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The Challenges of Balancing Careers and Family Life Facing College Women in Jordan

Anna Chang

Academic Director: Dr. Raed Al-Tabini

Project Advisor: Dr. Rula Quawas

Tulane University

Amman, Jordan

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Abstract

The Challenges of Balancing Careers Family Life Facing College Women in Jordan

Anna Chang

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The country of Jordan serves as one of the most progressive countries in the Middle East, yet Jordan has the lowest female economic participation rates out of all the countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Quantitatively, women's higher education attainment equals and, in some cases, even surpasses that of men. However, their economic participation barely begins to compare to that of their male counterparts. The purpose of this study is to investigate the potential causes for this large gap, using qualitative evidence from the interviews of fifteen college women at the University of Jordan and regional and national statistics and indicators.

By analyzing women's plans, or lack thereof, for the future, the study hopes to provide Jordanian college women with a chance to share their ideas on gender equality, ideal family dynamics, and pressures from society. By investigating the research question of, "What are the challenges college women believe they will face when trying to balance pursuing a career and fulfilling the demands of a family?" the findings led to a conclusion in support of the original hypothesis. Women who have yet to attempt to juggle professional goals with family demands underestimate the challenges they will face and thus also fail to address these concerns realistically.

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Introduction

Increased equality between the genders has led to many women pursuing careers with general societal acceptance. In Jordan, many young women attend college and university with plans to work after graduation and achieve professional milestones. However, while the female pursuit of the traditional male role has become more acceptable, the expectations for a woman to get married, have children and serve as the primary caregiver still pervade gender socialization and ideology. Jordan is a predominately Muslim country, and in Islam a woman is not responsible for providing the financial means for the family to survive. Additionally, religious, cultural and traditional views still exist that encourage a woman to put family as her first priority.

Oftentimes, engaging in the labor force correlates with educational attainment. In Jordan, the academic success of women has begun to surpass that of men. With high college attendance rates, women now make up 65.4 percent of the undergraduate student body at the University of Jordan in Amman (University of Jordan 2010:24). However, the number of women who work fails to compare. The refined economic participation rate for women fifteen and older in Jordan is 14.7 percent, while the same number for men is 64.4 percent (Department of Statistics [DOS] 2008:34). This incredible disparity indicates the existence of other factors beyond obtaining a college degree that prevent women from pursuing careers. As a female college student who hopes to succeed professionally and maintain a healthy, happy family at the same time, the obstacles preventing women around the world from achieving this dream have become pertinent to me.

Previous research has shown that the increased economic participation of women yields greater societal benefits. For example, enabling a woman raises her standard of living as well as

that of her family (UNIFEM 2004:23). Development trends and programs around the world have further underlined this important aspect. In Jordan, government plans like the Economic and Social Development Plan or NGO plans like the National Strategy for Jordanian Women all address equality issues and how to “induce positive tangible transformation in the status of women” (JNCW 2006:12). However, despite great attempts, oftentimes goals are not met regarding the status of women. In Jordan, beginning from the country’s law, we can see a startling disconnect between the intended equality between the sexes and its actual implementation.

With this stark contrast in mind, I decided to investigate the social implications of college women’s plans post-graduation. Beginning with lectures focusing on women’s issues in Jordan, the idea of women “settling” or resigning themselves to their roles piqued my curiosity. With this project, I hoped to investigate the factors that lead women to live the lives they create, or in some cases, that society creates for them. I wanted to discover how cultures and societies can convey conflicting messages at times to its members in an attempt to understand the reality of gender equality or lack thereof. Furthermore, I hoped to identify the factors that allow women to successfully balance their personal or professional goals with the demands of family life. Upon my return to Tulane University, I plan to execute the same research, finally culminating in a comparative case study. Conducting this research in both Jordan and the United States will provide a dynamic view into the societal changes across the world over time.

The original hypotheses are as follows:

1. College women, before having to balance the challenges of work and taking care of a family, will underestimate the challenges they will encounter.

2. Women will plan to work after graduating while in college, but after marrying and having children may see an alteration in this plan.
3. Women who do successfully work after graduating have significant support from their families, particularly in terms of childcare.
4. Women have many motivations for going to college, but one major consideration will be the societal expectation for young people to matriculate through university.

The first hypothesis was developed based on findings in a previous study of Jordanian women to determine their thoughts toward the importance of education, economic status, character traits and family situations pertaining to women. Women in the 26 to 44 age bracket complained of lack of family support more than the other two age groups, and the importance of the aforementioned factors was also greater when compared to the 18 to 25 age bracket and the 45 to 60 age bracket. This is likely due to the fact that between the ages of 26 and 44 women begin to face the challenges of maintaining a job, unlike the other age groups (Salem-Pickartz, Haddad, and Farkh 2002:26).

The second hypothesis is supported by rates of unemployment and employment among women. The unemployment rate of females ages 15 to 24 in 2007 was 47.8 percent (DOS 2008:54). Yet for women between 55 and 64, this rate was 1.2 percent (UNIFEM 2004:40). Thus, women face more unemployment compared to men, but, as they age, men experience higher rates of employment compared to women. Therefore, it can be assumed that less women look for work after they have their families, particularly since the average age of marriage for women is 26.4 for women as of 2007 (DOS 2008:21). Women between the ages of 20 to 24 still experience a 26.1 percent rate of unemployment; this rate drops to 9.7 percent for those in the 25 to 39 age bracket (UNIFEM 2004:40). Employment follows a similar trend: employment rates

peak for women between the ages of 20 and 24 at 16 percent and 25 to 39 at 18.7 percent, with the rates increasing from before and decreasing thereafter (DOS 2008:36). Thus, women who have just graduated from college are most likely to work and continue for a few years. However, many women may quit after a few years. After all, women work an average of 3.7 years, while men work an average of 44.8 years (Salem-Pickartz, Haddad, and Farkh 2002:13).

For the third hypothesis, past studies and national policies were examined to determine the use and availability of resources. Jordan has a number of policies in place like maternity leave, on-site childcare, and breastfeeding hour, but these policies, in many cases, have encouraged counterproductive hiring practices by employers (Peebles et al 2007). This hypothesis is partially supported by findings in a study conducted in 2000, in which the principal investigator found that factors influencing women's employment status include demographic factors, socio-economic factors, attitudes and cultural values, and women's employment facilitators (El Kharouf 2000:31). Furthermore, another study focusing on Jordanian women's perceptions of first-time pregnancy revealed that all women in the sample expected their family to assist in the motherhood role (Safadi 2005:272).

The fourth hypothesis is supported by the fact that 63 percent of all employed women hold a university degree, compared to the 21 percent of employed men who hold a university degree (Salem-Pickartz, Haddad, and Farkh 2002:13). Furthermore, the rates of tertiary matriculation are comparable in males and females. 44.1 percent of females fifteen and older hold a bachelor's degree or higher, while 55.9 percent of males fifteen and older are the same (DOS 2008:21). With a slightly larger male population, this difference in the percentages is further narrowed. Thus, we can conclude that if a woman wants to hold a job, she must obtain at least a bachelor's degree. Furthermore, according to Jordanian women, the greatest attribute of a

woman is her education; if she is uneducated, it is her greatest weakness as well (Salem-Pickartz, Haddad, and Farkh 2002:23).

The research was conducted in a sociological frame, with analyses of responses based on the assumption that the interviewees feel a certain way based on socialization. Participants' responses were framed in the idea of "self-concept." Self-concept refers to the idea people have of themselves. This image is created through the socialization, particularly from the family. Essentially, it includes the specific mental, personal and social characteristics that a person believes himself or herself. Thus, the idea of the self dictates the things the person believes he or she can accomplish (Salem-Pickartz, Haddad, and Farkh 2002:5-6). Furthermore, this concept also contributes to the psychology of change and self-determination.

Because self-concept develops within a social context, the ideas the target group expressed in the interviews were a reflection upon society as a whole. Furthermore, the study's qualitative basis examines the disconnect between what society tells a person to do and what it will actually allow him or her to do. Through macro-scale observation and micro-level interpersonal relationships, this project focuses on women at a dynamic stage in life. With the majority of the population in Jordan still young and having yet to face the challenges of balancing jobs and families, identifying potential mindsets and barriers can be integral to planning for the future.

Literature Review

In a country where traditional gender roles still heavily influence norms and expectations but modernization and social change have taken hold as well, young Jordanian women find themselves at the crux of a fast-changing world. Change has occurred unevenly, with macro-level initiatives outpacing the increase of bottom-up efforts. While national initiatives and policies support equality between the genders in all spectrums, implementation of these policies often results in flawed outcomes. Furthermore, statistical evidence expresses the limited change in mindset of the society as a whole. Thus, simply changing laws and policies is not enough; the need to increase societal awareness is far greater (Peebles et al 2007). The conflict between personal and collective identity among women intensifies as this population struggles to understand their place and the reality of their aspirations.

While women's participation in the labor force can be viewed as an economic development concern, it is subject to larger sociological forces. For example, higher education is often positively correlated with women's employment. However, in the MENA region, Jordan has the highest higher education rates for women while also experiencing the lowest economic participation rates of females (Spierings, Smits, and Verloo 2010). This phenomenon indicates that a woman's participation depends on more than just availing educational opportunities to the "fairer sex." It points to underlying cultural norms that ensure the continued functioning of a society. In Jordan, "the family represents the main social institution through which individuals acquire their religion, social class, and cultural identities" (Allaf 2010:70). With such a strong emphasis on the family, it stands to reason that women's participation in the labor force depends heavily upon her beliefs, her family's support, and social acceptance.

To address the overall status of women, a number of international indicators have been produced to illustrate where Jordan fails to meet expectations. As of 2005, Freedom House found that Jordan does not meet the internationally recognized standards for women's rights (Allaf 2010:12), and the World Bank report noted the Jordan maintains the widest gender gap in tertiary completion in the MENA region (Allaf 2010:1). When it comes to economic participation, the Jordan Population and Family Health Survey of 2009 found that 85 percent of women had not worked seven days prior to the survey (DOS and ICF Macro 2010:30). Finally, in a 2002 study, 66 percent of women do not want or expect total equality with men (Salem-Pickartz, Haddad, and Farkh 2002:9). Despite many efforts to improve the status of women, it is clear that there remains significant progress still to be made.

Efforts to ensure the status of women begin at a national level, stemming from laws, policies, and initiatives. Women's equality is established in the Jordanian Constitution and its National Charter, but women's status is established as less than that of men's in the Nationality Law, Personal Status Law and Penal Code just to name a few (Salem-Pickartz, Haddad, and Farkh 2002:v). Furthermore, many past policies in Jordan have contained gender blind planning, or policies that presuppose that all those involved in and affected by the policy are men (JNCW 2004:17). Thus, country-wide there is a lesser legal status for women, both as prescribed by law and in its formulation. Furthermore, policies designed to facilitate women's participation in the workforce have, in fact, had the completely opposite effect. For example, one labor law states that, if there are twenty women in the company with children four years of age and younger, the company is obligated to provide on-site childcare services. However, some companies will avoid implementing this law by limiting the number of women in their company to nineteen (Peebles et al 2007:21).

In a trickle down view, we can see similar attitudes in Jordan's predominately patriarchal society. In a study conducted at the Ministry of Education, a ministry that has a high percentage of female employees, findings still concluded that there is a negative attitude regarding women's leadership abilities (Human Forum for Women's Rights 2000). Women were found to be discriminated against in regard to promotions as well. However, participants believed women's lesser attainment was their fault, as a female's biological making leads to her frequent maternity leaves and responsibilities in the home (Human Form for Women's Rights 2000). This finding is further reinforced in another study that found discrimination against women to be based upon the belief that women are expected to be responsible for all family care, regardless of whether they engage in work outside the home (Peebles et al 2007). These mindsets permeate statistics as well, as unemployment rates among females who have reached secondary, intermediate diploma, and bachelor's and high level degrees were double than those of males in the same levels of educational attainment (UNIFEM 2004:41).

Society creates barriers to women's participation in the labor force, and this presents a high cost to Jordan's economy. Jordan, even as early as 1983, has been considered one of the "foremost exporters of trained and technologically educated workers" (Barhoum 1983:369). Thus, with women limited in their ability to contribute fully, Jordan wastes a considerable portion of its human resources and potential. Research findings around the world have proven that equal employment of women and men offers companies significant advantages, including improved performance, higher quality of service, and less turnover among other benefits (Peebles et al 2007:12). Since the founding of the University of Jordan, there has been a total of 51,968 male bachelor graduates and 74,090 female bachelor graduates (University of Jordan 2010:32). In contrast, in the Amman Governorate specifically, 42.3 percent (nationally, 39.7

percent) of men are economically active while only 9.0 percent (nationally, 7.7 percent) of women are (UNIFEM 2004:24). This dramatic discrepancy between female degree holders and females active in the work force is poignant, especially when presented in the context of lost economic potential.

Fortunately, Jordan has acknowledged the benefits of attaining equality between men and women on a national level. In 1992, the country decided to pursue the guidelines set by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), a United Nations' effort to increase equality between the genders. Likewise, Jordan also founded the Jordanian National Commission for Women in 1992 (Allaf 2010: 32). The National Strategy for Jordanian Women for 2006 to 2010 had three objectives in its economic development domain: increasing the available economic opportunities for women, creating the proper legislative environment to increase women's participation in economic activities, and increasing the percentage of women's participation in decision-making and economic policy creation processes (JNCW 2006). However, beyond simply creating more positions or enacting legislation, the country faces a significant challenge in adjusting the mindsets of women themselves.

Because the human is a social creature, each person is subject to the motivations of not just himself or herself, but many external pressures as well. Furthermore, "externally regulated processes become internalized by an individual and thus, viewed as an autonomous part of that individual" (Allaf 2010:102). In many cases, women are influenced by far more than just personal desires, although they may not be fully aware of the influence society has had upon them. This type of integrated motivation is linked with the person's sense of self. Thus, UNICEF found that many young people's aspirations stemmed from social stereotypes, although they regarded them as their own (Allaf 2010:104). Also, women tend to not challenge men in the

workplace and are often happy to settle for a lower-paying, entry-level job. Additionally, they are less likely to complain about unsatisfactory working conditions (Peebles et al 2007:29). Culturally, women are expected to not “make waves.” There is even a word with negative connotations to describe a woman who acts like a man (*mistarjileh*) (Kawar 2000:61). Aside from dress, other characteristics that could warrant such labeling include speaking loudly and causing conflict, both of which easily fall under speaking out against unfair treatment in the workplace.

While there are significant social barriers to women working outside of the home, a study conducted in 2000 enumerated potential resources that enable a woman to engage in employment in Amman. These are the husband’s agreement for the wife to work, the age of the oldest child, the woman’s own educational level, the husband’s educational level, and personal income satisfaction (El Kharouf 2000). As the importance of family and social support has been emphasized, a husband’s support for his wife to work would undoubtedly play an important role in her participating in the labor force. Interestingly, the percentage of women who are economically active is highest among those who are never married (UNIFEM 2004:28). As many husbands may prefer a woman to remain home, perhaps it is not surprising that, of married women, only 9 percent are economically active (DOS 2006:7).

Marriage leads directly to the next factor, the age of the oldest child. In Jordan, childbirth is expected after marriage. In fact, 88 percent of women who had not started childbearing wanted to have a child (DOS and ICF Macro 2010:70). Half of Jordanian women are married by the age of 22.5 (DOS and ICF Macro 2010:63) and only 9 percent of Jordanian women are unmarried by the end of their reproductive years (DOS and ICF Macro 2010:59). Getting married and having children is statistically almost inevitable. However, upon having children, a woman is further

disadvantaged, particularly if she wants to have many children. Spierings et al found that economic participation was lower for women with young children, and women in households with five or more children faced particularly low employment rates (2010:1399).

The number of desired children varies statistically with educational attainment and ultimately, economic participation. In Jordan, post-secondary education and greater wealth are associated with lower levels of fertility (DOS and ICF Macro 2010:39). In Amman, about 59 percent of households fall into the fourth or highest quintile of wealth (DOS and ICF Macro 2010:24), and 32.1 percent of women in the Amman governorate have attended higher education (DOS and ICF Macro 2010:29). Therefore, people living in the capital city are among those of a socioeconomic status in which women attend university and pursue work. To further emphasize this trend, 41.7 percent of women who work are in the fourth or highest wealth quintile (DOS and ICF Macro 2010:30). Thus, wealth, education, number of children, and economic participation create a cyclical-natured relationship, all factors that depend upon each other.

With all these considerations in mind, women's participation in the labor force is a multi-faceted issue composed of social, cultural, economic, psychological, and educational influences. It remains a complex issue that women who hope to pursue careers must confront as they graduate and weigh the value of their motivations to get married and start a family with pursuing a job. The challenges women face when trying to balance these goals and demands mentally and realistically are further compounded by the inextricable and internalized motivations of society. The woman cannot separate her own desires with those of the people around her. While the numbers may show improvement in the status of women, qualitative findings still cast doubt over the situation in which most Jordanian women find themselves.

Methodology

Developing the skeleton of this project began upon my decision to study abroad. Furthermore, acknowledging my desire to spend the summer following the spring semester in Amman, Jordan, I invested significant amounts of time in creating a topic that could withstand a grant application process and months of continuation. Of course, I soon discovered that my greatest challenge would not be finding enough to do, but having too much to cover in the given timeframe. With an interest in women's issues, I explored topics like sexual education and family planning before finally settling on balancing motherhood with pursuing a career. This topic was further refined by changing motherhood to family demands. Isolating the target population of college women resulted in my final topic, and the following investigation of this topic has been a journey, to say the least.

In my Foundations of Sociology course, we studied a book called The Second Shift by Arlie Hochschild, and I was immediately intrigued by the concept. The second shift refers to the unpaid and largely unappreciated work that people face after coming home from their regular, paid jobs. As a female who hopes to one day have a successful career and family, I was surprised by the challenges many of the women described in the book faced. To be completely honest, I had yet to anticipate the reality of the situation. My startling realization that my idealistic plans could very likely be thwarted without my conscious acknowledgement of it made me wonder if my peers experienced similar thoughts. Thus, when developing my research topic, the final result proved to be an exciting endeavor, even before I began researching it.

In our thematic seminar, the women's issues module presented myriad considerations for me. The unique characteristics of the country had manifested itself in varying ways, many of

which contrasted with the ideas of gender equality in the United States. The very first issue was the concept of gender, a word that originally did not exist in the Arabic language. With the holistic background provided by the course, I realized that I would face a set of expectations and ideologies in college women that could support and contradict each other at the same time.

When I began focusing on the logistics of conducting my research, I wanted to find a representative population to the best of my ability. I settled upon the University of Jordan as this particular university is the largest in the country, attracting students from all backgrounds and geographic locations. Furthermore, it was conveniently located and my advisor, Dr. Rula Quawas, teaches there. Aside from teaching, she is also the leading feminist in the country. Thus, I felt comfortable in finding participants. I decided to interview fifteen female students currently enrolled at the university. I hoped to talk with both married and unmarried women, in an attempt to determine any differences between those who had a clearly defined experience in balancing family demands with academic goals. I also planned to talk to faculty members to garner their opinions as they are exposed to many students on a daily basis, but this never happened given the limited time frame.

In developing my methodology, I quickly realized that the result I wanted would be best gathered through semi-constructed interviews. An interview would offer greater qualitative insight, while covering basic facts would be simple as well. Given my personal ability and time-frame, I felt that no other method would be as effective. After a field study day, I strengthened and solidified my interview questions, which can be found in Appendix A. I decided to ask about students' backgrounds, including their family of origin's financial status, religious affiliation, and geographic origin. These questions were included to see if any of these qualities led to different goals and expectations. I also asked about education, designing the questions so I could

determine the participant's motivation for attending school and goals following matriculation. Next, I asked the participants about their childhood, like who took care of the housework and how they felt about the way their parents balanced work and family. This set of questions was intended to reflect whether the way they were raised would affect what they wanted their own family to be like in the future. I included questions on past work experience to see if prior work experience would result in a better grasp of the demands of work. Lastly, I inquired about the participant's personal plans and level of control over her life. These were to ensure that she explicitly stated her plans and also how much of her decisions she perceived to be her own.

While participation in my research presented minimal risk, I still included several provisions to protect those who chose to participate. Firstly, there was an informed consent form. This form, along with oral explanation, explained to potential participants the motivations and objectives associated with the project. Also, the participants' rights were stated, including the right to full anonymity and the right to withdraw at any time. This form can be found in Appendix B. I asked, additionally, if the participants would be willing to have me record the interview. At this point, I assured them that the recording was solely for note-taking purposes and would never be heard by a third party.

It was only with a signed consent form that I continued with my interview. No names were used in this final product and all information can be accessed by only me. At the end of the research period, recordings will be deleted and any information kept beyond the extent of this project will be stripped of all identifiable information. Furthermore, in arranging interviews, I allowed the students to designate the time and place of the interview to ensure their personal comfort as best as I could.

While executing my research, I encountered several issues that I had not taken into consideration prior. Firstly, I had an extremely biased pool of participants. Given my connections in the university, I found myself with many students majoring in English language and other similar majors. Furthermore, this phenomenon also resulted from my limited Arabic language skills. While I can express and understand on a general level, the qualitative nature of my findings necessitated a more nuanced comprehension that my Arabic simply had not reached yet.

Noting my personal dissatisfaction with the representativeness of my sample, I strived to find other students. This resulted in my asking girls I had interviewed prior to help me find other potential participants. My peers were always incredibly helpful, and it was with this method that I was able to interview girls whose English was not strong enough for them to respond in English. Also, I managed to interview girls in different majors and from geographically different areas. It is difficult to say that the sample is representative, but at least greater variety was included.

Another unexpected challenge was the casual nature of arranging interviews. More often than not, interviewing students involved me going to the University of Jordan campus, having my scheduled interview, and meeting up with a friend who had agreed to help me for the day. At that point, he or she would find other willing participants, and I would interview them. Usually, these participants happened to have free time between classes. Thus, it was difficult to determine exactly how many interviews I would have in a day. I was also dependent on my peers for their assistance and relationships with students on campus. However, it was with their help that I had as much success as I did.

At times, because of the number of girls who had indicated interest, I needed to expedite the interview to the best of my ability. While this largely did not affect the quality of the interview, I also may have been limited in my ability to probe into some of the participants' responses. Additionally, the location and method of sampling often meant that other students were around while I interviewed. This could have potentially caused the participant to alter her responses. While the changes may or may not be significant, it is plausible to suspect that her responses would be somewhat different, whether or not she did so consciously. Also, sometimes those around the interview would interject with their opinions.

Having a translator at some of my interviews also revealed a difference in the quality of the interview. In general, the interviews in which a translator was present were shorter. I attributed this to the delay in transmission and comprehension of information and thus the lack of efficacy in any prompting or probing questions. Furthermore, I sometimes had trouble determining if an explanation came from the participant or from the translator. Additionally, whether the translator was known to the participant or not, in either situation I believe that the respondent would be affected in her answer. Ultimately, these influences came from a lack of formality in the interview and language barriers. At the same time, the lack of formality would produce more sincerity in responses and ease of interviewing. In some ways, a formal interview process would discourage some students from participating.

Another concern I encountered came from the participants' and helpers' desire to give me what they thought I wanted. While I emphasized that there was no right or wrong answer and that my questions were meant to be answered with personal opinions and thoughts, there were several instances when girls were recommended to me because they were "open-minded" or had strong English language skills. Furthermore, there were some occasions when I questioned the

honesty with which participants answered my questions. Given their time restrictions, it is possible that they gave abbreviated answers they hoped would staunch my flow of questions.

After conducting a few interviews, I contemplated a different method of gathering information. I believe that another method of researching would have been to survey classes from different faculties, and then interview only a few respondents as key informers. With this method, I would have contacted faculty members instead and asked permission to survey their classes. Using surveys would also provide a larger pool of data that could be easier coded and analyzed. My final interview pool would be self-selecting in many ways, as I would only be able to choose from respondents who had provided contact information. However, the variety in classes covered would have provided a different range of majors and educational backgrounds. Still, using this method would also have its own logistical problems: there would most likely be males in many of the classes, getting permission from professors would take time, and surveys taken in class are also subject to many variables.

Another observation I made was a judgment on my ability to navigate an interview. When confronted with the varying lengths of my interviews, I contemplated the meaning behind it. While I mentioned a number of variables that could have affected it, I also wondered if my personal beliefs caused me to take greater interest in certain girls than others. Oftentimes, I found that the longer the discussion lasted, the more insight I gained into her personal motivations and thoughts. Also, sometimes the most insightful comments I gathered happened while discussing my own thoughts. I found that, culturally, the participants were more likely to offer a sincere personal opinion after I had expressed a personal observation or opinion of my own. Unfortunately, this often forced me to walk a careful line to protect prior participants' confidentiality.

Following the interviews, I experienced trouble coding and analyzing the responses. It was difficult to view each person in an objective way. For me, trying to compare qualitative details was a challenge. It was only with conscious distancing from them that I could begin to identify similarities and differences between students whom I viewed as unique individuals. I finally settled into a method of analysis in which there was no particular linear path, but rather a natural, shifting path to draw conclusions.

Overall, the final sample of students in this research is not representative, and thus, any conclusions can only be considered speculative at best. Many of the benefits of the interview arrangement that I encountered were also the drawbacks, and my language deficit proved to be an unavoidable detriment. Were I able to revise my methodology, I would consider distributing surveys or holding a focus group. However, every alternative method also has its drawbacks. Regardless, my interviews offered me a glimpse into the thoughts, mindsets, plans and dreams of my peers in Jordan. My approach did ultimately create a qualitative description answering my research question. Lastly, the successfully completed fifteen interviews are the result of the incredible hospitality of a number of students, and I am indebted to them for their assistance.

Findings

This study was designed to determine the perceptions of college women regarding the challenges they will face when trying to balance the demands of a family and maintaining a career. Furthermore, it investigates women's plans, or lack thereof, and how their personal and collective experiences have shaped their thoughts. The tested hypothesis is that college women who had yet to start their own families will underestimate the challenges they will face. Furthermore, because they underestimate these challenges, they will have no, or very simple, plans for the future. Regarding their plans, the hypothesis was that women would plan to work after graduating. As they are enrolled in university, it is natural to assume that after successfully graduating they would enter the labor force. National statistics align with this idea, as young, single women are most likely to seek jobs and work.

However, as women begin to marry and start their own families, their original plans to continue work would change as they encountered an onslaught of demands they have yet to manage. For those women who successfully remain employed, they would benefit from a strong support network consisting mainly of family. Those who do not may suffer from a lack of such resources. Another explanation would be the importance they place on having a job. Women who find it to be of lesser importance would understandably be less likely to continue working. However, this lack of desire then questions the motivation of the woman attending university in the first place. The last hypothesis asserted that women who do not strongly desire to maintain a job attend college because it is socially expected for them to obtain a degree.

The following findings present an illustration of young women's thoughts at a pivotal point in their lives. Most of these university students are facing important life decisions and

periods of change upon their graduation. This snapshot is a simplified description of the many nuanced and highly personal experiences that have shaped the interviewees as people over time, and thus each participant's response became undeniably unique and irreproducible. Overall, most participants had a broad understanding of the challenges they would face, including finding a job and managing childcare. Most importantly, the one factor they all had in common was the goal to work and the undeniable influence society had upon all of their dreams.

Within my sample, there were thirteen undergraduate students in various majors and two graduate students pursuing master's degrees. Majors included accounting, agriculture, Arabic language, computer information systems, computer science, English language, English literature, finance, law, physics, public administration, Spanish, and women's studies. Those pursuing master's degrees studied nutrition and political science during their undergraduate careers. Most participants had grown up in Amman and live there currently, but one lived in a suburb of Amman and another commuted from the city of Salt. Fourteen students identified as Muslims and one as Christian. They ranged in religiosity, but I found no strong correlation between religious beliefs or adherence and plans for the future.

Questions regarding family background included financial situation, number of siblings, and origins. In terms of financial status, most students identified as middle to middle to upper class and indicated that their families were financially comfortable. A few expressed that they were financially well-off, or wealthier, while one noted recent family developments that led to tougher economic times for her family. Other family background information included the number of children in the students' families of origin. Of the fifteen participants, one came from a family with two children, three came from families with three children, five came from families with four children, and five came from families with five or more children. One woman

was hard to classify, as she had eleven half siblings but lived with her two other full-siblings. Of the fifteen interviewees, five indicated Palestinian heritage, one was half Filipino, and another came from a Circassian and Russian background, and all other identified as Jordanian.

Regardless of their background, all participants were currently enrolled in a degree-granting program at the University of Jordan with plans to graduate. Furthermore, they all spent most of the formative years and time following in Jordan. Of the fifteen students, it is interesting to note that two had parents who were currently separated and one whose father worked abroad.

Motivations for continuing study at the university-level after high school were mixed. Most girls shared that attending university is socially expected. One simply attends college after graduating from high school. Furthermore, the next reason shared (in conjunction with others) expressed how obtaining a degree was imperative for finding a job in the future. As one hundred percent of the participants indicated that they planned to work after graduating, it would follow that they would attend university. Statistical evidence on a national level supports this supposition, as 63 percent of all employed women have a university degree (Salem-Pickartz, Haddad and Farkh 2002:13). Other research also supports the opinion of these women, as common perception of a bachelor's degree was that "It's the bridge to everything else" (qtd. in Allaf 2010:107).

Motivations for choosing their majors also varied, but fell into three main categories: the student liked it, the major was the result of her score on the *tawjihi* exam, or the student had no reason for picking her major. By far, the first two categories were the most popular. Only one student indicated that she felt no strong attraction to her major, although she picked it herself. Otherwise, students who ended up with their majors as a result of the *tawjihi* score grew to like their majors. Another motivation the participants often listed in conjunction with the others was

that the major would be conducive to helping her find a job after graduation. A few students, also, were unsure as to what to decide and followed the advice of others.

These easily expressed answers to concise questions set the background for more subtle and complex responses. Of primary importance, it became apparent that the women operated in a much larger sphere that extended beyond the individual. The plural pronouns of “we” and “they” were often used as opposed to “I” or “he/she.” In fact, following personal responses, the women often continued by explaining the social belief and socially accepted response to the question. It was clear that it was impossible to disentangle their personal goals with those of the greater expectations society had for them. While sometimes their personal beliefs clashed with those of society, oftentimes society’s motivations had become internalized and the women were unaware of the conflict between their statements.

To continue in this complicated pool of contradictions, the most socially popular reason families send their daughters to university was never mentioned as a personal reason for attending school. Higher education degrees are often viewed as a type of insurance and recommendation, protecting women from the possibility of economic hardship in her future and commenting on her person when searching for a future spouse (Allaf 2010:104). As all of the women except for one indicated some type of plan for marriage, the lack of mentioning a university degree as an important achievement in finding a suitable spouse is significant. In Jordan, marriage is almost universal (DOS and ICF Macro 2010:59). In fact, participants often responded to the question of, “Do you want to get married?” with an almost offended answer of, “Of course!” One participant explained, “Everyone wants to get married” (Participant K 2011).

To delve deeper into the nature of their responses, one student indicated that she felt indifferently toward marriage and a family. Another student expressed her disenchantment with marriage overall, and indicated that she would only consider marriage if the potential spouse were ideal in every way. Otherwise, she would not marry. Following this confession, she added that, if her mother knew, “she would kill me!” (Participant M 2011). Of the fifteen women, one was already married, two were engaged, and one anticipated marrying after graduating from university. The response of the woman who was already married provides a point of contrast for all other women’s responses, and that comparison will be discussed later.

For those who have no significant other, plans for marriage were also largely unformed and insufficiently analyzed. To elucidate: all women confirmed that they want to work and would continue to work after marrying and having children. Their certainty varied, with some women insisting adamantly while others allowing that it would only continue if they could manage the dual burdens of paid work and home life. For those who did have a significant other, two of the yet unmarried girls had yet to discuss the logistics of the future with their future partner. Upon further questioning regarding their plans and motivations to get married, I was told that, in Jordan, marriage is simply the obvious next step if two people in love wish to stay together. As I learned many times, “Maybe it’s hard for you to understand that, but this is the way it happens in order for us to be around each other” (Participant G 2011). The engaged woman who had considerable planning and more insight comparatively was older than the other two girls. Thus, I attribute her foresight to greater maturity that comes with age.

Thus, women fell into three categories when it came to work and family. The first category was women who believed they would work without any challenges. The second included women who believed they would work, but acknowledged that there may be

difficulties. The third consisted of women who would work, but would only continue to do so if family conditions permitted it. Of course, it is important to note that these specifications exist on a spectrum, with the interviewees sorted as accurately as possible. In general, when asked why they wanted to work, all women pointed to the personal enrichment jobs offer. One student explains, "Learning is not everything. Working gives you practical knowledge" (Participant B 2011). Another participant shared that a job "lets you know that you can make a change, depend on yourself, produce something" (Participant C 2011). The women generally agreed upon the idea that a working woman has more to offer her family, as she has the opportunity to grow and remain aware of the world outside her home. However, it is also important to note that all participants ultimately admitted that their families would always come before their work.

For women who planned to work and indicated no notable challenges, there proved to be two subtypes. I considered eight women to fall in this first category, and the numbers further divide into the two subtypes. The first type includes three women who believe there will be no challenges for them when they try to balance family demands with their work but have no reasoning or evidence to support this claim. The second type includes the remaining five women who believe there will be no notable challenges for them because they have certain qualities or requirements that will leave them immune from the factors that force women to abandon their careers.

When interviewing girls who fall under type one of category one, I found them to believe that women do not have a harder time balancing family and careers. They considered the statistical gap between the percentage of women attending higher education and the percentage of women working to be *3adi*, or normal. Their personal plans to provide for the potential challenges are nonexistent, as they do not believe it will affect them personally. However, when

asked overarching questions about gender equality, two believed that the genders are equal and one pointed out issues she considers problematic, like polygamy and an unfair burden of work in the home.

For the participant who indicated areas of inequality, I came across the first point of contradiction between her beliefs. Her personal plan to work and address the demands of her family included her taking on the majority of the housework. However, she also believed that it would not be more difficult for her to balance home life and work life than the level of difficulty a man might experience. This plan clashes openly with her disapproval of the course of the equality movement in Jordan. This woman and another in the second subtype explicitly stated that they are against equality of men and women, as this movement has simply caused women to carry more of the burden. “Now, women are becoming woman and man at the same time” (Participant E 2011). However, when asked if men should then contribute more in the household, they insisted that this was unacceptable, as the responsibilities in the home were a woman’s job. Thus, I found another undeniable contradiction in their beliefs.

It is important to mention that potential obstacles were mentioned by category one, type one women; however, they were not considered to present challenges or cause great concern to the woman personally. The issues mentioned included not being able to spend as much time with the family and quitting her job because her husband asks her to do so. In these situations, the students did not regard the issue as a problem. They treated them more as statements describing a way of life or a state of being.

The second type of women who fall under category one tended to have specific plans or certain characteristics that they felt would ward them from the challenges the typical woman

would face. For all of them, one common factor was the strict requirements they placed on their potential mate, as none of them had a significant other at the time. One girl remarked that she was complex and would need someone special to be her husband. Another reflected upon how her personal family experiences led her to insist upon certain requirements in a potential spouse. Yet two more participants expressed that they would not marry unless they found the perfect man. It stands to reason that the perfect man would be someone who would understand her desire to work and develop a career and accordingly support her.

When asked about gender equality in Jordan, all participants had varying responses. One remarked that, “Women may be given rights, but we are not equal” (Participant M 2011). Another woman remarked on the negative effects the movement for equality has created, along with the challenges women in hijab face when finding jobs. The others believed adamantly in the traditional gender role of the man being the breadwinner. However, one came to this belief because of conflicts in her own family, and the other woman had motivations stemming from her own personal character. She explained that, “All my life, I am in the front. Now? No, you have to be in the front” (Participant J 2011).

Two of the women who were type two in category one also took issue with marriage in general. One respondent indicated that, if she married, the man would ruin all the things that she had achieved for herself, limiting her in her choices and decisions. The other evidenced her sisters’ marriages and the negative effect it has had on their participation in the labor force. She also feels that marriage often renders the female a piece of property. Furthermore, this participant had no personal desire for children. Overall, three of the type two women in category one either had no desire or did not want to marry.

The second category developed from the research consists of women who plan to maintain jobs but acknowledge notable challenges. Two women fell into this category, and both women hoped to work but included considerations in their plans for quitting if the dual burden became too much to handle. Furthermore, both women have similar views on equality, indicating that there is increased equality between the genders, but arenas of disparity still exist. For example, one woman shared that men have more opportunities while the other noted that women are still reluctant to speak up in public discussions. However, there were also differences in their personal plans for the future. One followed a more traditional model where she anticipated shouldering 90 percent of the housework. The other aspired for an equal division of the work but remarked that the woman often ends up with a greater burden. She stated, “You get the dream, the fantasy, and the reality” (Participant I 2011).

The third category of women consists of five participants. These women were the ones who knew, without a doubt, that they would take time off of work when the children were young and anticipated that family would take precedence in their lives. In some cases, the participant’s certainty in sacrificing her work for her family is best explained by her personality. I found little indication that there had been a particular experience or significant event that led to this decision. In other cases, personal knowledge or personal values played a role in the development of their plan to stay home and provide for the family. Additionally, their knowledge of inequality between the gender ranges from advanced to nonexistent and thus must be addressed individually.

The first participant who fell in this category emphasized the importance of work in developing a person’s character. She remarked upon its ability to equip a person with life skills that would allow him or her to accomplish more and thrive better in life. Her own mother

overcame illiteracy and obtained a job to better herself and elevate herself to a level where she could effectively engage with her children and family. For this student, her mother's accomplishment is a cause for admiration and emulation. However, having had a mother who worked, she was also aware of the disadvantages of two working parents. She shared that "maybe when people are going through hard times or you are needed, you can't be there" (Participant B 2011). Thus, her own plan for the future included time off to care for her young children around the larger goal to work. For her, the advantages of a working mother far outnumber the disadvantages, but working should not be done at the detriment of her children.

The second woman in category three is engaged and has spent time discussing the logistics of her married life. In my opinion, her decision to place her work as second to her husband's stems from personal preference and family background. She expressed many ideas that are prevalent in Jordanian society but is also aware of the challenges women face in Jordanian society, ranging from honor killings to passing on nationality. With this in mind, her motivations are similar to another woman in this category. While this other participant is not engaged, she has decided that she would not work if it were at the expense of her family. In many ways, both these participants fall into traditional gender roles, but these are the paths they believe suit them the best.

The last woman who falls in this category stands out from all other fifteen participants in the research as she is already married and has children of her own. Had I interviewed her ten years ago, she believes that she could have easily been a woman who had fallen in category one. Her plans when she was an unmarried undergraduate student included working and starting a family simultaneously. However, she soon found that building a career was impossible given her lack of *wasta*. Furthermore, while she had planned to pursue her master's degree, she lacked the

funds. Thus, after working for a few years and marrying, she had her first child, then her second, and quit her job soon after.

It has only been recently that she has been able to begin pursuing her masters, now that her two children are older, there is sufficient money, and her husband supports her fully. When asked about the alterations in her plans, she said, “Reality is very different from what you build in your mind... It’s very stressful when you can’t achieve this image. You feel like you’re a failure” (Participant G 2011). For her, she knows that she will always put her family demands first. However, after obtaining her master’s degree, she hopes to try again at building a career. With the support of her husband, extra hired help around the house, the increasing age of her children, and extensive family physically near, she believes that she can try again. She notes that her situation is not typical, as many women do not have the type of support she does. Furthermore, she has had firsthand experience balancing her studies with her family in addition to balancing a job with her family. This type of knowledge has enabled her to plan thoroughly and realistically.

While all the women in the sample indicated that they planned to work following graduation, national statistics would lead to the reasoning that some of them will not. The governorate of Amman has an economic activity rate of 9 percent for females (UNIFEM 2004:24). For the purpose of argument, if this percentage held true for my sample, that would mean that 1.35 girls would actually work. All of the women in my sample did not appear to be actively aware of this fact. In many ways, they considered themselves immune from the unpromising national trends. For the entirety of the university (including international students), there are 13,640 males and 24,052 females. Thus, females constitute 63.81 percent of the total 37,692 student body (University of Jordan 2010: 31). When I presented the participants with

these numbers and proposed the question of why these women failed to pursue jobs, none of the responses included any self-reflection. While Jordan is a collective society, the women also had trouble realizing that they, in fact, help to make up these statistics.

Another concerning trend observed in my sample population included the mismatch between the students' beliefs and their plans of practice. Several women commented on the social expectation for women's responsibility in the home and expressed dissatisfaction with this expectation. However, when the focus shifted to the individual, the same women would indicate that they planned to shoulder the majority of the housework. Not only did they not expect their hypothetical spouses to help, oftentimes they did not want them to contribute. When pressed for further explanation, I was told, "It is my nature. I am the woman" (Participant H 2011). Another method of interpreting women's understanding of gender roles was by asking how she would feel if she served as the breadwinner the man served as the homemaker. None of the women believed that this situation could ever exist. Three women indicated that they might accept the idea, but their significant others would never accept it. If it did actually happen, it would only be due to economic necessity: the man cannot find a job, and the woman must provide economically for the family.

At the same time, many women expressed the greater capacity for women to successfully fulfill the dual roles of a job and a mother. They explained that men have trouble doing more than one thing while women can easily manage. This mindset contradicts undisputable statistics that women simply do not end up balancing these dual roles, as most of them quit their jobs and exit the labor force. To further discriminate between job and career leads to an even grimmer prospect for my research participants. Studies have found that women are often discriminated against in jobs because they take maternity leave and quit upon marriage or childbirth. Thus,

women are far less likely to be able to build a career, as they often disrupt the course of such development at a pivotal moment. Therefore, when asked about their hopes for careers, the women either misunderstood the concept of the career or have limited plans to build one. Most of the women spoke of jobs they would like to have and only a few mentioned ideal careers. Even those who mentioned careers followed up with jobs that they would take, most of which did not relate to their desired career path.

Additionally, few women appeared to be aware of how national legislation and policies have affected general perception of a woman's economic potential. Issues like the glass ceiling were never mentioned, and Jordanian legal treatment of women as a dependent was also not discussed. Maternity leave was mentioned, but that was the furthest any participant planned to access the resources available to her on a national level (with the exception of the woman who has had children of her own). Thus, when asked if they planned to work even when they had children, all of the women said yes. Some made qualifications to their comment upon further examination, explaining that they would only work if their family were not suffering. However, it took deeper probing in many cases to produce an answer that addressed the childcare needs of young children prior to attending school. In all cases, this appeared to be from a lack of forethought if it had not been initially mentioned.

A component of my research included asking the participants to describe their dream job. Every woman mentioned teaching. Teaching has always been a role that women have filled with great success, as it imitates their gender role of "nurturer" well. Furthermore, it limits opposite sex interaction and offers hours that allow the woman to be home in time to care for her own family. When asked why teaching would be ideal, most of the respondents indicated that the loved children and appreciated the hours that a teaching job would offer. However, one girl

explained that “A perfect job is commitment – a job that, when I get up in the morning, [I find that] I missed it” (Participant J 2011). The universal mention of teaching as a potential job, followed by reasoning the women believed to be their own, led me to believe that society’s goals for women had been internalized in the participants without their conscious awareness of it. Furthermore, some girls would mention jobs that would require them to have considerable mobility. However, they never addressed how they would manage the potential move, commute, or travel. Again, I found that they set goals that would be unattainable, largely because they did not consider the logistics of undertaking such a job.

One study has found that if boys and girls were raised the same way, girls would be more likely to pursue jobs in the private sector and see the benefits of working outside the home (Peebles et al 2007:28). Based on my own sample, I also found differences in women’s mindsets based on how their parents raised them in their families of origin. When it came to how they were raised, the women in my research fell into three categories yet again. The first consisted of women who grew up with only sisters. The second category was composed of women who grew up with sisters and brothers and felt no difference in the way they were raised. The third group was made up of women who grew up with brothers and sisters and noticed a difference in the way they were raised.

The two women who grew up with only sisters both felt that they would have been treated the same way if they had been boys. It is difficult to determine if how they were raised was dependent upon their sex in any way, as the contrast is impossible to create. However, in these families the girls’ mothers also shouldered most of the housework. Their fathers did not contribute significantly to work around the home. Furthermore, both girls indicated that the

housework in their own families would be shared and everyone must cooperate to get it done. Both girls' dream jobs would be in the private sector.

Women who grew up with brothers and sisters but did not believe there was any difference in treatment often revealed differences upon further probing, but did not acknowledge it themselves. These women often revealed a contrast in treatment when asked about how household tasks were divided amongst family members in the family of origin. Usually, the mother would do most of the housework and the sisters would help on weekends. The father usually did not contribute significantly, and the work he did consisted of cooking once in a while or working in the garden. A similar pattern existed for the boys in the family. Women in this category expected to complete the majority of household chores herself.

Women in the last category had brothers and sisters and also noted a difference in how her parents treated their sons and daughters. In general, the women had reasoning for their parents' actions, but acknowledged that it caused conflict at times within the household. One explanation I received was that "It's because we want the man to be tough, strong...more responsible than the girl is. A girl begins to become responsible from her own duties in the home, but a man needs to become responsible before that" (Participant I 2011). These girls tended to expect more contribution from all family members but anticipated that they may end up taking care of more than the rest of the family members.

Lastly, another finding related to the age gap between a woman and her significant other. A study has found that the larger the difference in ages between the husband and wife, the less likely the woman is to work (Spierings, Smits and Verloo 2010:1400). In my limited sample, it was apparent that this finding held true. Two women had significant others who were seven

years older than they were, and they also had less solid and practical plans regarding the future. Both fell into subtype one of category one. The other two women with significant others close to their age (a one year age difference) tended to have discussed with their partner the details of having a family, working, and childcare. These types of discussions precede more solid, realistic planning for the future.

Conclusions

Overall, the women I interviewed over the past month have shared opinions and thoughts that have revealed the fragility of their dreams. While economic and social development in Jordan has led most people in Amman to accept the idea of a woman joining the labor force, women themselves have yet to reconcile their more ingrained traditional mindsets with the necessary adjustments needed to maintain a job outside the home. This has manifested in impractical planning that fails to properly provide for a future to which the women aspire. In many situations, even the women themselves did not seem to truly believe they would achieve their goals.

This lack of holistic planning feeds directly into the first original hypothesis that women would underestimate the challenges of balancing work and family life. It would be more accurate to say that they fail to identify and treat potential challenges as such. This phenomenon contributes directly into the plans of these college women and my second hypothesis. I hypothesized that women would plan to work after graduating while in college, but in the future find those plans subject to change. Based on my interview with one married woman, in addition to the strong presence societal norms maintain in these women's lives, I concluded that many of the women would end up following different life paths than the ones they indicated in their interviews.

My third hypothesis dealt with the resources a woman would need to work, or more specifically, the resources university women believed they would need to maintain a job. As it became increasingly apparent that the women in my research had plans to which they have given little thought, this hypothesis likewise became somewhat obsolete. It is still accurate that most of

the women would expect family support when it came to taking care of their children. In fact, a significant number of the participants indicated a dislike for hiring outside help, as it left their children subject to outside influences they could not control. There was mention was bringing their young children to daycares or hiring a babysitter if necessary, although the strongest preference was still for their mother to assist.

My final hypothesis that discussed women's motivations to attend university anticipated that women, above all else, considered it the obvious next step in life. This theory proved to be true but less accurate, as most women did not list it as their primary cause for pursuing higher education. However, based on the idea of internalized motivations, I believe that this actually played a larger role than most women acknowledged and admitted. Examining the veracity of this hypothesis also most directly led to the social expectations that women themselves reproduced in their own lives. As one woman stated, "This is the life that we should follow" (Participant G 2011).

My additional findings that fell outside the strict boundaries of my hypotheses primarily stemmed from the aforementioned social structure and reproduction of society's values. As women spoke about the social expectations they faced to marry and have children, I often asked if they would behave differently given a different set of expectations. All of the women said that they believe they would make different decisions. One shared that she would wait to marry and instead pursue her career first. The participant who is already married and has a family of her own described how she would have insisted on completing her master's degree before beginning a family.

Nevertheless, it is apparent that college women in Jordan realize the value of work. Another study has found that employment “gives many young women a route for self-expression, and breaks the monotony of restricted lives. For many, it represents a symbol of their desires to become independent adults” (Kawar 2000:64). However, I found that their aspirations for employment were simply that – a symbol and oftentimes no more. When asked to explain the conflicting demands between society’s expectations and those of their personal desires, one interviewee shared, “We read. We know. Our parents...they were raised by their moms and their fathers, and they inherited the same systems. They want to apply them on us. We take what we like, and we leave what we don’t. But that does not satisfy our parents – believe me, it doesn’t” (Participant M 2011). When asked about major life decisions, she explained, “Everyone decides, not you” (Participant M 2011).

Thus, in a community where the whole serves as the focus as opposed to the individual, the varying levels of perceived control also provide an insightful method of understanding. Only three women of the fifteen believed that they had full control of their lives. Other responses ranged between sixty to ninety percent. The remainder amount usually lied in the hands of their family and their surroundings. Many of the women who did not feel completely in control of their lives indicated that this would improve after they graduated, had jobs, and perhaps had families of their own. However, for the woman who does already have a husband and children, she tersely explained that now she only has 30 percent control over her life – far lower than any other respondents’. Furthermore, she feels that prior to having children, she had complete control of her life. While conducting my interviews, there was another married woman with children with whom I was supposed to meet. However, she was unable to meet with me at the agreed

upon time as her child had fallen ill. It became apparent that after marriage and beginning a family, actual control over their own lives plummeted.

In conclusion, I found that women faced unexpected challenges in the future stemming from their unrealistic understanding of the world. Another researcher has noted that women's beliefs and attitudes about their employment do not always align with their ultimate behavior and actions (Kawar 2000). This study echoes her findings, as my participants' beliefs and goals rarely agreed with their plans and national statistics. While these findings may be a comment on female equality in Jordan, it also could potentially echo challenges that all people face around the world, regardless of sex, gender and culture. After all, I was inspired to pursue this topic based on my own unpreparedness regarding my plans to work and have a family at the same time. In expressing my own desire to manage this precarious balance, one woman glanced at me with appraisal and said, "I hope that one day you can hold it all together, but it will be hard" (Participant G 2011).

Limitations of the study

The primary limitation of this study is the small sample size. While the sample could be representative in some aspects, the sample size fully negates any possibility to draw conclusions that can be responsibly applied to the population as a whole.

The next limitation of this study was also discussed in the methodology. Given my “outsider” appearance and role, many of the participants may have offered responses they believed were more appropriate. While their comfort was provided for to the best of my effort, it is difficult to say whether or not some interviewees felt the need to represent their country in a positive light rather than providing a more honest perspective. Additionally, my lack of Arabic language proficiency further enforces my position as an outsider.

Lastly, a significant limitation of the study is that the analysis was performed under the assumption that a university-level student can be adequately prepared for the challenges of balancing the demands of a family and a career. In many ways, this would lead to a bias when interpreting responses and coding findings.

Recommendations for further study

Further research on this topic is highly encouraged, and furthermore, significantly needed. There is a wealth of scholarship on women who have already married, become mothers, joined the workforce, or refrained from doing so. However, young women who have yet to make these life-changing decisions are ignored. As far as I am aware, my research focusing on this particular population has never been explored in Jordan. Ironically, they are the ones who can benefit the most from conclusive findings that can lead to positive change.

A dynamic expansion of this project would include examining married women enrolled in degree-granting programs. It is undeniable that they face more challenges when trying to obtain their degree than women who do not have the additional responsibilities of caring for a family. This topic, particularly when set against prevalence of college women dropping out before obtaining their degrees, presents these women as a type of positive deviant. Determining the resources they have that have enabled their academic pursuit offers a glimpse into one method of improving educational attainment for all women.

There are also many other approaches to this topic that could yield better results. For example, focusing on graduating women or women in certain fields may focus and concentrate the lens with which we examine this issue. Through my research, it became apparent that women at the University of Jordan vary even by physical location on campus. Certain faculties have certain stereotypes that are attached to its students, and this phenomenon was quickly drawn to my attention by observations and also through interviews. As fields of study also relate to future employment, this type of research refines the potential results and thus applicability of the findings.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

I. The Challenges of Balancing Careers and Family Life Facing College Women in Jordan and Louisiana: A Comparative Study

A. Basic Information:

1. What is your name?
2. Where is your hometown?
3. What is your religious background?
4. What is your/your family's economic situation?
5. What is your major?

B. Regarding Education:

1. Why did you pick your major?
2. How are you paying for school?
3. What are your plans after graduation?

C. Regarding Your Childhood:

1. How large is your family?
2. What role did your mother play in your life and in your family while you were growing up?
3. What are your thoughts about how your parents balanced their work and family life?

D. Regarding Past Work Experience:

1. Have you ever had a job before?
 - a. If so, what was it like?
 - i. Where did you work?
 - ii. What was the gender distribution like?
 - iii. What are your thoughts regarding your job(s)?
 - b. If not, why?

E. Regarding Your Future Plans:

1. Do you want to have children? Why?
 - a. If so, when and how many?
 - b. Will you continue working if you have children?
 - c. How will the children be cared for while you are working?
2. If you plan on working, how long will you work?
3. What would your ideal or dream job be like?
4. How much control do you think you will have regarding your life decisions? How much control have you had in the past?

Appendix B: Written Consent Form

The Challenges of Balancing Careers and Family Life Facing College Women in Jordan and Louisiana

Anna Chang, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana, United States
School for International Training—Jordan: Modernization and Social Change

Instructions:

Please read the following statements carefully and mark your preferences where indicated. Signing below indicates your agreement with all statements and your voluntary participation in the study. Signing below while failing to mark a preference where indicated will be interpreted as an affirmative preference. Please ask the researcher if you have any questions regarding this consent form.

I am aware that this interview is conducted by an independent undergraduate researcher with the goal of producing a descriptive case study on the projected and ongoing challenges college women in Jordan face when trying to balance personal goals and family life.

I am aware that the information I provide is for research purposes only.

I am aware that I have the right to full anonymity upon request, and that upon request the researcher will omit all identifying information from both notes and drafts.

I am aware that I have the right to refuse to answer any question and to terminate my participation at any time, and that the researcher will answer any questions I have about the study.

I am aware of and take full responsibility for any risk, physical, psychological, legal, or social, associated with participation in this study.

I am aware that data will be retained by the researcher without identifiers for possible use in a future project, which will be consistent with the original research purpose.

I am aware that I will not receive monetary compensation for participation in this study, but a copy of the final study will be made available to me upon request.

I [do / do not] give the researcher permission to use my name and position in the final study.

I [do / do not] give the researcher permission to use my organizational affiliation in the final study.

I [do / do not] give the researcher permission to use data collected in this interview in a later study.

Date:

Participant's Signature:

Researcher's Signature:

Participant's Printed Name:

Thank you for participating!

Questions, comments, complaints, and requests for the final written study can be directed to:

Dr. Raed Al-Tabini, SIT Jordan Academic Director

Telephone (962) 077 7176318

Email: raed.altabini@sit.edu