there is very little contact with men in general and Emirati men in particular. Working with Emirati men posed a unique challenge for Emirati women because Emirati men were more likely to cause trouble for young women by gossiping about them to friends or relatives and thus tarnishing their honor.

“I don’t like working with national men because I’ll have to watch what I say and wear. It just makes life easier if you don’t have people who could gossip about you to your friends, neighbors etc. I just wouldn’t be comfortable”- Salma

Working with non Emirati men also posed challenges for women whose families want them to work in female only environments.

“The ideal job environment for me is one in which I won’t have to work with men. It’s really important for me because I’ll have a lot of problems with my family if I work with men. I think this an issue for many Emirati women who want to work but they have families like mine who forbid them from doing so”- Amal

They also stated that the work environment and hours should be flexible to their needs as wives, mothers and daughters. Government employment was preferred because of the work hours. “Fair”, “dynamic” and “challenging” were additional adjectives used to describe what they expected in the work environment.

“It would be really nice if the headmistress would be understanding of the nature of life for married women----like if she won’t mind it if I’m occasionally late, or if I had to take time off to take care of my son if he were sick or something”- Shaima

“I’m not worried about the work hours because they (schools) tend to be pretty stable like from 8am to 3pm at the latest----which are great working hours”- Hamda

“I would appreciate it if my boss could understand that differences in martial status can have an influence on work----I don’t expect to be given less work but I would appreciate it if they would understand that I have other responsibilities at home, if I were married and had children”- Shurooq

Results of the survey confirmed the above findings and provided additional insight into Emirati women’s attitudes about employment. The importance of female only work environments were corroborated, although not in the strength in which it was stressed by interview participants. In the response to the statement “Women should not work in predominately male work environments”, those that agreed with the statement to some degree (37%) had a slight margin over those that did not agree (35%) and the remaining (29%) choose to remain neutral.

**Table: 5.18: Attitudes towards working with men**

<i>Women should not work in predominately male work environments</i>	<i>%TC</i>	<i>%UU</i>	<i>%Combined data</i>
Strongly agree	21	14	20
Agree	16	21	17
Neutral	30	23	29
Disagree	20	29	22
Strongly disagree	13	13	13

Government sector jobs were considered ideal for some participants because their work hours are considered reasonable compared to banks and private sector jobs. This clear partiality towards public sector employment was also seen among survey respondents, with 77% of all respondents preferring public to private sector employment. There were significant differences among the institutions particularly in relation to self employment, with 13% of UU students citing self employment as a choice compared to only 2% at TC. This difference can be explained by the lower support for employment that exists at UU, which may cause students to look to other means of using their education.

**Table 5.19: Choice of work sector**

<i>Choice of work sector</i>	<i>%TC</i>	<i>%UU</i>	<i>% Combined data</i>
Public	79	67	77
Private	13	16	13
Self employment	2	13	4
Other- semi-government	6	3	3

**Table 5.20: Sector perceived to be better for women**

<i>Public sector employment is better for women</i>	<i>%TC</i>	<i>%UU</i>	<i>%Combined data</i>
Strongly agree	26	10	23
Agree	20	29	22
Neutral	34	46	37
Disagree	11	13	12
Strongly disagree	9	1	7

The importance of sex-segregated employment and jobs in the public sectors were also found to be important in studies done both by international organizations and other

researchers. The World Bank report (2004) cites the “code of modesty” which calls for the segregation of men and women in the quest to guard family honor as an important element in the traditional gender paradigm that inhibits women’s from working.

Studies done on the reasons for female preference for public sector employment showed that egalitarian hiring policies, liberal family and maternity leaves and the stability of employment in the sector were the key reasons for the increased representation of women (Doumato, 1992; Longva, 1993; Seikely, 1994).

## **CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS PART II SOCIAL NETWORKS**

### **What role do the social networks of Emirati women play in their educational attainments and labor force participation?**

The importance of family was cited repeatedly by both interview and survey participants as being crucial in the lives of Emirati women. Families were generally portrayed as a source of support, but they were at times perceived as an obstacle that limited participant career aspirations. Therefore it came as no surprise that both interview and survey participants cited family as the single most important network they belonged to and confirmed its importance in the educational and decision making process.

#### **Type and influence of network**

The two groups of networks most commonly referred to by interview participants were family and friends. Family referred to only parents and siblings for single participants and both parents and siblings and husband/in-laws for married participants. Friends generally signified college friends which were also high school friends in some instances. Participants used terms such as “main people in my life”, “key people” and “influential people” to describe their families.

When asked to rank members of their networks by order of importance in educational and employment decision making, answers varied depending on the family situation. In the majority although not all cases in which the father was present (lives in the household with the participant), he was seen as the most important individual in influencing the educational and employment decisions of the participant.

“There are some decisions that I take on my own like what grade I will teach. My parents particularly my father is the one that influences my decisions. He is concerned about the distance I’ll have to travel to the school I’ll be teaching at, and he wouldn’t let me drive until I get married. He may have one of my brother’s drop me off and pick me up. He may even get a driver for me. No one can influence him in our household one way or the other. My brothers have no say in any of our decisions---it’s my dad that we go to directly for everything”-Hamda

“My parents try to convince me that they are right-----but my dad is the one that makes the final decisions in our household. My mother voices her opinions just like we do but he makes the ultimate decision”- Salma

There were two cases in which the father sought feedback from older siblings. In the case of Yasmine who was the first of twelve siblings to go to college the father appears to be less conservative than older siblings. She stated that the only reason she was allowed to pursue higher education was that unlike her other sisters she had not received a marriage proposal. She talked about her family has being very conservative so perhaps she posed unique issues that her father never had to deal with such as field trips, internships etc. These issues may have been perceived by her conservative older siblings as detrimental to family honor. When asked to rate family members by importance in decision making Yasmine placed her father first and her older siblings particularly her brothers second.

“In terms of my family, my father is the most important figure in any decision that I make regarding education and work. He makes all the decisions in our household. He can be influenced by my older sister and brother whom he discusses issues with. They tend to be more conservative and they are concerned about what the society may think, if I do this or that. He tends to listen to my views on the issue as well-----and I end up convincing him most of the time particularly if the issue relates to me”- Yasmine

In the other case, Hind, a Biological Sciences major at UU is the third of seven siblings, the eldest of whom is a physician. Hind intended to study medicine but her brother opposed, because he believed a career in medicine would conflict with her role as a future wife and mother. In the following quote she explains without any bitterness how her parents use different methods to obtain information to help them to advise her. When Hind was asked to rate people that influenced her educational and employment decisions she placed her brother first, father second and mother third.

“My brother didn’t encourage me to go to medical school because he said it’s a difficult career for a woman and it takes her away from her family for long periods of time-----My brother has a lot of influence because he influences both my parents and his opinion is very important in our family. My father will listen to what my brother thinks about a particular thing and then he will ask his brother (uncle) whom he respects before he makes his decision. My mother tends to go about things in a different manner from my dad----she believes in asking people who have experience in a particular problem etc. For example when I told her I wanted to study medicine she asked female physicians what the advantages and disadvantages of being a physician were----they both told me what they found and I had to decide what to do”- Hind- Biological Sciences major UU

Mothers, brothers and sisters emerge as the individuals with most influence in households where the father was deceased or not living with the family.

“My older sisters are the key people in my network. They provide both opportunities and obstacles for me depending on the situation. For example, they don’t want me to go graduate school overseas because they think I’m too young and that I can’t take care of myself but they don’t place stipulations on where I work or want I major in ”- Azza- father deceased- lives with mother and sisters

“My mother are really important in both educational and employment decision-making. Even if my brother disagrees with me he defers to my mother for the final decision”- Mona- father deceased- lives with mother and siblings

“He (brother) has always been the most interested in me. He gives a lot of positive feedback and support and he trusts my judgment. No one else has any influence or say in my life. For example I thinking of getting this really nice job in Abu Dhabi

and its okay with my family to move, I'd take my mom with me of course"-  
Maryam- father has another wife- lives with mother and brother

Among married participants, the husband is cited as the most influential person in the participant's decision making. Only one of the six married students cited her mother-in-law as the primer source of influence on her husband and hence her decision making.

Shiama, who was also presented in chapter four spoke of the influence that her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law had over her educational and employment decision making:

"If I had to rank them by importance I'd say my mother-in-law is the most influential person when it comes to decisions about education and work. My husband discusses all our decisions with them (his parents) but his mother has always been the one that makes decisions about the daughter-in-laws so she works on my husband and tries to make him more controlling of my movements. My husband ranks second and my mother ranks third. His sisters are also very influential in my decision-making-----I'd say they rank third too----they're constantly trying to tell my husband what I ought to be doing"- Shiama

Some participants particularly those in the "ambivalent" group in relation to family attitudes about career choice, spoke of other relatives who had higher educational levels than their parents as people whom they approach for help in making decisions.

"My aunt (mother's sister) who has been to college and who has a career helps me and my other siblings with decisions regarding education and employment. My parents really don't really know the details of what my career choice entails or the nature of the work that I do, so that makes things easier for us sometimes and in other times it makes it more difficult because sometimes they have strong feeling about certain things that they have preconceived ideas about"- Layla

None of the interview participants cited friends as being overtly involved in the decision making process. Although some participants stated that friends were influential

in steering them towards applying to a certain higher education institution or major.

Friends were mainly portrayed as providing “companionship” and “information”.

“Friends do influence my choice by providing information but I generally do what I want to do”- Salha

“My friends provide me with companionship. There are a lot of personal things I share with my friends and not my family”- Azza

The primacy of the family as the central unit for decision making was confirmed by survey respondents. As presented in Table 6.1, 70% of respondents view family members to be important in their decision making.

**Table 6.1 : Influence on educational and employment decisions**

<i>Influence</i>	<i>%TC</i>	<i>%UU</i>	<i>% Combined data</i>
Family members	70	70	70
Friends	3	8	5
Role models	17	10	15
Other (aunts, uncles)	10	12	10

As seen in table 6.1, 15% of survey respondents cite role modes as influential in the decision making process. However, none of the participants used the term role model when speaking of family members, although they did speak of mothers, older siblings and aunts whom could be also be viewed as role models. The assumption I made in Chapter Three about the importance of brothers in the decision making process and their conservative nature that was based of my experiences with Emirati women was not supported. There were only three instances in which brothers were mentioned as being

involved in decision making. Only in the case of Hind, was a brother presented as more important than the father in influencing the participant's decisions, but even in that case the participant had a role in making her own decisions although her brother did influence her.

At Bradford and Southern University the peer cultures were seen as the primary sites for social reproduction. In the two institutions studied by Holland and Eisenhart college peer cultures suggested that a woman's worth and social prestige was a function of her sexual attractiveness and her ability to find a marriage partner. The role of the family was seen as secondary to peers in perpetuating the culture of romance that was found to be so prevalent.

However, the importance of peers in Holland and Eisenhart's study did not prove to hold true in this study. Emirati women view family as the central social unit to which they belong. The Emirati family is consistent with Barakat's view in that it is patriarchal as evidenced by the authority and power commanded by the male head of household. It is pyramidally hierarchical with respect to both age and gender as confirmed by participant responses in relation to how older siblings advise parents on matters relating to them. It also appears to be nuclear since the majority of parents did not live in extended family situations. It is also undergoing democratization because the responses of the young women in the study are consistent to other research done in the region which shows that Gulf women are torn between traditionalism and modernity. This conflict is blamed for the ambiguity that they express about their feelings of equality on one hand and

subordination on the other. The presence of conflict indicates that the process of change has begun. Other signs of the democratization process include participants perceived contribution to the decision making process although the father continues to have the ultimate authority.

### **Social networks and employment**

In response to the question “who would you ask for help in securing employment?”- the overwhelming majority of participants named close family members and not friends or acquaintances. Almost all mentioned fathers and other male kin such as fathers-in-law and brothers only two spoke of sisters and mothers. The term “wasta” came up repeatedly-this term refers to use of contacts to assist with all matters of daily life from registering a car to finding a job. As presented earlier the majority of the young women intended to seek jobs in the public sector.

“If I were to look for work my sisters would be the ones I would approach for help because they are all employed and they may know of more job openings than I would”- Azza

“My dad probably has more of an influence than my mom in my employment choice or even access because he knows more people had he can tell a bad offer from a good one”- Salha

“I don’t really want to use wasta but I would ask my father to follow up on my application for me. So I think I’d use him to help to me get the job I want because he knows a lot of people in important places”- Ayesha

“I would try to find something on my own but if I can’t find anything I’ll have to use wasta----- public sector jobs, which are the most in demand, are so difficult to get nowadays specially for college grads. Its seems easier for high school grads to get clerical jobs in the government sector than it is for college grads because

college grads have to be given hard to find grades in the civil service which makes wasta so important. I would have to use my family for wasta because I don't know a lot of people outside my family. My aunt and my brother-in-law have offered to help me look for work when I graduate but as I said I'll look and see if I can find anything on my own first before I ask them for help"- Asma

It is clear from their responses that the participants are aware of the importance of the status and number of the contacts in securing employment. The importance of weak ties and connections with high status individuals documented in the literature as crucial to creating opportunities that increase social mobility and occupational status( Davern, 1999; Lin & Dumin, 1978; Ensel & Lin, 1981).

Two participants mentioned university job placement offices as providing support to help secure employment. One of two stated that her family's lack of high status contacts made her rely on the placement office.

"The college is the main source of jobs for graduates and although they don't participate in making the decision for us they do locate the jobs and help coach us for interviews and resume writing"- Salma

"I've applied for a job and I've used the job placement at the university for help with my CV and other things because my family and my husband's aren't well connected, so I don't see them being able to get me a job through their contacts"- Reem- Married- her parents receive social services assistance

It is clear from participant responses that my working hypothesis regarding Emirati women's use of "strong ties" is supported. The "strong ties" that Emirati women use are not friends but family. In fact they don't like to use friends as evidenced in the following responses

“I know through my friends that wasta is really important in finding work. So although I don’t like it --realistically I think that I’d probably have to use my father or my brother. I would never use my friends because I they may expect me to pay them back some how or they become jealous of my success, if I were to become successful”- Maryam

“My family are the only people I would look to help me find a job----like my aunt, sister, brother, uncle etc. I wouldn’t ask any friends because I’m sure that wouldn’t want me to get a job better than theirs or if we were to work in the same place they wouldn’t want me to move up the ladder faster then them. It would be a source of strain on any friendship if help to get a job came into the equation”- Ayesha

These finding is consistent with the literature which identifies the family as the primary mediator in resolving conflict and family loyalty as the foundation of the wasta system in the Middle East (Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1993). The students all qualify the use of wasta with “only if necessary” because as stated by the authors, people are reluctant to admit that they give or receive wasta especially outside the family. The inability of participants’ to ask their friends for wasta could be explained by the three following reasons: 1) Participants do not have the same loyalty to friends as they do their families and if they receive wasta they will in turn be indebted to provide it if called upon. 2) Perhaps the participants are aware that their friends do not have access to resources (power and prestige) needed to perform wasta because as women (particularly if they are also unemployed) they lack access to high status individuals (whom are men). It is also unacceptable for Emirati women to approach men beyond their immediate family for wasta because they would beholden them, which could seriously affect the woman’s honor. 3) The issue of jealousy was mentioned by participants as a deterrent to

asking friends for help. Fear of envy or jealousy is common among cultures that believe in the “evil eye” or harm caused by envy of a person, possessions or accomplishments.

### **Summary**

The dearth of women in positions of power in the Emirates presents a real dilemma for the employment of Emirati women who have no choice but to use close contacts to access employment, which deprives them of information from distant parts of the social system and places them at in a disadvantaged position in the labor market. Emirati women of low socioeconomic status are also more likely to lack prominent tribal affiliations through their families which could further disadvantage them.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

In the previous six chapters the researcher provided an overview of United Arab Emirates and the participants, discussed the rationale for the study and presented the methodology and findings of this exploratory study on the disconnect between the higher education attainments of Emirati women and their employment rates. This chapter concludes the study by presenting a summary of the findings in relation to the theoretical framework and literature. The research and practical implications of the study will also be presented.

### **Summary: Educational and Career Expectations**

Family expectation was the most commonly cited reason for pursuing higher education (61%). Families expected their daughters to pursue higher education to enable them to achieve greater social and economic mobility and also because it was important to parents to have their daughters take advantage of the availability of higher education. The majority of participants were first generation college students (71%), fathers had higher educational levels than mothers and UU parents had higher educational levels than TC parents. Two of the twenty one participants (10%) stated that they pursued higher education because their mothers' viewed higher education as an "insurance policy or weapon" for the future. The reasons why mothers advocated this view is that education would mean less dependence on husband's for financial support and could be beneficial to the young women in cases of divorce and abandonment.

These two groups, education as a family expectation for social and economic mobility and education as an insurance policy or weapon were similar to Holland and Eisenhart's (1990) theme of school as "getting over" in which a college education was sought because it could be used to secure employment. Contrary to studies on first generation colleges students done in the US, there were strong expectations among Emirati women to pursue higher education regardless of socioeconomic status because of the availability of cost free geographically and culturally accessible higher education.

29% of the young women that were interviewed cited more intrinsically motivated reasons such as a personal drive or calling as a reason for pursuing higher education. They intended to pursue careers in medicine and dentistry. However, this was met with lack of family support because the science majors sought were not accessible to the young women from their homes. This group was somewhat similar to Holland and Eisenhart's work for "Doing Well" group, who viewed college as a way of gaining recognition for their natural abilities and skills, but were then discouraged by the grades that they obtained which caused them to transfer to majors that they perceived to be more manageable. However, the key difference between the two groups is that unlike the young women in Holland and Eisenhart's study, Emirati women were not discouraged by their grades. Instead they were never given the opportunity to do what they had set out to do because their families did not permit them to leave home. The inability of young women to live away from home was cited as the primary reason for parental disapproval. Parental attitudes towards the importance of having their daughters live at home is

consistent with the literature on honor in the Arab world and the inherent pressure placed on women to maintain family honor (Abu Lugod, 1999; Delaney, 1987).

Only two of the twenty-one participants interviewed (10%) stated that they either viewed education as a waiting station for marriage or that they had nothing else to do and hence sought higher education. Considering the literature on the importance of marriage in the Middle East and the fact that most participants identified marriage and motherhood as a goal that they hoped to achieve within five years of graduation, it was interesting that only one of the twenty-one participants clearly articulated the link between education and marriage. Among survey respondents 30% agreed that higher education could lead to finding a suitable husband, 44% neutral and 27% disagreed. There was more agreement among UU respondents compared to TC respondents, which the researcher attributes to the higher socioeconomic status of UU respondents. This finding is consistent with the literature and the findings of Holland and Eisenhart's study which found that education is viewed by middle and upper social class women as a means to finding a suitable husband.

It is clear from the findings of this study that Emirati women have very high educational and occupational aspirations. All the participants and 89% of survey respondents intended to graduate from the institution they were enrolled in. UU had a higher percentage of students that intended to graduate (96%) compared to TC (87%). But TC had a higher intention to work (92%) compared to TC (80%). These findings are incongruent with literature on first generation students in the US who have difficulty with both access to and persisting in higher education because in this study 71% of the

participant group and 82% of survey respondents were first generation college students. The high access rates among Emirati women can be attributed to the fact that higher education is free of charge for all Emirati's and that women even those from low income families access higher education since the role of providing for the family falls largely on male siblings leaving women free to access higher education in higher numbers compared to male siblings. Parental educational levels were found to be linked to the educational levels of siblings in general and male siblings in particular. Participants who were second generation college students had more educated male siblings than those who were first generation college students probably because families that were not low income did not need their sons to work to assist with providing for the family.

The majority of both survey respondents (89%) and interview participants (81%) intended to work. Nine of the twenty one participants (43%) stated that they want to work, get married, have children and further their education. Some of the young women in this group expressed doubts about achieving their goals because of marriage and motherhood. Five (24%) stated that they intend to work until they have children. Four (19%) stated that they never intend to work, but that they view education as important to their future roles as mothers. Three (14%) stated that they intend to work to achieve financial gain and independence- all three students were low-income which indicates that low income women are more likely to translate education into work. The young women also spoke of "benefiting the country" or "giving back to society", which is something

that is unique to new nation states like the Emirates where there is a strong link between education and development (Rabo, 2000).

Survey respondents also perceived that they had strong family support for employment (91%). However, it became clear through interviews with participants that not all types of employment received equal support from families. There was a strong preference for public sector employment and all female work environments. Participants in feminized fields particularly Education perceived greater support from both family and society than those in traditionally non feminized fields such as Information Technology, Banking and Media Sciences. The degree of gender segregation was cited as crucial for both family and societal acceptance of career choices. This theme was echoed by participants in their response to the query concerning ideal work environments. Gender segregated environments in general and environments with a few or no Emirati men were considered ideal because of the importance of maintaining family honor. Other factors such as the work flexibility, reasonable work hours (6-8 hours) and the availability of childcare provisions at work were also considered important. Both the preference for public sector employment and sex segregated work places are consistent with the literature on women and employment in the Middle East (World Bank, 2004; CAWTER, 2001; Doumato, 1992; Longva, 1993; Seikaly,1994).

Despite the high educational and career expectations of Emirati women, 32% of respondents' agreed with the statement that a woman's place is in the home. 75% agreed that men should be given greater work opportunities than women and 14% disagreed with the statement that women should receive the same pay as men for the same work. While at the same time 67% agreed that women should be given the opportunity to run public and private corporations. All single participants cited marriage and children within their five year plan (95%) or ten year plan (5%), and all married participants stated that they intended to have children within the next five years. However, marriage and child bearing were also overwhelmingly cited as barriers to goal achievement. Participants spoke of mothers, sisters and friends who changed their plans upon marriage or motherhood to please their husband's or because they found it difficult to continue with their education or career along with their responsibilities as wives and mothers. The ambiguity in responses in relation to the role of women coupled with high educational and career expectations is consistent with the literature on women in the Gulf region (Dhaher & Al Salem, 1987; Sanad & Tessler, 1988; Al Kadhi, 1978; Massiaslas & Jarrar, 1991). This ambiguity is associated with the conflict between modernity and traditionalism which sends mixed messages to women. Society expects women to contribute to development as evidenced by the provision of free education, yet at the same time it values motherhood above all else and places the responsibility of economic care of the family on the male.

Family support was cited as the most important factor for goal achievement by both participants (90%) and survey respondents (85%). Participants perceived that family acceptance of their goals would increase their chances of achieving those goals. Considering the importance of the family as the most important unit in Middle Eastern society (Joseph, 1999; World Bank, 2004; Barakat, 1985) it is not surprising that the family unit plays an important role in the lives of the young women in this study. Additional factors such as a personal drive to succeed (69%), hard work (78%), childcare provisions at work (66%) and flexible work environments (83%) were also cited as important for career advancement.

Participant responses in relation to how their families perceived their goals indicated that family support was largely linked to two factors:

**1. Parental educational levels** – participants who were second generation college students spoke of the importance of education in their families and were likely to report higher levels of family support regardless of the career. Whereas some first generation participants used words such as “disinterested” and “they don’t understand” to explain that their families lacked knowledge of the experiences and processes of being in college. This finding is consistent with literature that links parental education levels to higher levels of social and cultural capital and support for college education (Bourdieu, 1986).

**2. Degree of segregation** - The type of career the participant was pursuing had an affect on the level of perceived support. Students in the field of education perceived that their families were supportive because teaching would not involve working with men. This finding is congruent with literature on the importance of gender segregation in the work place. Studies have shown that the inability of women to work in close proximity with men is an important factor in the low labor force participation rates in the Middle East. The acceptability of teaching to participant families is not surprising because girls' schools are the only areas that provide an all female work environment and also because teaching is a public service profession that is considered socially and culturally acceptable for women (World Bank, 2004).

Societal support was also closely linked to the degree of gender segregation. Careers that involved working with men such as Information Technology, Design Arts and Banking were not perceived positively. While education was considered ideal because it did not involve working with men and it also was perceived to be congruent with the role of women as nurturers of the young. Other majors/ professions such as Accounting, Social and Behavioral Sciences and Communication Sciences were considered to be in transition because of the relatively recent nature of their emergence as careers in the UAE.

Regardless of major the majority of participants preferred to work in female only environments or in places where they would have minimal contact with men in general and Emirati men in particular. This feeling was not as strong among the survey respondents with only 37% agreeing with the statement “women should not work in predominately male environments”, compared to 35% who disagreed and 29% who remained neutral. Participants explained that working with Emirati men could cause problems for the young women because they would have to watch what they say, wear and who they talk to because Emirati men are more likely to “gossip” about them to friends and relatives thus tarnishing their honor.

Both participants and respondents (77%) preferred public sector employment because of its short work hours. More UU respondents (16%) chose private sector employment and self employment (13%) compared to TC (13% and 2% consecutively). The significant difference in preference for self employment among UU respondents can be explained by their higher socioeconomic levels and their lower family support for employment. The strong preference for public sector employment because of the benefits, pay and short working hours is cited in the literature as an important reason for the high unemployment rates of women in the Middle East and North Africa (World Bank, 2004, CAWTER, 2001)

Based on the educational and career expectations of Emirati women identified in this study in relation to the construct of romance posed by Holland and Eisenhart (1991), it is

clear that marriage replaces romance as the goal to which all unmarried participants aspire and family replaces peers as the central unit of social reproduction by perpetuating existing gender roles and norms. Although similarities exist between the two groups there was no overt preoccupation with marriage among the participants. The lack of longitudinal data similar to that in Holland and Eisenhart's study, coupled with the lack of data on student persistence in the Emirates and the ambiguity of participant responses makes it difficult to confirm the hypothesis posed by the researcher.

It can therefore be ascertained that the Emirati women in this study are aware of their position as caretakers within society but that they also believe that their education will be rewarded. Their view is reinforced by the strides that Emirati women have made in the last thirty years and their future earning potentials vis-à-vis their mothers. Unlike low income women, those of middle and high socioeconomic status do not necessarily translate education into work.

### **Summary: Role of social networks**

Family was cited as the single most important network that the participants belonged to. Friends were generally described as providing "companionship" and "information" rather than being overtly involved in the decision making process. 70% of survey respondents cited the family as the unit in which all decisions were made concerning education and employment. Role models were also cited as important (15%) in the process by respondents although they were not mentioned by participants, which lead me

to believe that perhaps respondents may be referring to extended family members as role models. Within the family the father emerged as the individual with the greatest influence in the decision making process. Despite the ultimate authority of the fathers and the participants deference to his decision, it was clear from their comments that the young women saw themselves as partners in the decision making process.

In cases where the father was absent from the household due to death, divorce or estrangement from the family, the mother and older siblings held the most influence. Among this group influence was linked to their role as providers irrespective of gender but closely linked to age. The lack of continuity of male authority following the death of the father by brothers and other male relatives and the perceived sense of empowerment voiced by the participant's calls into question the theory of Neopatriarchy (Sharabi, 1983) and supports the Barakat's (1985) concept of Democratization. This concept is further supported by the ambiguity of responses described above which shows that the young women who partook in this study were torn between their traditional roles as mothers and wives and the changes that the region as a whole has been undergoing for the last thirty years which is reflected in their higher educational achievements.

The family was also cited by all participants as the key network that they would use to secure employment. The majority of the participants cited fathers', brothers or uncles as the contact persons for the "wasta" process. Wasta refers to the use of contacts to secure favors and it is cited in the literature as the pervasive means by which social networks function in the Middle East. The use of friends as contacts was considered

inappropriate by the participants who felt uncomfortable with being indebted to someone other than a close family member. They generally cited older male kin such as fathers, fathers-in-law, uncles and brothers as primary sources of *wasta*. One participant mentioned that her family did not have any high status contacts which forced her to rely on the university employment office to try to secure work. The majority of participants (80%) sought jobs in the public sector which further necessitates the use of *wasta* because of the size of the bureaucracy and the shortage of positions in the sector due to automation and the decline in the numbers of school age children in the region (World Bank, 2004).

These findings are congruent with literature on the use of contacts in the Middle East (Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1993) and they support the hypothesis posited by the researcher that Emirati women use close network ties to access employment, which deprives them of information from distant parts of the social system and places them at in a disadvantaged position in the labor market. Emirati women of low socioeconomic status are even more disadvantaged by their lack high status contacts.

### **Social Trends and Higher Education**

It is often argued that women's access to higher education transcends the basic acquisition of knowledge and skills, because it elevates the social and economic position of women, and allows them to gain access into circles into which they would otherwise be excluded (Youssef, 1977; CAWTER, 2001). In countries such as the United States in which women have had access to higher education since the 1800's reasons for pursuing

higher education have evolved over the past two centuries. In the 1800's only the elite had access to higher education and for women, education was considered a form of "social grace". This view remained common until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when more women gained access into higher education and education began to be viewed as a means for job preparation. In her book, In the company of educated women, Barbara Miller Solomon (1986) discusses the two hundred year history of American higher education and its impact on the lives of women in the United States. She presents stories of women who attended college at the turn of the century and reveals that they had the highest non-marriage rates of any group in US history. These women were the first group to attend college with the option to use their education outside the home and they were conflicted between family and a career. A recent study published in the US by the Center for Research on Families (Rose, 2004), found that higher education is no longer viewed as a impediment to marriage and motherhood as it did in the past. In fact, both men and women who completed a college degree were more likely to be married compared to those who didn't complete a college degree because of the economic returns achieved through higher education.

In contrast to the long history of higher education in the US, the UAE has achieved a great deal in relation to the education and employment of women in its short thirty four year history. This progress was championed by the late President and Father of the Nation, Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahayan and his wife Sheikha Fatima Bint Mubarak Al Nahayan.

"Nothing could delight me more than to see the woman taking up her distinctive position in society... Nothing should hinder her progress... Like men, women deserve the right to occupy high positions according to their capabilities and qualifications." –Sheikh Zayed

"I really have confidence in the future in the girls of the UAE and am sure that what President H.H. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahayan and Their Highnesses the Rulers of the Emirates have done for our country's daughters and their unstinting support for them to achieve postgraduate education will yield the fruit expected by the community"- Sheikha Fatima from UAEU graduation 2002

The local press and research institutions like the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR), have attempted to identify social trends linked to the increased educational levels of Emirati women. These trends include the high divorce rates among Emirati's, the drastic increase in the number of unmarried women and the increase in the marriage age. The following quotes from media publications illustrate these trends:

"As is the case with all Arab societies, the improvement of women's educational status and their participation in the labor market has led to the increase of the marrying age. In fact, there's an increase in the rate of young women who have faced difficulty in finding men suitable for marriage with appropriate age as well as the equivalent educational and intellectual level - the most important preconditions for marriage. The divorce rate in the UAE has risen to an extent that has worried officials. According to the 2002 statistics from the Ministry of Planning, approximately 30% of marriages resulted in divorce in the first year of marriage" (ECSSR, 2004).

"More national girls have been delaying their marriage plans to pursue higher education or make a professional career." Mansoor was speaking at a conference hosted recently at Umm Almoumineen Women's Association in Ajman on boosting childbearing in the national family. He noted that in 1999, some 93.5 per cent of national girls aged between 15 and 19 years were unmarried compared to 47.5 per cent in 1975. The trend to delay marriage was even higher in the older age groups. Some 62.7 per cent of those between 20 and 24 were unmarried in 1999 compared to 11.5 per cent in 1975. Moreover, around 31.6 per cent of those aged between 25 and 29 were unmarried in 1999 against 2.9 per cent only in 1975" (Zeitoun, 2001).

The increase in the age of first marriage is a common trend in countries where women have access to higher education. In her study of marriage trends among Egyptians in Cairo, Hoodfar (1997), found that educated Egyptian women marry late and often marry men with similar or higher educational levels. She also found that Egyptian men preferred to marry educated women because of their earning potential but they hardly ever married women of higher socioeconomic or educational levels. Although no published studies are available on the marriage preferences of Emirati's, it can be speculated that although education currently negatively effects the chances of marriage for some Emirati women, this trend is likely to change with globalization and consumerism which will necessitate the women's economic contribution to the household.

### **Implications for Research**

1. My research encompassed only a few weeks of the lives of the young women. A longitudinal study of the participants to follow up and identify differences between aspired and achieved goals would be beneficial. The relationship that could be established through such a study could also enable the researcher to access the participants' families to conduct a more detailed study of social networks.
2. The present study did not include focus groups or peer group observations. Research involving peer group observations would provide a better sense of their

influence on participant choices and would shed more light on the importance of marriage within the peer group.

3. No data on persistence rates were made available to the researcher by the institutions. Such research is crucial to identifying at risk populations and increasing graduation rates.
4. This research only touched on the influence of socioeconomic status on educational achievement, more studies need to be done that address this issue among both male and female students.
5. There are no published studies on the lower higher education participation rates of Emirati men. Research in this area is vital in traditional societies such as the Emirates which rely on the male as the primary source of economic support for the family unit.
6. A detailed assessment of what the current generation of educated women want for their daughters is an important area of future research because it would chronicle the evolution of the expectations from mothers to daughters.

### **Implications for Practice**

Since the majority of Emirati women (both participants and survey respondents) intend to work the most significant implication is related to reducing barriers to their employment. These barriers include the importance of gender segregated work environments, lack of flexible work environments and childcare provisions at work, and the confinement of women to strong network ties.

The importance of gender segregated work environments poses a significant challenge to the employment of women in the Emirates and the region as a whole. To address this challenge both private and public corporations need to create environments which give women a certain degree of space. This could include separate work spaces or sections, sectioned off eating areas etc. The increased employment of women could help families feel more confident that the young women are not alone or among few women in large male dominated environments.

Countries such as Sweden and Holland that allow women to use alternative methods such as flextime- alternative start and ending time for work, job sharing- allow two or more employees to share the same job, compressed work weeks- allow employees to put in total week work hours in less than five days, and telecommuting- working for a remote site/home have higher percentage of women in the workforce. These strategies along with child care provisions at work using women who are professionally trained in early childhood development would lead to increased numbers of women in the workforce.

The confinement of Emirati women to strong ties can pose a significant disadvantage for them in accessing jobs particularly in the private sector which has the lowest percentage of Emirati's in general and women in particular. Higher education institutions need to play a more active role in linking graduates to alumni and other women in private corporations to help situate graduates within networks that can enhance their employment and career advancement opportunities.

## Appendix A

### Student Questionnaire

#### Section I: Demographic information

1. How old are you?

- a) 18- 21
- b) 22-25
- c) 26-30
- d) 31-35

2. What is the highest degree you will earn at this institution?

- a) Certificate
- b) Diploma
- c) Higher Diploma
- d) Bachelor's degree

3. What will you obtain your degree in?

- a) Information Technology/  
Information Sciences
- b) Business
- c) Health Sciences
- d) Graphic Arts/ Art & Design
- e) Family Sciences
- f) Social & Behavioral Sciences
- g) Education
- h) Communication Technology/  
Communication & Media Sciences
- i) Engineering
- j) Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. What is the highest degree you hope to earn in the future?

- a) Bachelor's degree
- b) Master's degree
- c) Doctorate
- d) Post Doctorate

**Section II: Expectations:** Please pick the answer that best describes your personal view

11. Do you plan to graduate from this institution?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) I don't know

12. If you don't plan to graduate, circle the answer that best describes your reason

- a) Not interested in obtaining a degree
- b) Plan on getting married soon and my future husband doesn't want me to continue with school
- c) I have/will have children and so I don't intend on graduating
- d) My family won't allow me to work so there is no point in completing a degree
- e) I need to work to support my family

Other \_\_\_\_\_

13. Do you intend to work upon graduation?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Maybe

14. Does your family support your choice to work?

- a) Yes
- a) No
- b) Not sure

**If you answered “Yes” to question 13 please answer questions 15, 16&17**

15. How long do you plan to work?

- a) For the foreseeable future
- b) Only until I get married
- c) Only until I have children

16. Where would you be most interested in working?

- a) Public sector
- b) Private sector
- c) Self employment
- d) Other: \_\_\_\_\_

17. Would your family be supportive of your choice of employment sector?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Not sure

**If you answered “No” to 13 please answer questions 18 and 19**

18. If you don't intend to work circle the answer that best describes your reason

- a) Not interested in work
- b) I prefer to stay home
- c) My family don't want me to work
- d) Other \_\_\_\_\_

19. If you don't plan on working, what could change your mind about going out to work?

- a) Better work opportunities
- b) Better pay
- c) More family support
- d) Availability of childcare at work

- e) All female work environment
- f) There is nothing that would make me change my plans
- g) Other: please specify\_\_\_\_\_

20. Who most influences your educational and employment decisions?

- a) Family members
- b) Friends
- c) Role models
- d) Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Section III: General attitudes**

In responding to these questions, please indicate the extent to which you agree with the statement

#### **Likert scale 1 to 5**

1 strongly agree, 2 agree, 3 neutral, 4 disagree, 5 strongly disagree

- 21. A woman's place is in the home
- 22. Women should work to achieve independence
- 23. Public sector employment is better for women
- 24. Most Emirati women don't work after graduation because of family pressures
- 25. Emirati women do not want jobs in the private sector
- 26. Women should not work in predominately male work environments
- 27. As heads of households men should be given greater work opportunities
- 28. Women ought to receive the same pay as men for the same work
- 29. It is possible for Emirati women to work long hours
- 30. Emirati women should be given the opportunity to run public and private corporations.
- 31. Women have a better chance of finding

a suitable husband if they have a college degree.

32. Women should stay home particularly if they have children.

**Rate the following according to their importance for the career advancement of women in the UAE**

**Likert scale 1 to 5**

1 very important, 2 important, 3 somewhat important, 4 a little important, 5 not important

33. Family support

34. Role models

35. Willingness to work hard

36. Flexible work environment

37. Childcare provisions at work

38. Personal drive to succeed

39. Social institutions- women's associations

40. Career development offices

41. Adequate preparation to enter careers

42. Use of family or close contacts

43. Use of non-family or other contacts

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Schedule**

Begin by asking the participant to complete the demographic portion of the questionnaire -

Discuss responses

1. Tell me about yourself and your family? - Where they live, number of siblings/child, parents/husband's employment, what educational levels the siblings are in/had and if they are employed.
2. Can you briefly explain why you decided to pursue higher education?
3. What are your goals for the future and how did you arrive at these goals?
4. How do you intend to achieve those goals?
5. Does your family approve of your career and future goals?
6. How does your society view your career choice and future goals?
7. Under what circumstances would you change your plans?
8. What are the major factors that you believe are necessary for you to achieve these goals?
9. What are the major factors that you believe could inhibit or curtail your goal achievement?
10. Given what you have said about your career choice and goals, where do you see yourself in the next five years? In the next ten years?
11. Can you help me draw a diagram (visual image) of your social network?
12. How important are these individuals/groups in making decisions concerning your educational and employment choices?
13. Is there anything you would like to add or ask me?

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