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KAWANZARUWA, GALLIE

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**LIVED EXPERIENCES OF EMIRATI SENIOR  
WOMEN MANAGERS IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION: A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS**

**GALLIE KAWANZARUWA**

**Ed. D. THESIS 2014**

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF EMIRATI  
SENIOR WOMEN MANAGERS IN  
HIGHER EDUCATION: A NARRATIVE  
ANALYSIS.

GALLIE KAWANZARUWA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of  
the degree of Doctor of Education.

School of Education,  
University of Durham, UK

2014

## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis, which I submit for the degree of Doctor of Education at the University of Durham, is my own work. This is not the same as any other work that has previously been submitted for a degree at any other institutions or universities.

## **Statement of Copyright**

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation or data from it should be published without her written consent. Any information derived from this thesis should be acknowledged.

## **Acknowledgements**

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Last but certainly not least, I sincerely thank God Almighty for his favour, love, guidance and protection, and for granting me the wisdom to accomplish such a challenging task.



## **Abstract**

Over the last four decades, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has sought to ensure the full, comprehensive inclusion of women in both education and the workplace. Motivated by my own rise from a relatively humble upbringing to later professional success achieved largely against the odds, this thesis aims, through the use of narrative analysis, to establish the reasons behind the accomplishments of five Emirati women managers in Higher Education (HE).

The thesis contextualises their testimony by providing a historical overview of the UAE and a comprehensive examination of the literature; and setting out the critical feminist perspective at the heart of this study, which influenced the research paradigm: linking this with the narrative analysis method adopted.

The life stories of the five women are analysed in detail, in order to identify key themes and commonalities. These key themes are: support received from different individuals at different times; opportunities provided by political, cultural and structural change in the UAE; personal resilience and resolve to succeed; and the importance of the Islamic faith.

Taken together, the women's testimony justifies the use of narrative analysis; it provides lessons for policymakers to learn (as well as recommendations set out at the end of the thesis, which seek to nourish an environment based on genuine equality of opportunity for all) and inspiration for future generations of Emirati women and girls seeking to follow in their footsteps.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This thesis is based on an examination, through the use of narrative analysis, of the lived experiences of five women in Higher Education (HE) leadership positions in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The dramatic changes in the UAE over the past four decades have enabled these women to enjoy academic and professional opportunities denied to previous generations; but to what extent had they encountered discrimination and/or various cultural, patriarchal and religious barriers en route to their success?

Moreover, based on their testimony, have the government's policies, which have sought to provide considerably more opportunities for the country's women and girls, proven successful? Do their experiences bear out or contradict the literature in the area? And what recommendations would they themselves make for future generations seeking to follow in their footsteps?

This introductory chapter begins with a detailed overview of my own story: which, it is hoped, will enable the reader to better understand the motivations behind carrying out the research. It moves on to explore the difficulties which this personal story will pose to the task of carrying out a reliable, unbiased research project, and the steps taken to remedy this danger as far as possible and to briefly summarise the literature, explored in depth later in the thesis, before concluding by presenting the aim of the research, research questions and

thesis outline. I employ the first person 'I' throughout this thesis. As section 4.2.1, which draws heavily upon Frankfurtian interpretations, explains, the role of the researcher may be objective, detached or neutral; but critical theorists view it as inseparable from the personal values and assumptions which they bring to the table as a result of personal experience (Young, 1990).

Touching upon my own experiences, as the thesis does at various points, will also help explain any biases and presumptions. It is imperative that these are made visible to the reader as part of an approach which questions logical positivism and instead lays bare the too often unheard voices of women themselves.

### **1.1 Personal motivations**

My role as a researcher does not stand alone. I bring to the research process multiple roles (De Vault, 1999; Anderson et al., 1987; Harding, 1987; Mies, 1986), some of which I share with the five participants at the core of this study. These include being a student, mother, wife, professional woman and manager in education, and a teacher. These roles are also shaped by the historical, cultural and social aspects of my life, which I will now briefly present.

At the time of writing, I am 47 years old, married with three grown up children. Of African descent, I was raised by my mother within a moderately poor family in Chivhu, Zimbabwe, along with five step-siblings. Following the failure of their arranged marriage, my mother divorced my father when I was just a few months old. A qualified teacher, my mother had to leave home to

look for employment in order to raise me and send me to school. I was left with my grandparents until the age of five. This experience led me to acquire certain skills such as cooking, and the ability to look after family members from a very early age. Indeed, two of my aunts contracted polio, so were rendered unable to perform most house chores. Aged just five, this resulted in me being charged with looking after them.

Subsequently, my mother met and married my stepfather, who raised me, together with his own five children from a previous marriage. Following this, I joined my mother, who had now established a new home and family in another part of the country (Mashonaland West), popularly known as Zvimba. This was where I started my schooling. Without entering into much detail about my early school life, I can certainly report that it was not a pleasant experience; at times, indeed, I was unable to attend school because my mother could not raise my school fees.

We depended very much on subsistence farming: each summer, we were required to prepare the land for tilling, plant crops and harvest them, for our own consumption as well as commercial purposes. If the crops did not do well in any given year, we would struggle for food as well as school fees. We also did a great deal of gardening of various types of vegetables, which we would then sell.

My childhood experiences and upbringing had an enormous impact on the striver that I became. In effect, they provided training in skills which would



prove vitally important: problem-solving, resilience and perseverance, amongst many others. Accordingly, I was eager to discover to what extent the family backgrounds and formative influences of the five Emirati women under scrutiny in this study had impacted their later lives: would it be possible to draw a link between early formative experiences and their subsequent professional success?

Alfred Adler (1870-1937), a physician and psychotherapist, argued that we develop our desires and drives during childhood; and that our whole adult life is affected by those experiences. In my view, my own childhood and adult life have provided confirmation of that.

Even into my youth, the struggles referred to above continued: raising school fees remained a problem, but I was very keen to gain academic qualifications. After leaving secondary school, I married at age 17, and had two children before continuing with education, which I resumed by enrolling at a teacher training institute, where I qualified as an English and Home Economics teacher. I began teaching and continued into university education on a part-time basis. Thus, by this time, I was working, raising my by now three children, and furthering my studies and qualifications.

After ten years as a secondary school teacher, and having graduated with my Bachelor's degree, I went on to take a Master's in the United Kingdom. While in the UK, I worked in various positions, mostly in the education sector, although I had a brief stint in retail, where I worked as a Customer Service

Adviser for Marks & Spencer. I also worked for different local organisations, and was promoted to different managerial positions. I also persevered in undertaking a study at Doctorate level. Despite my personal resilience, if it were not for a strong support mechanism that included my current supervisor's support and guidance, I would have not have come this far.

Consequently, I wanted to establish whether my experience was similar to that of the five women under investigation in this thesis. Did they have to overcome similar barriers in order to accomplish what they have? Had they also encountered poverty during their childhoods? And had they found themselves obliged to face down cultural and religious norms and expectations regarding the role of women in society?

Although I am now a British citizen, the idea of women growing up in developing or under-developed nations greatly resonates with me; this is, I presume, what motivated me to approach this research project from a feminist perspective. I have been fortunate to have made a career for myself, but many other women have been disadvantaged by poverty, societal norms, cultural perceptions and patriarchal beliefs.

I bring to this research the personal knowledge and experience of a woman brought up in Africa, where many barriers continue to hinder the education of women and girls. Getting married and having children at a young age, at the expense of education, was considered the norm.

I could easily relate to the experiences described by the participants when they discussed the poverty-stricken lives which they had endured before the exploitation of the oil reserves in the UAE. This enabled me to continue a line of questioning that could confirm certain statements in their accounts. I ensured that I listened very carefully, always mindful that people perceive and make meaning of their experiences in their own individual way. They do not necessarily share my responses to similar situations.

However, the personal background which I have set out above also enabled me to be both an insider and outsider to the environment and topic I was exploring. It provided me with a stronger understanding of the dynamics and play of social relationships which made up my investigation. In this context, I sought to overcome cultural and religious challenges by reassuring the women of my own familiarity with such difficulties, thereby enabling them to feel more at ease in sharing information (Matsumoto, 1996).

Adopting a feminist approach required me to reflect on differences between the participants and myself. While I am also a woman, I come from a different cultural and religious background. In this sense, having to explain personal experiences and feelings to an outsider provided the participants, all of whom are senior women managers in Emirati higher education, with the space to critically assess their own lived realities. It reinforced their positions as authors and experts (Jackson and Carter, 2000). At least potentially, it also provided them with the opportunity to safely criticise their community, organisation or situation, without fear of discovery. And of course, as we were all women, we

shared common experiences in the social world and could therefore communicate on the basis of this similarity.

Within narrative inquiry, or qualitative research generally, one researcher cannot expect to interpret the data in exactly the same way as would another (McEwan; 2001). Nevertheless, as noted above, personal experiences and biases have the potential to shape the analysis. The role of the researcher may have shifted by the time that the research is completed, generating a conflict of interest. Accordingly, I reassured all participants that my role would be made clear to them, and that my position would remain the same throughout the research period.

Riessman (1993) notes five levels of representation in the research process: attending to experience; telling about experience; transcribing experience; analysing experience; and reading experience. From the original events, through the whole process of interview to the transcription, analysis and the reader's interpretation, the knowledge imparted may not be complete.

Therefore, while I was aware that the representation of the women's experiences may be partial, I was strongly committed to doing my very best to represent their experiences. This commitment was grounded in empathy, careful listening and questioning within the interview, and reflecting back to the participant (Chase, 2005), in order to obtain a strong sense of collaboration in building up an understanding of events.

## **1.2 Overview**

The aim of this study is to explore and understand the lived experiences of five Emirati women managers in Higher Education (HE) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) through the use of narrative analysis. As the research progressed, the interview framework which I developed proved very useful in guiding the participants as they told their stories.

Education is now free and universal for all Emiratis, up to and including higher education; the government has established various forms of higher education institutions in the country over the last 40 years. The first women gained access to higher education through the establishment of the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) in 1976, with graduates from this first wave going on to hold senior positions in government or academia.

95% of Emirati women enrolled at secondary school apply for admission to colleges and universities and nowadays, in tandem with the extraordinary increase in the country's literacy rates – from 60% in 1970 to 97% in 2006 (UNDP, 2007) – women are outstripping men in terms of both presence and performance in secondary and tertiary education (Ministry of Information and Culture, 2001). However, when set against the literature concerning education in the UAE, and of Emirati girls and women in particular (comprehensively explored in Chapter 3), a confusing picture begins to form: of remarkable advances on the one hand, but traditional, cultural and hegemonic constraints on the other (Mazawi, 2007).

Would an evaluation of the lived experiences of five successful Emirati women help square this circle, and explain whether the country has indeed made seismic progress towards female equality of opportunity, or if it still has further to travel than certain statistics might suggest? Moreover, had these women suffered repression at the hands of men during their rise up the career ladder, as a result of Islamic values being distorted (Gallant, 2010)? Had they encountered patriarchal pressures suggesting that they should remain as homemakers and caretakers (Sharabi, 1988, p. 33; Findlow, 2012; Mazawi, 2007)?

In her study of five Emirati women working in Dubai, Gallant (2010) identified key themes of gender, marriage, kinship and ethnicity, meritocracy, religion, employment enhancers, and barriers to employment. She found that the UAE very much remained a deeply patriarchal society: in which the first requirement of women is to fulfil domestic duties, and where laws regarding inheritance, divorce, marriage, child custody and nationality clearly favour men and discriminate against women. With commitment to the family central to Arab values and norms, societal expectations are effectively preventing true female empowerment from taking place (El-Rahmony, 2002; El-Ghannam, 2001; El-Jardawi, 1986; Abdalla, 1996)

Moreover, Mostafa (2005) found that Emirati women enjoy scarcely any options or opportunities in management, as their employment in non-traditional roles away from the home is looked down upon and scorned. Organisations are also hesitant to employ women in, or promote them into, managerial roles:

instead suggesting that they move into traditionally ‘feminine’ careers such as teaching, nursing or secretarial work. Many positions filled by women also remain poorly paid and unskilled (Rankin and Aytac, 2006).

It is hoped that this thesis will help shed new light on the obstacles which the five women under scrutiny needed to overcome: whether their families, society and government helped or hindered their progress; and whether their stories display consistencies, both with one another and in line with the findings of the literature.

Yet there is also the question of feminism, explored in more depth in Chapter 3: specifically, whether these women have done as Gallant (2010) suggests, and been able to gradually challenge patriarchal discourse while remaining faithful to societal norms. This is particularly important given the Islamic principles and culture which remain integral to all Arab societies: not least that of the UAE. As Gallant (2010) puts it, ‘women can’t voluntarily admit to not wanting to become a wife or mother’; and very simply, tend to end up doing what society expects of them.

The question, then, is whether there is any place for notions of ‘Western feminism’ in an Arab society; yet how do women fight for equality of opportunity without employing feminist discourse?

Moreover, women have found themselves held back by patriarchal attitudes, in both academia and elsewhere. As Ghubash (2011) highlights, women make up less than half of tertiary level teaching staff in most regions of the world; and

work at lower levels of institutions in general. Cultural attitudes and practices are at the heart of this (Currie, 2002; Currie et al., 2000). Dines' (1993) conclusion is stark: 'Women are disadvantaged by the simple fact that they are not men'.

In the UAE, the literature highlights that there are markedly few women in senior management positions. Assaad (2008) ranked the UAE at number 105 of 128 countries surveyed as part of a comprehensive study into gender equality, and identified a very wide gender gap in technical and managerial positions, with only 8% of women having attained the latter.

Emirati women have invariably found it difficult to combine their careers with taking care of their families (Mostafa, 2005); and Arab societies have been highly reluctant to move away from traditional gender viewpoints of women as homemakers (El-Rahmony, 2002; Abdalla, 1996; El-Jardawi, 1986). To what extent had the women at the heart of this study encountered and been encumbered by such viewpoints?

Masculine styles of leadership and management have also been found to predominate in the academic profession (Miller, 1995; Collinson and Hearn, 1996; Spurling, 2001). Stereotypical views of female roles abound: often leaving women feel they have little choice other than to put aside their own values and behaviour, and adopt a more 'masculine' style in order to succeed (Phillips et al., 1997).



Has this also been the case with the five women scrutinised by this study? What do the management styles which they have developed involve? And even in their positions as leaders and managers, have they found themselves marginalised by the dominant male culture (Smith, 2006 Thomas & Davies, 2002; Barry et al., 2001; Itzin, 1995)? Have men in their charge struggled to work for them, for example (Powney, 1997)? What forms of discrimination, if any, have they encountered in the workplace?

The next chapter, Chapter 2, contextualises the thesis by providing information on the history of the UAE before and after the advent of the oil industry and how and when it went about providing female education. It further highlights the country's socio-cultural beliefs and values in relation to religion and its continued strong patriarchal culture.

Chapter 3 draws on a body of literature on areas outside the UAE which is nevertheless salient to the research topic, and will provide a strong grounding for this study. This literature pertains to women and higher education management from a global perspective. In addition, literature on feminism, encompassing both Western and Arabic perspectives on the struggle of women to achieve parity in higher institutions of learning, is reviewed. The chapter also interrogates literature which looks at organisational practices and cultures with regard to women in managerial positions and how these support continued patriarchal practices.

Chapter 4 helps establish my standpoint as a feminist researcher by discussing the theoretical framework of the study, setting out the critical feminist perspective which influenced the research paradigm, and linking this with the narrative analysis method which was adopted. For a woman to be understood in any social research, it may be necessary for her to be interviewed by another woman (Cook and Fonow, 1986).

In Chapter 5, the narrative analysis, the life stories of the five women are analysed in order to identify key themes and commonalities. These are presented through the words of the women concerned, as well as the analytical voice of the researcher.

Finally, Chapter 6 first presents a meta-analysis of these narrative constructions, focusing on the key themes which are drawn out, before moving on to provide a broader discussion of these as juxtaposed against the literature. Both it and the thesis conclude with a series of recommendations for Emirati politicians and policymakers, based on the lived experiences of these five women.

It is hoped that by following these recommendations, the country's leaders will be able to prevent future discrimination against women in the workplace and provide genuine equality of opportunity for all.

## **Chapter 2: Setting the Scene**

This chapter sets out both the historical background and the context of the research. It discusses the history of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and its emphasis on education generally and seeks to identify how education has helped play its part in empowering Emirati women. Discussions on the impact of religion and patriarchy will also help the reader to understand the interconnectedness of these issues with the overall participation of women in the development of themselves and the nation. Although the chapter examines each of them separately, an interrelationship exists between the two, particularly in terms of Islam – not merely as a religion, but rather as a blueprint for life.

### **2.1 Geography, economy and demographics**

Located in the eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) extends along part of the Gulf of Oman and the southern coast of the Persian Gulf. It has Saudi Arabia (to the west and south), Qatar (to the north) and Oman (to the east) as its neighbours. The land is mostly barren and largely hot, dry sandy desert. The UAE constitutes a federation of seven sheikhdoms, spanning some 77,700 square kilometres: Abu Dhabi, the capital (territorially the largest); Ajman; Dubai; Fujairah; Ras al Khaimah; Sharjah; and Umm al Qaiwain.



The country is heavily dependent on the export of oil and natural gas. However, more recently, it has successfully diversified its economy to incorporate international banking, financial services, regional corporate headquarters and tourism.

Less than half of the country's inhabitants are Arabs; 40% are from South Asia, while Iranians, East Asians and Westerners make up the remainder. Only 20% of the population consists of native citizens. The very large non-native population was attracted by the employment potential following the UAE's oil boom. 96% of the population is Muslim (80% Sunni; and the remainder,

Shiite); the remaining 4% is made up of Christians and Hindus. The official language is Arabic, although Farsi and English are both widely used; while Hindi and Urdu are spoken by many of the South Asian population.

## **2.2 Historical background**

The seven states comprising the UAE were formerly known as the Trucial States, Trucial Coast, or Trucial Oman. The term *trucial* refers to the ruling sheikhs having been bound by truces concluded with Britain in 1820 and by an agreement made in 1892, which accepted British protection. Before British intervention, the area was notorious for its pirates and was called the Pirate Coast. After World War II, the British granted internal autonomy to the sheikhdoms. Discussion of federation began in 1968, when Britain announced its intended withdrawal from the Persian Gulf area by 1971 (Noyes, 1979).

Originally, Bahrain and Qatar were set to be part of the federation; but after three years of negotiations, they chose to be independent. Ras al-Khaimah, one of the seven Emirates, also opted for independence at first, but reversed its decision in 1972. Following the 1973 rise in oil prices, the UAE was transformed from an impoverished country with many nomads to a sophisticated state with one of the highest per capita incomes in the world and a broad social welfare system. In 1981, the country joined the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

The fall of the Shah of Iran in 1979, the subsequent growth of Islamic fundamentalism, and the Iran-Iraq War, all threatened the stability of the UAE

during the 1980s. In 1990, Iraq accused both the UAE and Kuwait of over-production of oil. In response, the UAE participated with international coalition forces against Iraq during the 1991 Gulf War, and ever since, has expanded its array of international contacts and diplomatic relations.

The period since has encompassed a dispute with Saudi Arabia in 1999 over relations with Iran, a traditional enemy; the death in 2004 of Sheikh Zaid ibn Sultan al-Nahayan, ruler of Abu Dhabi, who had been President of the UAE since its founding, and was succeeded by his son, Sheikh Khalifa ibn Zaid Al Nahayan; and financial crisis in Dubai in 2009, triggered by the collapse of the speculative bubble there. As the government-owned Dubai World conglomerate struggled with huge debts, all the sheikhdoms were affected to some degree, and the banking system was severely shaken: so much so that Dubai was forced to seek significant financial aid from Abu Dhabi. Finally, in 2011, Emirati forces aided Bahrain in suppressing pro-democracy demonstrations.

### **2.3 Education in the UAE**

In the UAE, education, including higher education, has been rendered a free, universal right for all. The government provides free higher education to Emirati students via various types of institutions throughout the country. The country maintains high expectations of its students, whose success, it hopes, will provide a strong foundation for a ‘knowledge-based economy’

Significant strides have been made investing in educational infrastructure, which led to literacy rates increasing from 60% in 1970 to 97% by 2006 (UNDP, 2007). This remarkable outcome has been even more noticeable in women: despite Emirati men having enjoyed a ten-year head start in access to higher education, they are now being surpassed by women in terms of both presence and performance in secondary and tertiary education. Statistics show that girls are out-performing boys across the majority of subjects (Ministry of Education, 2007).

The establishment in 1976 of the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), at the behest of the late Sheikh Zayed, provided the first women students with access to university education. The first cohort of these women, as graduates, proved able to position themselves in different sectors of the economy. Some went on to hold senior ministerial positions in the government, while others moved into academia.

Now, fully 95% of Emirati women enrolled at secondary school apply for acceptance to colleges and universities (Ridge, 2009) and account for more than 70% of university graduates. The vast majority (80%) of these students are first-generation college attendees. Their fathers are more likely to be better educated than their mothers, because Emirati men have always had access to education and wider employment opportunities, ahead of their female counterparts (Madsen, 2009).

Thus, although the Middle East is traditionally associated with male privilege (Mazawi, 2007), women's participation rates in Emirati higher education have displayed an upward trend. Emirati women were disadvantaged at the birth of the federation: only a decade later did they become active participants in education, including higher education; yet they have made very effective use of this opportunity. Family attitudes towards female children have gradually changed, in tandem with greater access of these children to educational resources, and the lead being provided by the country's rulers (Madsen and Cook, 2010; UNDP, 2007).

Yet the growing levels of participation in higher education on the part of Emirati women have not been sufficient to free them from traditional hegemonic constraints. On the contrary: they still find themselves tied to long-established cultural and traditional ideologies (Mazawi, 2007). Nevertheless, at the same time as global economic competition has overcome some of this religious, political and cultural traditionalism, local ideas about available roles for women have expanded through the creation of what Findlow (2007) has termed:

‘The creation of indigenous intelligentsias while simultaneously sourcing personnel and ideas from further afield than the traditional learning centres’ (p. 113).

In the UAE, it is still considered normal for women to seek permission from their spouse or parent to work (UAE Ministry of Information and Culture, 1995; United Nations, 2007). A mismatch also continues to exist between



educational attainment and those women with 'limited occupation and social mobility' (Mazawi 2007, p. 77), and they remain heavily dependent on the skills, connections and economic autonomy which they already have (Seikaly, 1998).

Education is commonly regarded as the gateway to success, the ultimate means through which women can secure their emancipation (Baber and Allen, 1992). It has long been key to feminist goals of equal citizenship in terms of economic, legal, political and cultural participation (Findlow, 2012; Kemp, 2013; Friere, 1970). The dual function of education as a tool of state to train and shape the attitudes of its citizens, while reinforcing the culture and values held by that state, is critical (Rimmerman, 1998).

In all societies, the division of the social world into male and female categories means that boys and girls are socialised in different ways. They are educated to have different expectations of life, develop emotionally and intellectually in particular ways, and are subject to different norms and expectations of behaviour (Fonow and Cook, 1991). Fonow and Cook go on to suggest that, as educational opportunities and experiences influence the individual's life experience beyond school, within the labour market, to the benefit of themselves and their family, this way of investing in human capital represents one of the most effective means of reducing poverty and encouraging sustainable development.

In order to address the disparities noted above, the UAE's leadership supported the growth of women's education (Madsen, 2009b; Ridge, 2009). This support encompassed the provision of a free primary, secondary, and tertiary public system, which enabled women of varying socio-economic status and familial circumstances to access higher education. Female students took advantage of these opportunities in ways that many males did not, largely because of the many other post-high school options which the latter enjoyed (Ridge, 2009). For example, male students could choose to enter the military or police force, study abroad, or join the family business.

Having recognised the country's women as equal partners in national development, the government has continued to pursue a strategy of empowering them within cultural, social and economic fields (Kemp, 2013; UAE Yearbook 1995, p. 186). The UAE is ranked 38<sup>th</sup> in the UN Human Development Index; and 32<sup>nd</sup> in female-male labour force participation (UNDP, 2007).

The policy of empowerment was initiated by Sheikh Fatima bint Mubarak, Chairwoman of the General Women's Union (GWU), Supreme Chairperson of the Family Development Foundation (FDF) and President of the Arab Women Organisation (AWO). Speaking at the 2009 National Day, Sheikh Fatima declared that:

‘Under a wise leadership that believes that investing in people is the most valuable form of investment, we are confident that UAE women will continue to be successful. It is enough to say that UAE

women are no longer busy claiming their rights but exercising them’ (UAE Yearbook 2010, p, 189).

Currently, the Emirati workforce is undergoing a noticeable transformation, with women holding more and more senior positions. Four women sit in the country’s Cabinet; nine of 40 members of the Federal National Council are women; two are ambassadors. Fully 66% of the public sector workforce, moreover, is made up of women, with 30% of these in senior positions. 15% of teaching staff at the UAEU are women; and women also hold 60% of the jobs in professions such as medicine, pharmacy and nursing (UAE 2010, p. 186).

## **2.4 The religious perspective**

In the Arab world and throughout Middle Eastern culture, the influence of religion is marked and obvious (Abuznaid, 2006). Islam has a major impact on human behaviour, social interactions, and social relations (Madsen, 2009b). Yet it also supports the role of women in society, including their right to study and work, the importance of family and their role as mothers (Gallant, 2010). It will inevitably continue to exercise a strong influence on organisational philosophies, policies, and practices in the Middle East (Metcalf, 2007). The combination of religion and nationalism has influenced the ‘sense of belonging, political lifestyle, and communal cohesion’ (Metcalf, 2007, p.125), thereby creating a sense of patriotism among the population.

Much as religion has shaped culture and social interaction in the Middle East, it has also helped shape the role of women. Since the first century of Islam, women have been respected and have exercised their authority as religious

scholars, teachers, and leaders. Sutayta Al Mahamati, for example, was a distinguished mathematician in the fourth century; while May Ziyada (1886-1941) was a writer and thinker who called for renewal and revival in intellectual thought and a change in societal attitudes towards women and their activities. Shadia Rifai Habbal obtained distinction and prominence in the field of Physics; whereas Fatima Mernissi was a pioneering feminist writer and social scientist.

These examples highlight the activities which Arab (not necessarily Emirati) women have undertaken, in order to be at the forefront of intellectual development. It can be assumed that intellectual emancipation helped shape these voices; yet have Emirati women and girls heard about them? It can surely be presumed that they made a constructive impact on society; and hence, can be regarded as role models for any Arab woman who wishes to follow in their footsteps.

Several Muslim countries have also produced female Heads of State and Prime Ministers: among them, Benazir Bhutto (Pakistan); Mame Madior Boye (Senegal); Tansu Ciller (Turkey); Kaqusha Jashari (Kosovo); and Megawati Sukarnoputri (Indonesia). Yet it is notable that none of these leaders emerged from the Middle East: and especially not from those countries making up the GCC. Despite the outstanding intellectual achievements of Emirati women, the institutionalisation of religious and secular learning over the twentieth century both marginalised women and undermined the kind of informal authority which educated Arab women had hitherto enjoyed (Metcalf, 2007). Yet it is

not possible to separate religion and culture in the Arab context; the two are intertwined and combine to make up the way of life.

Islam encourages equal education for men and women, as well as women seeking to work outside their home, although the main priority is often given to their familial roles (Mazawi, 2007; Mostafa, 2005; Madsen, 2009a). However, Gallant (2010) claims that at times, Islam is used by men to suppress women: the Koran gave women equality, but their voices were silenced after the death of the Prophet (Gallant, 2010). Law was always man-made, but when it was formed, women's opinions were not taken into account (Metcalf, 2007). Such values and patriarchy, 'which endangers a reluctance to abandon traditional caretaker roles of women in Arab societies' (Jamali et al. 2005(a), p. 583), have only exacerbated the position of women in Arab societies.

According to Rizzo et al. (2002), although changing dynamics in Arab states have led to women being afforded at least some rights, differing interpretations of Islam are deployed by different countries in terms of how they are treated. There is a tendency to limit the rights of women in areas which include political participation (Findlow, 2012), corporate roles, marriage, inheritance laws and divorce (Metcalf, 2007). Further orthodox Islamic definitions on the role of women do not approve of any transition. Rather, 'a conservative relentless male-oriented ideology, which tends to assign privilege and power to the male at the expense of female' (Sharabi, 1988, p. 33), continues to obtain.

Above all, women's freedoms in the Gulf (of which the UAE is part) are still dependent on the will of men (Findlow, 2012; Mazawi, 2007). Thus, traditional roles and responsibilities are still linked both to those depicted by religion, and to prevailing patriarchal beliefs and practices, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

## **2.5 Patriarchal beliefs**

Throughout history, men have held the right to make decisions in public and private aspects of life; women's participation in the decision-making process has been limited (Mazawi, 2007; Metcalfe, 2007; Philips, 1978). In the Arab world, patriarchy has traditionally been built upon a hierarchy of roles and responsibilities for men and women (Foquahaa et al, 2011). The power distribution at all levels has been clearly defined: these discriminate against women both directly and indirectly, in order to 'maintain the status quo within the object reality' (p. 235). Political, social, and economic policies effectively operate to reinforce existing social roles, which are heavily influenced by Islamic culture (Omar, 2008). The UAE is certainly no exception to this.

In her quest to find answers to the plight of working women, Gallant (2010) looked at five case studies based on the personal experiences of Emirati women working in Dubai, in order to deduce what social discourses these women had resisted and challenged. The themes which emerged encompassed gender, marriage, kinship and ethnicity, meritocracy, religion, employment enhancers, and barriers to employment.

From the findings of Gallant (2010) and these emergent themes, it is clear that the UAE remains a patriarchal society, in which the first priority for women is to fulfil domestic duties, and where most laws discriminate against them. For example, in cases of inheritance, divorce, marriage, child custody and nationality, men are still treated as the decision-makers both for themselves and the women in their lives (Gallant 2010). Although women are gradually finding ways to gain certain forms of empowerment, an imbalance clearly remains. Family commitment is central to Arab culture: men maintain the legal and cultural authority to make decisions for women (Gallant, 2010). Thus societal expectations continue to prevent full empowerment from being realised (El-Rahmany, 2002; El-Ghannam, 2001; El-Jardawi, 1986; Abdalla, 1996).

In other words, the idea of symbolic domination (McNay, 2004), which refers to active yet often invisible social processes, has led to the reproduction and re-contextualisation of historically coded elements of gender (e.g., women as 'housewives'). This same historical process could be said to involve the 'cultural reproduction' of 'deeply sedimented' gender symbols, despite the influence of sweeping social movements such as feminism in labour market structures (Acker & Dillabough, 2007, p. 136).

The behaviours which form the basis of societal discrimination against women are part of patriarchal practices. In the workplace, these practices include exclusion, occupational segregation and gender-based pay differences (Mies, 1986). According to Mostafa (2005), hardly any managerial opportunities exist for Emirati women: their employment outside of the house in non-traditional

roles is looked down upon and not appreciated. Organisations are quite hesitant to employ women in important managerial roles, and do not give them promotions in order to avoid them reaching higher positions. Instead, women generally find themselves only with the option of traditional 'female' roles such as nursing, teaching or secretarial work.

Moreover, Rankin and Aytac (2006) note that even though many education options have been opened up to girls, they are often not sent to school. This is either because they are required to assist in the work at home, or because those jobs usually taken up by women appear to be low-paying and unskilled. Thus, the patriarchal practices outlined above continue to constitute a great hindrance to the education and employment of women.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has helped contextualise this research by exploring the historical background of the UAE and the country's position on the education of women. It has also highlighted the influence of religion and patriarchy on Arab and Emirati society. While considerable progress in terms of female education and employment has been made, the chapter has noted key factors that continue to hinder the full participation of women in the civil and political arena, predominantly as a result of religious and cultural practices.

The next chapter draws on a body of literature from outside the UAE, which is nevertheless highly relevant to the research topic and provides a strong grounding for this study. First, it will consider literature on the feminist



approach, which has been adopted as the epistemological backdrop against which this research is being undertaken. Second, it examines research relating to women and higher education management from a global perspective, in addition to literature on feminism, encompassing both Western and Arab perspectives. Finally, it will interrogate work which has looked at organisational practices and cultures with regard to women in managerial positions, and how these continue to support patriarchal practices.

## **Chapter 3: Literature Review**

The previous chapter helped contextualise this research study by highlighting interconnected factors such as religion and patriarchy, and how these fit in within the UAE's historical treatment of the education of women. This next chapter draws upon a body of literature from outside the UAE. As noted by Fenster and Hamdan-Saliba (2013), there is a rich and extensive body of research on Middle Eastern gender and feminist issues.

First, the chapter considers literature on the feminist epistemological approach adopted by this study; second, it looks at work pertaining to women and higher education management from a global perspective. Research on feminism, encompassing both Western and Arab perspectives on the struggle of women to achieve parity in higher learning institutions, will also be reviewed, as well as literature examining organisational practice and culture with regard to women in managerial positions, and how these support patriarchal practices. However, it is important to acknowledge here that there is a dearth of published research on women in management positions in higher learning institutions in the Arab world.

### **3.1 Feminism: the general and Arab perspective**

Gallant (2010) evaluates what form of feminism best fits the Arab context. She argues that it is possible for Arab women to create a ‘sustainable, emancipator movement by gradually challenging patriarchal discourses while still maintaining a connection to key societal norms’ (p.14), which is what other societies encourage. Kikosky (2008), again focusing on Arab feminism, echoed this view, highlighting the importance of culture to women in Lebanon who, while yearning to realise goals and dreams in their own ways by leading more autonomous lives, do not want to do so at the price of the relationships which nourish them – in other words, the patriarchal system within which they enjoy security. It is important that women are not alienated from their society; hence there is a need to ensure that ‘Arab feminism’ considers Islamic principles and culture as core to their emancipation.

Gallant (2010) also reveals the importance placed on the expectations of women in the Arab world, and that the women themselves would want to conform to what society expects of them. The expectations of women to be wives and mothers are still very strong: ‘Women can’t voluntarily admit to not wanting to become a wife or mother’ (p.14).

One might be led to conclude from this that there is no place for Western feminism in the Arab world: such are the prevailing cultural and religious differences in the two societies. Indeed, Fenster and Hamddan-Saliba (2013)’s review of feminist research in the Arab world concludes that women there are marginalised politically, socially, spatially and academically; and are

subservient to male hegemony in terms of both knowledge and production of knowledge. The result of this male hegemony is the marginalisation and exclusion of women from academic life, including academic research on women generally, and research on gender and feminism in particular.

Yet on the other hand, one can also conclude that Arab women are indeed fighting for an equal place in society but, crucially, that they want to accomplish this without recourse to traditional feminist discourse. This is because the term 'feminism' indicates a gender struggle, which is primarily a 'Western ideal.' Such a vantage point may conceivably result in a new form of feminism: not Westernised and only applicable to the Arab world. In the case of the UAE, Kirk and Napier (2009) identified developments in its education system: which amount to a dichotomous relationship between Western systems and traditional Islamic society and norms. 'This in turn has given rise to tensions between adherence to traditional female roles in society and new roles linked to education and career development'.

Femininities are not constructed in the same ways as masculinities, in that they do not confer cultural power nor are they able to guarantee patriarchy. They are, instead, constructed as a variety of negations of the masculine (Paechter, 2006, p. 256). The debate continues over processes and their outcomes in the quest for both gender equity and gender equality. Questions are not just about insiders and global interpretation, but also about how, as insiders, male and female construct the two concepts of feminism and gender and the political,

social and cultural contexts within which patriarchal dominance is formed (Kirk and Napier, 2009).

Although the education issues in the Arab nation are predominantly Islamic in terms of history, culture and belief, these authors have cautioned against painting the whole Arab world with a single brush in a homogenous and limiting way. Each nation is distinctive: with its own set of internal contextual factors and circumstances shaping the details of development.

Moller (2007) is concerned with the techniques and tactics of masculine power that 'do not quite make sense as dominating or oppressive to see power as only domination' (p.266). However, Schippers (2007) views gender inequality not only through the prism of the unequal distribution of resources and power values between women and men, but also between those who embody intelligible gender and those who do not (p.100). These differing viewpoints suggest the significance of ongoing debates on how gender identity is seen both within and without educational research.

Quinn (2009)'s viewpoint is that feminism in the academy does not escape careful scrutiny. Thus he advocates the introduction of international perspectives, which effectively allow the feminist to act as a tourist of other cultures, positioning them as 'inextricably' the 'other' (p. 339). Like Quinn (2009), I also feel that researchers have only scratched the surface of what women can and should know, and the implications of feminism for transformative higher education. From a 'critical postcolonial perspective,

feminists have barely begun to make connections, relations, and engage in mutual learning with women across the globe' (Quinn, 2009, p.340).

Research associated with notions of gender equity and deconstruction of identity is concerned with binary emancipation (Rasmussen, 2009). Francis (1999) regards feminism as a 'political project that has emancipator aims' (p.385). However, post-structuralists dismiss emancipatory concerns as a 'modernist truth narrative', which requires deconstruction instead of being developed (Rasmussen, 2009, p. 385). Arnot and Dillabough (2000) argue that the theory of performativity constitutes a shift away from challenging structural inequalities and power relations between 'relatively given or fixed sexual/gender categories to deconstructing categories themselves' (p. 9), and that this theory is more interested in deconstruction than in inequalities and relations of power.

Dillabough (2001) argues against those forces opposed to feminism's advancement, and maintains that certain types of research exist to discredit the true spirit of social analysis in education and feminism (p. 26). She is supported by Francis (1999), who is concerned that post-structuralism is unable to engage in theory or to work for 'social change' (p.387), and suggests that instead of an emphasis on gender equity, researchers should focus on gender identity as a transformational process in social theory, as the latter encompasses many different facets.

Conversely, however, some education feminists see the need to continue examining the relationship between ‘gender identity both as a ‘category of analysis’ and as a coherent narrative which is shaped in part, through educational forces’ (Rasmussen, 2009, p. 16). Dillabough (2001) feels that this approach is shifting away from the sociology of women’s education and political and pedagogical concerns with gender identities, towards broader theoretical concerns with the formulation of gender identities and ‘novel gender theories’ of education.

### **3.2 The global picture**

The literature reviewed from a global perspective highlights the international struggle of women to achieve a level playing field in terms of access and promotion to positions in senior management. Not only in the Arab world have women in academia been held back by patriarchal attitudes towards their academic and intellectual endeavours (Madsen, 2009a). Madsen notes that women make up less than half of tertiary level teaching staff in most global regions, with the Arab region ranking as the second lowest within this ranking. Internationally, women occupy lower levels of these institutions (Morley, 2005).

In 2012/13 in the UK, 32.7% of academic staff in publicly funded higher institutions were female; but only 10% of the total were in management positions, whether as Deputy Vice or Vice-Chancellors, Deans, or Heads of Department (HESA, 2014).

Research has also shown that cultural attitudes and practices form ‘key impediments’ to equal access to education and consequently, to academic career mobility (Currie et al., 2000; 2002). Dines (1993, p.11) concludes that ‘women are disadvantaged by the simple fact that they are not men’. Acker and Armenti (2004) note the preponderance of research projects undertaken in the assumption that *something* should have happened in terms of the situation of women academics having improved. However, despite more than 30 years of feminist writings and resistance, these problems appear to persist.

In Europe, women still tend to teach mostly in schools and pre-schools; while in the higher education sector, administrative positions are dominated by men. If this is the scenario in Western countries, the Middle Eastern context will surely provide particularly revealing findings, given a cultural background which favours male dominance. Even with the advent of new thought processes encouraging change in this regard, a complex interplay between external forces, organisational structure, and the activities of women is still likely to occur (Fletcher et al., 2007; Currie et al., 2000; Thomas, 1996; Martin, 1994).

Universities in the UK have been greatly influenced by managerialism, which favours men (Parker & Jary, 1995; Barry et al., 2001); globally, labour structures are also still dominated by men (Acker, 1990; Fletcher et al., 2007). Significant gender differences in senior management positions remain (Deem et al., 2000; Chesterman, 2004). Indeed, Deem et al. (2000) criticise universities for ‘the dubious privilege of likely remaining the most male



dominated establishments in the world in relation to career advancement' (p. 13).

A study of 17 countries found that women were under-represented in positions of prestige and power in higher education (Lie et al., 1994). In Australian universities, men still occupied 87% of senior positions, while women only accounted for 13% (Winchester et al., 2005).

In terms of the American context, Acker et al. (2004) maintain that distant and silent discrimination continues to occur in US universities. Consolidating this, O'Laughlin and Bischoff (2005) concluded that women in American academia still experienced less support in balancing work and family obligations; and that they carried a greater part of the responsibility for the household than men.

Perceptions of the global state of affairs vary, and are influenced by historical and cultural views. As noted by Morrison et al. (2005), women enter the workforce at levels comparable to their male colleagues and with similar credentials and expectations; but it seems that after this point, gender plays a role in their career paths. Notably, even when women managers are hired in approximately equal numbers to males, they do not enter the ranks of senior management at comparable rates.

The picture is different in Central and Eastern European countries (Metcalf et al., 2005). However, even there, the high representation of women in management, once the hallmark of socialist/communist employment, is now threatened by the erosion of state childcare services and the increasing level of

discriminatory practices in recruitment, selection and development. Metcalfe & Afanassieva (2005) further argue that a process of ‘remasculisation’, which reaffirms gendered hierarchies and gendered power relations in public and private realms, is currently taking place. A number of strategic policy initiatives have been taken to improve gender equality among university managers, notably in terms of equal opportunity and affirmative action.

‘Equal opportunity’ is a passive policy initiative which celebrates difference and diversity. Measures are put in place to redress structural and systemic discrimination, and offer opportunity and power, access to mentors and challenging work to groups which have been historically disadvantaged. In other words, the aim is to achieve a system whereby everyone is treated the same. Considering gender, as acknowledged earlier, this policy is based on the simple point that in most societies, the patriarchal system has offered men greater wealth, privilege and power than women. However, action is taken only when there is evidence of discrimination.

Many debates have occurred among radical feminists asserting women’s differences: and hence, their potential for delivering results not achievable by men. Terms including ‘soft’ approaches to management – which emphasise consensus and collaboration - (Trow, 1993) are underscored. For example, women managers in English higher education stated that their gender affected both how they managed and the way that others responded to their management (Deem, 1998).

‘Affirmative action’, on the other hand, is proactive, albeit with a similar goal: to redress discrimination faced by identified groups within society. This policy recognises that discrimination is not necessarily overt. It examines equality of opportunity and, where identified, removes barriers to equality. Resources and other instruments are used not only to subvert, but also to avert discrimination (Crosby et al, 2006).

Woodward et al, (2012) suggest that many men in the academy find themselves caught in a patriarchal system which holds that the presence of any women in senior or middle management positions implies complete domination by women. Yet numbers of women in senior higher education remain persistently low. Woodward et al, (2012) also argue that feminist critiques of inequalities are often manifest in women’s invisibility and silence; hence, there is still the need to support a politics of difference and to devise ways to give women a voice.

In Australia, both equal opportunity and affirmative action policies in universities have served to increase numbers among university management teams (Carvalho et al., 2013). Similar results were observed by the same authors in Portugal, which has the same policies.

In post-independence Africa, despite a number of declarations and resolutions on the part of the higher education establishment – such as Tannanarive (UNESCO 1963), Cape Town or individual university mission statements –

inequalities continue to persist, and are influenced by institutional dynamics and processes (Mama et al, , 2007).

In South Africa, until 1994, issues of inequality encompassed both race and gender. Since then, higher institutions have continued to be affected by gendered inequality common to other African universities. Barnes-Powell et al (1998) observed that the African professoriate remains overwhelmingly male, as do the ranks of administrators and managers. Women are still a marginalised minority; most have to battle not only racial barriers, but also various economic and political crises in order to establish themselves.

The next section considers the situation in the Arab world.

### **3.3 Closing the gender gap**

Over the past three decades, women have been making, and are continuing to make, monumental strides in education in the UAE. As noted by Madsen & Cook (2010), most female Emirati college students nowadays are first-generation attendees, with relatively uneducated mothers who married in their early teenage years and immediately began bearing children. According to Dr Maitha Al Shamsi, Minister of State for Education, Emirati women have become a significant contributing factor in the nation's growth and development. Women now account for 66% of the government workforce, with 30% in senior positions involving decision-making (Gallant, 2010). These statistics do not reveal the proportion of women in senior management positions in higher education; but do for other sectors: such as the armed

forces, police and customs (15%), technical, medicine, nursing, and pharmacy (15%).

Policies to promote women's empowerment in the UAE are engraved in government initiatives. The political leadership has been extremely supportive of women's education, even from the earliest days of the federation, albeit schooling was initially made available to men only during the 1950s. However, with women still enjoying fewer post-secondary employment opportunities than their male counterparts, they have tended to opt for higher education, meaning that careers in the education sector have therefore become particularly popular. Women are encouraged to be 'flexible in their approach to work – to choose a career path, to balance the demands of home, and the office, to contribute to the development of this nation' (Sheikha Lubna Bint Khalid Al Qasimi, Minister of Economy and Planning for Higher Education, 2007).

Yet despite the recent advances made, very few women can be found in senior management positions in the UAE.

Numerous research projects and publications on gender-related issues in the UAE have been performed and produced, yet none have looked at educational management in higher education institutions. Assad (2008) examined gender issues from an economic rather than higher educational perspective. Ridge (2009); Abdulla (2009); and Abdulla et al, (2011) contributed to the debate by focusing on contradictions steeped in traditional, religious, cultural, and

patriarchal beliefs, but made no contribution to the question of whether women have access to positions of authority in higher educational institutions.

Ridge (2009) notes a gender gap which shows that only 27% of males attend higher education compared with over 70% of females. In his view, young men do not proceed into higher education as a result of family obligations and the desire to find work. Perceived low economic returns from education constitute a major factor.

However, the policies mentioned above have also contributed to the high proportion of young women in higher education. A survey of the participation and contribution of women in academia has revealed that they have achieved and contributed a great deal to intellectual and cultural life in the Arab world: despite what a policy paper (Ghubash, 2011) refers to as ‘ways in which women were caught in the problematic interactions of thought and patriarchal policies’ (p.26).

According to Delamont et al, (2012), society should not ignore the context in which certain beliefs and practices are held. Beliefs about sex roles and education should not be mistaken notions. Despite the large body of research that documents the existence of serious gender inequalities in education, health, economic, and political participation in the Arab world, a few initiatives do exist in the Gulf region, which define research-driven agendas (Ridge, 2009).

Policy-makers in the Gulf faced the problem that most research on education had been undertaken in other countries, mostly outside the Middle East. Issues

surrounding access for researchers have contributed to this continuing imbalance; and in the absence of policies and solutions based on locally derived research, the UAE, Qatar, and other Gulf states will continue to fail to address their own distinct educational needs (Ridge, 2009).

Indeed, this point is of particular importance: local research ‘gives insights, shows nuances and reveals gaps not identified by large cross-cultural studies’ (ibid., p. 32). Sustainable solutions to educational challenges in the region will require policy decisions based on local realities rather than international opinion.

Assad (2008) undertook a comprehensive study on the position of the UAE in terms of gender equality. She found it still to be lagging behind, ranked number 105 of 128; although it does have a highly competitive economy. One third of Emirati women in the labour force are in middle and senior management positions, with the potential to rise to senior roles (Assad, 2008). Yet a wider gender gap can be found regarding managerial and technical positions, achieved by only 8% of women (ibid.). Clearly, then, the gender gap identified here is wide enough to warrant further investigation, especially in terms of higher education leadership.

Traditionally, women in the UAE have always assumed greater amounts of responsibility; but they find it difficult to combine their careers with taking care of children and a family (Mostafa, 2005). Such assumptions and expectations have led to Arab women occupying roles regarded as extensions

of those pertaining to the home and family: for example, as elementary school teachers, secretaries, and nurses (Mostafa, 2005).

Yet research on gender roles over the last two decades appears to lean towards a universal trend of increased liberalism, and an acceptance of a more 'egalitarian role definition' ( Coltrane et al , 1997. This is indicative of a paradigm shift in so-called traditional roles for women, not only in the UAE, but the Middle East more generally, as more and more women take up employment outside the home.

As expanded on later in this chapter, Arab societies remain reluctant to abandon traditional expectations (El-Rahmany, 2002; Al-Ali, 2000; Abdalla, 1996; El-Jardawi, 1986). From such a standpoint, they consider household and domestic activities as suitable for women: to the extent of focusing on the education of boys rather than girls (El-Ghannam, 2001).

However, on the more positive side, despite the challenges faced by the Arab region in addressing women's empowerment and their contribution to the civil, political, and intellectual arenas, women in GCC countries are entering higher education sectors in greater numbers (Abdulla et al, 2011); and, indeed, actually making up the majority of graduates.

### **3.4 Attitudes towards women managers**

Many factors influence women's careers and their progression into management positions. These include family and cultural context, significant others, professional considerations, and competencies. In a study covering both



public and private companies in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, Kemp et al. (2010) established that women are still under-represented in senior and leadership positions.

A 'patriarchal contract' (Moghadem, 2005), whereby tradition assigns the role of family provision to the menfolk, is based on perceived gender strengths and weaknesses (Hashim, 1999). Culturally, women find themselves assigned the roles of nurturers, caregivers and homemakers, men as leaders and breadwinners. This attitude is extended to organisational hierarchies: thus women are excluded from managerial positions. There is evidence, though, that this attitude is more prevalent among the older generation (Mostafa, 2005).

The World Bank has found that women from Arab societies mostly work in social services. Much the same can be said of the UAE (Mostafa, 2005). Moreover, a study carried out in Egypt on male attitudes towards women revealed negativity linked to women managers and those in managerial and leadership positions (Abd El-Latif, 1988).

In contrast, a similar study in Kuwait indicated a relatively positive attitude towards women managers. Similarly, encouraging developments can be identified in the UAE, thanks to the policy initiatives noted above. Yet further studies reveal patriarchal attitudes reinforcing traditional values: particularly in Egypt (Mensch et al., 2003).

Attitudes and expectations of female family members appear to be based largely on the views of their families as a whole. For most women, family

holds a central position in their lives, greatly influences their choice of career and pace of progress. Male prejudice is more apparent among the middle classes; here, emotional help and encouragement are central to a woman's career development.

Yet family – including male – support appears to be more readily available to females from upper class and ruling families. Women in these groups are recipients of support and advice on career choices, and opportunities for employment thanks to *wastas*, powerful social networks. These networks represent the acknowledgement of tribal and familial structures (Neal et al, 2005; Metcalfe, 2007).

Those women who enjoy access to these networks do nonetheless acknowledge the barriers and prejudices faced by their less fortunate counterparts. For all women, however, the key point remains the reconciling of their roles within the family, expected within an Islamic culture, with the personal commitment required to gain the competencies necessary for management positions. Their study choices dictate not only employment potential, but their subsequent level within the organisational hierarchy.

Research has also confirmed that women encounter huge difficulties in maintaining a career while having a family (Thomas & Davies, 2002; Powney, 1997). Traditional gender roles still commonly discourage women from seeking employment outside the home (Helman et al, , 1997; Schreiber, 1998).

Abdalla (1996) argues that there have been some changes and movement towards increasing liberalism and greater acceptance of more egalitarian roles for women in the Arab world (for example, in Qatar and Kuwait). Yet despite advancements in both education and employment, Abdalla believes that Arab women will remain 'locked in restrictive traditional roles' for a considerable time to come (p.37).

Mostafa (2005) uncovered some moves in management in the UAE towards a less traditional stance, but emphasised that his research should not be generalised in any sense as denoting a move away from a 'patriarchal and traditional society' (p. 534). In other words, symbolic domination (McNay, 2004) is still leading to the reproduction and re-contextualisation of historically coded elements of gender (e.g. women as 'housewives').

### **3.5 Barriers to progression into leadership and management positions**

The literature available on women in management in the Middle East tends to focus on career barriers and challenges for females in supervisory roles or middle-management positions (Madsen et al, , 2010). Countries such as Egypt, Lebanon (Jamali et al., 2005(a); Bahrain (Metcalf, 2006); and the UAE (Mostafa, 2005; Gallant & Pounder, 2008), have experienced their share of research related to supervisory or middle-management positions. Yet to date, I am not aware of any studies having been performed which look at senior women managers in higher education.

Madsen (2009b); Jamali et al (2005); Kattara (2005); and Metcalfe (2006; 2007) all highlight the many barriers and challenges facing women as they seek to progress into leadership and management positions. These tend to involve coded, unwritten social mores rooted within a patriarchal, male-dominated society (Omair, 2011). By law, women require permission from a man (either their father or husband) to take up employment.

Women in top managerial positions also report overt discrimination among male colleagues; and lack of confidence and trust, leading to bias against them. Although they can aspire to and have the potential to reach the highest positions, their male counterparts still perceive them within family-oriented roles away from the public realm (Wilkinson, 1996).

Negative perceptions of women's professional capabilities and commitment emanate not only from male colleagues, but at times from women themselves. They may be reticent about their capacities, ambivalent about choices or resistant to the heavy demands of senior jobs (Chesterman et al., 2005). Thanks largely to prevailing cultural and religiously conservative traditions, segregation of sexes and workplace relationships – although 'not official' – places restrictions on employment, training and promotion opportunities for women (Omair, 2011). This may be attributable to Islam; but in any case, gender stereotypes drawn from the traditional sex roles are used in decisions regarding hiring, promotions, and performance evaluations.

Traditional stereotypical attitudes of male bosses towards working women represent another barrier in an environment dominated by men. Formal and informal networking processes are not available for women managers. Such are the low numbers of women in these positions, and gender segregation in wider society, that women lack support, whether in the form of role models or fora in which to discuss issues such as balancing childcare and other domestic roles with the demands of a management position. As noted by Kattara (2005), men control the networks which have access to the organisations' sources of power and valuable information, and are also more likely to be mentors.

As observed by Hammoud et al. (2005), the role of women in management cannot be treated in isolation from the general status of women in society, and from the general aims of economic, social and educational development. While the positive impact of policy instruments aimed at advancing women's education has been acknowledged, this conflicts to an extent with Arab and Islamic traditions, which still promote the patriarchal system. While Arab women are willing to accept responsibilities in the workplace, their male counterparts are not willing to share these with them (Abdalla, 1996).

As a result, women tend to enjoy more limited training and development provision opportunities; are regarded as less reliable due to their anticipated familial responsibilities and, consequently, receive more limited career advancement opportunities.

Little opposition exists to the traditional expectations noted here. Women managers are themselves of the view that, while they can aspire and have the potential to reach the highest management positions, the primary concern and role of any woman should continue to revolve around the family (Jamali et al, 2005).

In the debate about religious gender codes, however, a contest exists in terms of how Islamic teachings are interpreted; patriarchal power relations claimed therein are being challenged. The argument is being advanced that women are themselves unaware of rights which actually exist under Islam, which does not prohibit them from holding positions of authority (Kausar, 1995). Kausar reveals the growing number of 'women-friendly interpretations of the Koran and Muslim teachings'. Yet the still widely held religious views about the position of women continue to form effective barriers to their progress into management (Metle, 2002).

These findings support the theoretical framework emerging from Gallant (2010), which concluded with an examination of feminism and post-structuralist theory. These are further discussed in the following sections as part of a more detailed analysis on how they have come to shape universities today. However, the type of feminism being discussed here is regarded as having come from the West: this ideology cannot be sold to Arab culture. Indeed, the conviction exists amongst many young women (Gallant, 2010) that the so-called Western concept of feminism has no place in the Arab world; and

that women must therefore employ other means in order to obtain an equal place in society (Wilkins, 2010).

### **3.6 Gendered organisational culture of higher education**

Another emerging theme is that of gender and organisational culture. Universities exhibit the full 'panoply' of 'symbolic trappings', from new cultural paradigms of mission statements, strategic plans and total quality management, towards more global trends, where managerial practices depend on funding and performance indicators. Blackmore and Sachs (2000); and Morley (2004) note the rising expectations of universities in terms of quantity of work, accompanied by various forms of performance indicators to ensure that this work is quantifiable and demonstrable. These institutions are also considered as forming one of the largest sectors of the service economy: producing workers who naturalise 'upward mobility' in terms of performance, and attribute this only to merit, masking inequality (Morley, 2004, p.108). Alexander (2005, p.108) argues that as feminists, we cannot 'concede the operation of the new world order to the will of corporate restructuring'.

These changes have also brought about administrative and bureaucratic responsibilities, increased production of research and publications, accountability measures, technology, and increased workloads (Acker & Dillabough, 2007). Universities have found themselves caught in 'the relentlessness of the contemporary performative', whereby they are only as good as the quality and quantity of their publications (Acker, 1992; Morley, 2004; Blackmore & Sachs, 2001). Such has been the extent of this

competitiveness that research and publications have taken priority; but in turn, this forces academics, male and female, to be torn between family, friends, and work (Blackmore & Sachs, 2001).

Conclusions drawn by various proponents of organisational culture describe universities as 'highly gendered organisations' (Blackmore, 2001) and from this standpoint, Blackmore views universities as in need of re-gendering and re-masculisation of their core activities, and refers to the formation of 'flexible peripheral labour of a feminized, casualized and de-professionalized teaching force' (p. 345). Women at these institutions are under pressure to accept heavier teaching loads and more pastoral care than their male colleagues, who can focus more on research and external networking (Thomas & Davies, 2002). They noted that teaching was seen to fit family life better than research, and that women would still be expected to bear the major responsibility regarding the care of children.

Research has always dominated the professional image of the academic. It is, according to Rice (1992, p.119), the 'central professional endeavour and the focus of academic life'. This also determines a depreciation of many women's work in academic institutions, where they have traditionally published less than men (Brooks and Mackinnon, 2001).

Much of the literature on gender asserts that stereotyping and discrimination are perceived differently by men and women, and can affect people's work in various ways (O'Loughlin and Bischoff, 2005). Some women have developed



strategies with which to overcome barriers to career advancement, and achieved positions of influence.

The above assertions by Brooks and Mackinnon (2001) may be deeply embedded in the organisations where women work. Thus, the culture of an organisation plays an important part in either promoting stereotyping or defending the position of women in academia. This culture is defined in terms of the realities and values, symbols and rituals held in common by members (O'Loughlin and Bischoff, 2005). For women to succeed in such organisations, they have to put aside values and behaviours which they believe to be important in defining who they are (Phillips and Imhoff, 1997, p.571).

Burton (1997) criticises the systematic influence of masculine values underpinning the organisational culture of universities, which leads to an environment in which men are more 'at home' than women. In other words, this masculine culture reflects not only male values and priorities, but the structural arrangements in which they become embedded.

Gender dimensions of organisational life are based on a male rather than female profile, with negative consequences for perceptions of women's suitability for managerial positions. Thus, women fail to gain inclusion because they are judged in systems set up by men, reflecting male standards and criteria (Deem, 2003).

According to Miller (1995), the academic profession has shown resistance to cultural change; the position of women in academic institutions is evidence of

this. Miller (1995) suggests that the most obvious feature of the management of universities lies not only in the dominance of men, but also that of masculine styles. Similarly, Collinson and Hearn (1996) presume that the numerical dominance of men occurs through masculine discourse, and practices which often pervade the managerial function and its perception. Miller (1995) argues that established academic conventions result in gender imbalance in favour of masculine experience.

From another standpoint, O'Loughlin (2005) asserts that the organisational and managerial values in some organisations tend to be characterised by stereotypical views of women's roles, attributes, preferences, and commitments. These in turn influence decisions about who is suitable for particular positions, and who is thought of as having potential. To succeed in such organisations, women feel that they have to put aside the values and behaviours which they believe are important in defining who they are (Phillips and Imhoff, 1997). This includes having to 'downplay' the importance of family and children in order to be seen as serious about their careers.

Also problematic is the question of stereotyping, which can influence the way in which men and women are perceived at the workplace. Stereotyping is a process of categorisation which is effective and efficient in most cases (Heilman, 1997). Gender stereotypes are still pervasive and widely shared.

Many researchers on gender issues attribute their findings to persistent gender stereotypes which colour the evaluations and expectations of women. The

literature has also often identified that women are not thought to have the characteristics necessary to become successful managers, and that in itself is stereotypical (Lips, 1995). Thus, the concept of gender is vital because it facilitates gender analysis, revealing how women's subordination is socially constructed. As such, this subordination can be changed or ended. In this case, gender equity - a process of being fair to men and women - is needed. To ensure that such a process yields positive results, measures must be put in place to compensate for the historical disadvantages that prevent women and men from operating on the same 'playing field' (Singh, 2003).

Gender stereotyping is not an unfamiliar phenomenon in research on gender and leadership (Bagilhole, 2002; Billing & Alvesson, 2000). The view that men are 'better' and 'stronger', while women are emotional leaders, is stereotypical. It is quite difficult, then, to define leadership between men and women; suffice to conclude that there is a system of what Deem (2004) refers to as 'common beliefs'. These beliefs regard women as 'people centric' and possessing emotional intelligence, and men as strong, but lacking in emotional intelligence (Deem, 2004).

Another argument is that women are positioned as outsiders, only to be allowed to the centre by invitation; and that dominant male cultures both marginalise these outsiders (Morley, 2004; Thomas & Davies, 2002; Barry et al., 2001; Itzin, 1995), and are resistant to change (Whitehead & Moodley, 1999; Elg & Jonnergard, 2009).

A closer inspection of the above suggests that the 'glass ceiling' concept still exists. This defines the barrier which women face in trying to rise past a certain point, a barrier which is transparent and virtually invisible until a person crashes into it. Higher education institutions are no exception in this regard. With increasing numbers of women entering fields which lead to leadership positions, many tend to assume that reaching the top is a matter of time and energy (Lips, 1995). This has restricted the proportion of women taking up leadership roles in universities.

The key points highlighted in the above discussion, which have remained unaddressed from both societal and institutional viewpoints, are that women remain under-represented in positions of authority in global higher education institutions; and that even for those who may have made it, barriers to career progression still exist. Thus, the analysis of the literature has identified a gap in what is known, which relates very effectively to the way that this study looks at the lived experiences of women through their own 'lenses'.

Moreover, there is also a gap in how far life stories have contributed to research and policy change in the UAE. Thus, further research is called for to seek to address these issues; research which, in the case of this study, looks at the experiences and perspectives of women managers themselves.

Scott (1998) supports the idea that processes concerning gender are not predetermined, but may be attributed to actors' possibilities of integrating their interpretations with organisational practice. Earlier studies on gender reveal

how gendering processes in academia marginalise women and reduce their opportunities (Thomas & Davies, 2002; Barry et al., 2001; Goode & Bagilhole, 1998; Margolis & Romero, 1998; Prichard, 2000; Martin, 1994). Meanwhile, Acker (1990) has also argued that gendered structures in universities have affected the recruitment and selection of women into senior management positions, attributing this disparity to feminine management practices: explored in more detail below.

### **3.7 Feminine management practices**

The ‘traditional’ gender divisions of work have led to various forms of gender symbolism (Priola, 2004), one of which is linked to the management styles of men and women. However, Mano-Negrin (2003) argues that men and women do not differ in their management approaches, because women managers are a highly select group who do not conform to feminine values. Middlehurst (1997) supports this view, when noting that management and leadership have been predominantly male territories. Thus, the figure of the ideal manager is grounded in masculine values.

These masculine discourses and practices are so dominant that they have to be embraced if a person seeks to have influence as a manager (Kerfoot & Knights, 1998). Yet as feminist theorists suggest, women’s relationships to management and organisation often generate conflicts and tensions over gender roles, power relations, sexuality, forms of resistance, and the masculine aspects of the professional culture (Whitehead, 2001).

By adopting male behavioural traits, institutions will have no feminine culture even though they may be headed by females; hence they may not play host to a nurturing or congenial environment (Powney, 1997). The assumptions about women managers in this regard are that they are competitive, aggressive, and influenced by 1980s-style power-dressed women executives in Western culture: predominantly, the US (Whitehead, 2001).

This idea contradicts that of Eagly and Karau (2002), who assert that women's concerns are for others' welfare, including being affectionate, helpful, kind, sympathetic, interpersonally sensitive, nurturing, and gentle; in contrast to masculine management traits, which include being 'assertive', controlling, confident, aggressive, ambitious, dominant, forceful, independent, self-sufficient, self-confident, and prone to act as a leader (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Consequently, in masculine discourse, the rhetoric of male patriarchy is characterised by 'individualism, hierarchy, lack of feeling, impersonality, the competitive mentality' (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

Eagly and Karau (2002) continue to argue that winning in this discourse is important; and that it supersedes collaboration and cooperation, typically the gendered feminine characteristics of leadership. These characteristics are commonly held attitudes which prejudice the appointment of women to positions of senior management. Powney (1997) finds that men struggle to work for a female boss, while women also prefer a man to be in a leadership position. Thus, in this case, women themselves adopt masculine ways of

approaching relationships, and may find it difficult to work for other women (Priola, 2004, p. 31).

From Mouffe (1995)'s analysis of women academic managers, it emerges that tensions are engendered over their (feminine) identities as managers, and over their 'gendered roles' outside work. Gherardi et al (2001, p. 190) views them as 'outsiders on the inside.'

The experience of being a stranger and entering a 'non-natural culture, entails the suspension of normal thought patterns' (Prioli, 2004, p. 36). These women managers reiterate discourses associated with femininities: greater personal and professional support, and more open and democratic communication (Goode & Bagilhole, 1998; Priola, 2004). As these women are steeped in emulating masculine qualities in the way that they work, they tend to deny some feminine attributes of emotional vulnerability and softness: as discussed above. This denial (Gherardi et al, 2001; Prichard & Deem, 1999) may affect their competencies, abilities, and work relationships. This creates tensions between what Priola (2004, p.36) holds as 'institutional identities as managers and personal identifies'. In other words, women are positioned disadvantageously within their institutions, largely because of their career paths; their concept of selfhood is tied to teaching, service, and care (Acker, 1990).

University leadership, especially in the US, has remained largely white; with good practice tailored around the administrative practices of these white leaders. This masculine discourse relegates the reproductive processes of

service and nurturing to the 'ontological basement' (Edwards 1990); and assumes that women have a different way of managing. Several studies suggest that women faculty members find their work lives constituted differently from those of their male counterparts, in ways that play upon parallels with their location in domestic life (Davies and Thomas, 2002).

In many studies, women are found to state that they do too much nurturing and mentoring of students (Acker, 1990). This assertion is echoed by Park (1996), who argues that women's work in the academy 'mimics' their work at home, with the accent on service and teaching rather than research. Artazcoz et al (2004) describe 'the institutional housekeeping' responsibilities of women faculty; while Eveline (2004) discusses the 'glue work' that academic women perform invisibly in the relational realm (see also, Barnes-Powell & Letherby, 1998). Acker et al (1996)'s look at the Canadian context observes that women's work is particularly tiring: incorporating caring and service with responsibilities which demand high skill levels, but go unrewarded.

This is echoed by Blackmore and Sachs (2000): who find that, paradoxically, senior women are framed as both academic and management workers. They are identified as academics, when in fact, the nature of their work as they move into senior positions is more aligned with that of management. This results in contradictions: by trying to balance the subject positions, they become frustrated, overworked, and are 'doing things on the run' (p.6).



Leadership is a term that seems commonly understood, yet difficult to define (Isaac et al., 2009). Higgs (2003) suggests that leadership denotes the attempt to influence behaviour of an individual or group, regardless of reason. While leadership has a broader implication of influencing behaviour, management focuses on organisation. Thus 'power' is often misconstrued as the synonym of leadership (Higgs, 2003). Porter et al. (1997) characterise good leadership as:

'Promoting 'ownership,' listening and organizing others' value, creating opportunities for progressive roles for others, rewarding competency, negotiating barriers, promoting collegial interaction, creating teams for organizational problem solving, and helping individuals understand how their roles contribute to the collective whole and all these behaviors are carried out without managing and controlling.'

In their study on female deans, Isaac et al. (2009) sought to deconstruct the term 'leadership' by examining, through a post-structural feminist lens, patterns of discourse, subjectivity, resistance, power, and knowledge among women administrators who worked in male-dominated versus female-dominated fields. It was found that their identities were balanced between masculine and feminine, a view confirmed by Walton (1997).

Feminist post-structural writings further destabilise critical feminist traditions by probing research possibilities that 'might, perhaps, not be so cruel to so many people' (Pierre & Pillow, 2002, p.1).

Spence (1993), attribute sex-related attitudes towards strong masculine-based views. These determine how society views women managers. However,

Gherardi et al (2001) argues that femininity and masculinity, while socially constructed, represent a binary opposition: in which the feminine part is subordinate, suppressed, seen as weak, and powerless (see also, Kerfoot & Knights, 1998).

Pregnancy, caring for children and other family-related work are examples of household labour division along gendered lines: 'Family work still tends to be "women's work"'. Deem (2004) asserts that the career narratives of her research participants show the division of household labour as one area where gender factors emerge.

Data collected from ten female deans of both male- and female-dominated colleges portray multi-dimensional qualities of power; and how women use power 'consciously' and 'unconsciously' to move within 'academic discourses' (Isaac et al., 2009). Research such as this Western-based example helps extend and set the platform and context of non-Western women managers.

### **3.8 Globalisation phenomena**

The gendered framework of universities' management structures is a universal problem, and hence requires effective policy-making machinery which will address the issues at hand at a global level. Yet this may not be achievable, given the different cultures which govern individual countries.

Castles (1994), views globalisation as a phenomenon which is slowly establishing itself, and offers at least the possibility of a prosperous, democratic

world order. It is built on principles of free trade and investment, and the free movement of people. Conversely, Markoff (1999); and Sklair (1999), both critics of globalisation, regard it as exacerbating global inequalities and new forms of Western imperialism. Given these two arguments, it is necessary to reach a balanced viewpoint on how Emirati senior women managers working in HE should respond.

Globally, universities appear to be characterised by a traditional, specifically masculine culture (Priola, 2004). Hearn (1999) suggests forms of ‘specific masculinities’ and general masculine criteria imported from the corporate world. Leonard (1998) and Deem (2003) agree that universities are moving towards the importance of management and private-sector practices. They are supported by Willmott (1995), who noted that in recent decades, universities have moved progressively towards a market-driven culture, which has informed their management processes. Various other scholars are also coming to consider universities as institutions in the process of being turned into enterprises which serve the market (Giroux, 2002; Slaughter and Leslie, 2001).

Moreover, Blackmore and Sachs (2000); and Giroux (2002), argue that universities are being compelled to ever more fervently embrace the ‘neo-liberal marketisation of education: with concomitant focus on radically “cost-effective” management of its academic personnel’ (Leonard, 1998). These observations may suggest developments that have led to or exacerbated a number of aspects which are disadvantageous to women: namely, career, research, and management.

Thus education is now viewed as a 'tradeable service' worldwide (Bok, 2006). This 'market-driven culture' has in itself translated into increased marketisation (Ball, 1990); and what Thomas and Davies (2002), and Leatherwood (2005) refer to as 'new managerialism.' Thus the emphasis is on increased accountability (Brooks and Mackinnon, 2001; Barry et al., 2001). These views are of particular interest to this study, given that most universities in the UAE are Western and fee-paying, classifying themselves more as corporate organisations which exist, among other reasons, to make a profit.

Another emerging theme is that the higher the status of the university, the more male academics are likely to work there (Hearn, 1999). Hearn (1999) suggests that women who work in male-dominated institutions have to display outstanding abilities in order to secure appointment to senior positions, as well as not be considered as a threat in terms of management style or subject identity.

University cultures around the world tend to value and reproduce concepts of career, academic achievement, institutional and intellectual work, based on male life trajectories (Currie and Thiele, 2001). Such pathways to success tend to be built upon dominant male traits and characteristics (Adler & Israeli, 1994). Friedland and Alford (1991) regard gender as a central institution in the Western world, which 'shapes individual preferences and organizational interest as well as the repertoire of behaviors' (p.231). At the same time, different cultures within organisations and organisational fields have

competing value systems, including different interpretations of gender as an institution (Alvesson, 1997; Deem, 1998; Morley, 2003).

Riger et al (1997) conclude that universities are 'deeply' imbued with patriarchal ideology, and that women are disadvantaged in climbing the ladder to powerful positions. Quinn (2009) adds that their contribution to the body of knowledge is largely ignored, dismissed, and sometimes even vilified. Her conclusion that feminists still have a long journey to travel before they win the battle is certainly plausible.

As already noted, the UAE remains a highly patriarchal society, in which the current position of women is endorsed by the rest of society. The conclusions of Riger et al (1997); and Quinn (2009) help sustain this finding. The huge amounts of work put in by women in order to compete with men are highlighted by a study of British women university managers: which found that at every level, women worked more hours (64.5) than men (58.6) each week (Morley & Walsh, 1995).

Another assumption is that universities may be practicing discriminatory tendencies indirectly. Verrell (1986) noted 'indirect discrimination' in the academy, whereby a 'condition, requirement or practice is imposed (in the workplace) that has the effect of disadvantaging people of one sex in relation to the other'. These could include criteria for professional development, remunerative advantages, or promotion that excluded worker categories into which women were statistically more likely to fall (Verrell, 1986).

Carrington and Pratt (2003) ask how far we have actually travelled in terms of the continuing inequalities in education. Even though women have gained some ground in the academy, particularly in the formation of policy regarding appointment and promotion (Winchester et al., 2005), the question which still needs to be answered is whether policy implementation has changed practice. Winchester et al. (2005) also favour the interpretation put forward by Probert (2005, p. 51), who argues that, although the 'system barrier' concept has merit historically, the academy's 'substantial gender equity reforms' renders the concept obsolete, and necessitates an alternative explanation.

Blackmore and Sachs (2000) outline five paradoxes which are shaping women in leadership and management positions in higher education in contemporary Australian universities:

- Women are doing more work but it is less valued.
- There is a distinction between an academic as an intellectual worker versus the academic leader as a management worker.
- There are now new technologies of surveillance with which to measure quality and performance, while academic work is intensified through demands to be more productive with fewer resources.
- There are new collegial notions of academic identity; while merit is rewarded on the basis of individual achievement.

- Lastly, one may be considered as a source of leadership despite being institutionally powerless.

This was reiterated further by Blackmore and Sachs (2000): who found that newer universities challenge women's sense of professional identity in different ways: 'as teachers, as change agents but also as academics in terms of their role in the production of valued knowledge' (p.14).

### **3.9 Conclusion**

This literature review has identified that, as with many Arab countries, the UAE has a strongly patriarchal society, embedded in its culture and religion. Yet it also established there to be a different type of feminism in the Middle East, which should be differentiated from global feminism. In other words, a feminist approach designed according to Western perspectives may not necessarily apply to Arab society. Thus there is a need to address this feminist discourse in a way that is appropriate and suitable to the Arab context. This raises an important question: what is an appropriate Arabic feminist approach? It is hoped that this study will establish a feminist theoretical framework, which can be understood and be applicable within an Arab context.

The chapter also highlighted the traditional, specific masculine cultures within universities, which prevent women from progressing into management positions. Attitudes to women managers and the barriers which they face have been discussed in the light of institutional cultures. These institutions appear deeply imbued with patriarchal ideology, which hugely hinders the progress of

women within them: indeed, they have been found to simply reproduce concepts of career, academic achievement, institutional, and intellectual work based on male life trajectories. The literature also reveals that in the new wave of universities, which are market-driven, there is a further reduction in the prospect of women progressing up the career ladder, as they find themselves faced with ever greater responsibilities outside their core university work.

Organisational culture has been revealed as a contributory factor in how women are regarded. However, as organisations, universities represent society: if their practices are discriminatory, this representation may promote and/or uphold societal beliefs.

An assumption has also been noted regarding the idea that women have a different way of managing compared to men. Yet in most cases, they enact masculine attributes in the way that they manage, in order to be acceptable. Commonly held attitudes, which prejudice the appointment of women to senior positions, include the finding that women themselves would prefer to have a man in a position of authority.

Feminine management traits are thought of as including affection, sympathy, interpersonal skills, sensitivity and nurturing abilities; while masculine management traits are regarded as assertiveness, control, confidence, and ambition. This suggests that the 'hard' masculine management style is considered 'normal'; and in most cases, women are expected and feel under



pressure to adopt this - regardless of their 'soft' personalities or gendered traits  
- in order to fit in.

Overall, though, a clear gap in the literature has been identified regarding the barriers faced by women who seek to attain senior management positions in higher education and in UAE in particular. It is hoped that this thesis will successfully fill this gap through a feminist, narrative analysis of data obtained during the research process: which seeks to develop an explanatory grounded theory with which to help explain this ongoing problem.

The next chapter presents the theoretical framework and methodology adapted to undertake the study.

## **Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter helps to establish my standpoint as a feminist researcher by setting out the critical feminist perspective which influenced the research paradigm; the chapter will then go on to make links with the narrative analysis method which was adopted.

I explain how the interviews were designed and conducted, and address the difficulties of narrative inquiry as a research method. The criterion for evaluating narrative research is discussed, followed by a consideration of ethical issues and how the narrative analysis was developed. Finally, the chapter gives details of the procedures involved in sampling, ethical considerations, initial contact with interviewees, the interview process, data collection and analysis.

The chapter also presents a broader discussion of feminist research methodologies, and explores the values and beliefs incorporated into feminist research. These values and beliefs distinguish feminist research from traditional research methodologies. Feminist research opens up the field of questions which are deemed significant, changes the choice of and interaction with participants, and alters the implementation of data collection and analysis.

It is important to note here that the discussion of feminist research in this chapter is not prescriptive, but illustrative.

The chapter discusses the concept of narrative inquiry, its conceptualisation and why it was preferred to traditional qualitative and quantitative research methods. The aim was to provide an insight into the concept of narrative research, and justify its use in this particular study, which focuses on senior women managers in higher education in the UAE.

The constructivist paradigm, the paradigm of this narrative inquiry, assumes a subjectivist epistemology and, of necessity, has different criteria for evaluating research instead of the usual criteria of internal and external validity (see the discussion below, pp. 115-6), reliability and objectivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2006; Richardson, 1998). Thus, from a social constructivist paradigm, I was able to analyse and describe the world of Emirati senior women managers in HE, and explore how entrenched assumptions, cultural values and beliefs impact on the meaningful construction of their positions as women.

## **4.2 Theoretical framework**

According to Mathison (1988, citing Denzin (1978)), theory functions as ‘an integrated body of propositions, the derivation of which leads to explanation of some social phenomenon... to give the order and insight to what is, or can be, observed’ (p.6).

Theory founded on a particular set of assumptions provides us with a lens through which we interpret our universe.

#### **4.2.1 Critical feminist perspective**

Feminist theory and critical theory are known to share common assumptions in respect of their underlying epistemologies, yet their histories reflect important differences. Feminist theory originated from the women's consciousness movement in the US of the mid-1960s and 1970s: a movement inspired by President John F. Kennedy's establishment of the President's Commission on the Status of Women in 1961 (Calderwood and Rossi, 1973). Feminists and feminist researchers focused on 'the absence of women from the marginalized reports of women in research accounts' (Olson and Shopes, 1991). Later, feminist researchers became increasingly concerned about ethical issues, and focused their criticisms on the research act itself: questioning many assumptions central to the positivist paradigm.

At the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt, a critical school of thinking, led by researchers such as Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse, who would subsequently migrate to California, emerged during the 1920s. The most important contribution of the Frankfurt theorists was to broaden 'Marx's concepts of exploitation and the alienation of labour into the category of domination, hence explaining aspects of structured social inhumanity' (Agger, 1993, p. 15).

From this broad interpretation of critical theory, a definition can be derived. According to Kincheloe and McLaren (2002), a critical theorist is someone

who attempts to use her or his work as a form of social or cultural criticism and who accepts certain basic assumptions that:

- All thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are socially and historically constituted.
- Facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or moved from some inscriptions.
- The relationship between concept and object and between signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is often mediated by the social relations of capitalistic production and consumption.
- Language is central to the formation of subjectivity (conscious and unconscious awareness).
- Certain groups in any society are privileged over others. Although the reasons for this privileging may vary, the oppression that characterises contemporary societies is forcefully produced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable.
- Oppression has many faces: that which focuses on only one at the expense of others often neglects the interconnections among them.
- Mainstream research practices are generally, although most unwittingly, implicated in the production of systems (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2002, p.140).

In Frankfurt traditions, critical theory attempts to discover the ways in which power and privilege are institutionalised in a certain culture. Agger (1993, pp. 18-9) uses the term ‘original critical theory’ to distinguish it from other genres of critical theory based around postmodern perspectives. Central to critical theory is the need to question the role of logical positivism, which represents the objectification of human experience. Critical theory also challenges the traditional binary perspectives of positivistic science such as ‘the knower and

the known, the researcher and the researched, the scientific expert and the practitioner' (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2002). It further asserts that the 'notion of self-reflection is central to understanding of the nature of critically grounded qualitative research' (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2002).

According to Young (1990), critical theorists view the role of the researcher as objective, detached or neutral, but inseparable from the personal values and assumptions they bring to the research as a result of personal experience.

#### **4.2.2 Feminist research methodology**

Is there a distinctive feminist methodology? De Vault (1999) argues that:

'Often, queries of feminist methodology carry contradictory demands. Skeptics ask feminists to define their methodology so as to fit with the terms of conventional research paradigms, and also to make sharp, non-overlapping distinctions between feminist and mainstream methodologies' (p.22).

Feminist methodologies are those grounded in a feminist theoretical perspective (De Vault, 1999). Walker (2004) suggests that researchers who employ this perspective should explicitly acknowledge what their feminist theoretical perspective is and how it influences the research process.

De Vault (1999), Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002), Walker (2005), and Letherby and Zdrodowski (1987), have a strong influence on the discussion about the characteristics of feminist research. They believe that, first, feminist researchers agree about paying attention to marginalised people in a social

context. Their standpoint is to ensure that every person is heard, or at least effectively represented.

Second, De Vault (1999), Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002), Walker (2004), and Letherby and Zdrodowski (1987), explicitly consider the ethics of the relationships between all those involved in a given piece of research. They also move beyond the simple notion of reciprocity as repaying people for their participation time. The interviewer and interviewee enter into a relationship of mutuality.

The third characteristic of feminist researchers lies in their approach to an individual's experiences, life histories and stories; these are not only valuable, but also crucial to understanding social interaction (De Vault, 1999; Walker, 2004; Letherby and Zdrodowski 1987). Walker (2004) argues that feminist researchers value what traditional researchers consider as 'anecdotal' evidence. She gives the example of a case study of one person being valued, as it enables the understanding of the nuances of that individual's experience. The ability to generalise this experience is not a criterion. She concluded that even the consciousness-raising groups of the second wave of feminism were greatly influenced by the significance of stories and experience.

De Vault (1999), Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002), and Walker (2004), have a fourth assumption, which relates to an explicit orientation towards change in social institutions, structures and cultures. Since feminists believe that the current society is organised in such structures that support sexism, feminist

research is always motivated by a desire for change. Thus, feminist research is often located within the critical theory perspective.

All four characteristics were influential in my motivation to research into career experiences of senior Emirati women managers in Higher Education, and resonated with my own approach. Most importantly, I considered their stories a starting point, giving a voice to the voiceless as I entered into a relationship with them. As a feminist researcher, I take women's situations, concerns, experiences and perspectives as the basis for my research. This is why it was important to hear what the participants had to say through the narrative construction of their experiences and perspectives, which may help to support or dispel certain assumptions.

Feminist research must attend to the meaning women give to their experiences, as well as what they identify as being topics that concern them. As the senior Emirati women managers at the heart of this study are the experts and authorities in their own situations, the way in which they create and give meaning to their experiences becomes central. Language shapes the words, concepts and stereotypes of society, and in turn also shapes actions, behaviours and expectations. Feminist research, from the standpoint of women, opens up the possibilities of new topics for research which go beyond standard social science labels and categories (Anderson et al., 1987, p.114).

As a feminist biographer, I accept that, because differences among women are pervasive, it is hard to theorise across categories; but I place emphasis on the



similarities between women's experiences expressed in oral histories and in biographical works.

### **4.3 Narrative inquiry**

In their reflections on key criticism of research in educational leadership and management, Foskett et al (2005) argue for an expansion of the range of methodologies to include qualitative studies. In choosing narrative inquiry as a research method, my aim was not to confirm theory, but to explain and clarify the experiences of Emirati women managers in higher education. The qualitative approach sought to explain how these women made sense of their life experiences from childhood through adulthood. Their stories helped me delve deeper into their experiences. They also enabled me to establish any similarities or differences, which these experiences manifest in a society assumed to be patriarchal in nature, which embraces religion and culture in a traditional way.

Recently, narrative inquiry has earned a progressively more popular place as a form of systematic inquiry into social research. Why, then, was it deemed appropriate as a research method?

The term 'narrative' comes from the Greek word 'narros', which means 'to know' (Emihovich, 1995). Narrative inquiry is the process of gathering information for the purpose of research through story-telling; the researcher then writes a narrative of the experiences. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note that humans are story-telling organisms who, individually and collectively,

lead 'storied lives'; the central premise of which is that stories are part of the nature of human experiences. Stories imbue people's thoughts and actions with meaning and, according to Murray (1997, p.2), 'guide our interpretation of reality'. There are similar implications in the findings of Knights and Wilmott (1999), which state that phenomenological research which seeks to understand 'lived experience' must consider how this experience and meaning is expressed or constructed in narrative forms.

Various authors have presented research on the use of narrative inquiry, all of whom have informed my choice of this form of inquiry as a research methodology (Dewey, 1985; Bruner, 1985, 1987, 1990; Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, 2000; Knights & Wilmott, 1999; Quong et al., 1999; Dhunparth, 2000; du Toit, 2003; Chase, 2005; Ospina & Dodge, 2005; Wolf, 2005). The terms 'story' and 'narrative' are frequently interchanged; there are no definitive definitions of either (Polkinghorne, 1988; Poirier & Ayres, 1997). Some writers, depending upon their particular purposes, choose to use the terms 'story' and 'narrative' separately (Sarbin, 1996; Franzosi, 1998; Murray, 1997). Some use them interchangeably.

When I discuss the nature of my research inquiry, I use the term 'narrative' to refer to narrative analyses. However, I employ the terms 'story' and 'narrative' synonymously throughout the study, as I believe it is difficult to differentiate between them. People both tell stories and draw on cultural narratives: we have stories that give accounts of our experiences; we narrate the events of our lives

and use stories to teach others. Thus it is not the intention of this research to discuss a plausible definition of each, but to use them interchangeably.

The way in which an individual constructs narrative shows how they create 'self' in representations of experience and construction of reality. When you want someone to know who you are, when you experience something or you want to communicate your experience, you need some form of story through which to convey thoughts and experience. Identity, in the form of narrative events, is not presented randomly but in a meaningful way. Narratives are everywhere because they constitute a basic means for humans of making sense of the world.

'Narrativity' refers to the idea that events and lives are affirmed as being worth telling and thus worth living. Stories give lives legitimacy, and lives are shaped as narratives: 'They come from somewhere and are going to somewhere' (Frank, 1995, p.3). Narratives do not seek self-fulfilment; important social issues can be addressed, and the answers which society wants can be derived from narratives. These answers can give guidance on what to do next. Further, the narrative view is also predicated on the belief that those features which make up human experience, including our emotions, our sense of self, our thinking and our time, are constructed by narrative.

People's stories do not constitute or reflect reality; they are an individual's representation of reality, socially constructed, and can furnish a variety of

meanings and interpretations. Smith and Watson (1997) support narratives as a good research method when stating:

‘We are habitual authenticators of our own lives. Every day we are confessing and constructing personal narratives in every possible format’ (p.2-3).

Within social research, narrative inquiry is a way of knowing, constitutive of reality, which moves researchers beyond traditional methods of inquiry and away from numbers, variables, tables and questionnaires (Chataika, 2006). The data in narrative research is in the form of stories. However, we cannot aspire to stories being revelations of the truth; rather, we need to reflect upon the meanings of stories as merely representing a version of events from the teller, with possible alternative versions according to the reader’s interpretation. These stories are not linear, polished, sequences of events but a reflection of multiple realities.

‘These [new approaches to narrative] posit that it is through narrativity that [All] of us came to be who we are (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing) by being located or locating ourselves [usually unconsciously] in social narratives rarely of our own making’ (Chataika, 2006, p. 66).

Dhunpath (2000) confirmed that lives are intrinsically narrative in quality, and that the way the world is experienced is represented in narratives. Studying the structure and use of narratives can provide important insights into the roots of self and nature of thinking (Herman, 2003). There are two modes of cognitive functioning: the paradigmatic or logico-scientific mode and the narrative mode

(Bruner, 1985). Of these, the narrative mode focuses on the broader, more inclusive question of the meaning of experience. The primary way that individuals make sense of experiences is by putting them in narrative form (Bruner, 1990).

Narrative inquiry has become accepted as part of a wider discourse in the field of educational research, as it provides the 'best way' to understand and expand knowledge of experiences, practical knowing, and meaning-making in a situated, social reality (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Dewey (1985) and Clandinin & Connelly (2000) presented the concept of life as an experience involving a dynamic process of living and telling stories; the criterion for this is that of maintaining wakefulness. Thus, narrative inquiry is a form of phenomenological inquiry; part of being human involves narrating stories to ourselves and to others (Plummer, 1995; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). How an individual constructs narrative is how they create self in a representation of experience, or construction of reality. Therefore, I believe, the way in which people construct knowledge goes hand-in-hand with how they make sense of their experiences and the world about them. From this, they develop their individual beliefs, attitudes and practices.

It is only through narrative that oppressed people resist; they do this by identifying themselves as subjects, defining their reality, shaping their own identity, naming their history and telling their story (Chataika, 2006). In a narrative, identity is pronounced, named, explored and even reconstructed. A psycho-social constructed narrative integrates the reconstructed past, perceived

present and anticipated future in a story of the self (Lieblich, 1996; Wolf, 2005).

As a life story develops and changes through time, when a particular story is recorded and transcribed, we receive a text that resembles a still photograph of a dynamic, changing identity (Lieblich, 1996). Social constructionism stresses the influence of our culture as it shapes the way that we look at things, thus providing a distinct picture of the world (Crotty, 1998). Narrative inquiry becomes a way of knowing, as the stories operate through constructing action and consciousness simultaneously (Bruner, 1985). Therefore, narrative inquiry is committed to representing the actions of relatively unknown, perhaps oppressed and ignored social groups whose agendas and meaning have been under-represented in theoretical and practical policy debates (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Story-telling is of particular importance because narratives help people to organise their experiences into meaningful episodes, which call upon cultural modes of reasoning and representation. People's stories are versions of events, representations of reality; thus we are able to reflect upon the meanings that they construct from their world. While researchers only have access to limited representations of people's experiences, they can access the meanings which people make of their experiences through language.

In the case of a research study such as this one – into the lived experiences of five Emirati women managers in higher education – participants' narratives are

not only transcriptions of events and thoughts, but ‘means of making sense and showing significance of them in the context of the “denouement”’ (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.19). The individual constructs narrative through natural cognitive functions when constructing meaning and creating self in a representation of reality. Narratives enable people to give authentic accounts of their lives, in the belief that telling a story may empower the teller (Goodley, 2000).

The stories that individuals tell about themselves are part of their becoming; stories are the central component of experience and reality. Stories define who we are, where we are and where we came from. This could be a precondition for knowing what to do next (Somers, 1994, p.618). Self is given content, delineated and embodied primarily in the narrative construction of stories (Goodley, 2000). According to du Toit (2003), self creates meaning and knowledge through the sense-making process. Narratives promote the notion of multiple realities and stories embrace the concepts of fidelity and authenticity to the teller (Blumenfield-Jones, 1995). It is this that distinguishes narrative inquiry from other modes of qualitative research.

Stories open up the possibility of seeing anew: of representing complexity, uncertainty, contradictions and silence. Narratives give our lives meaning. People ‘dream, remember, anticipate, hope, gossip, doubt, plan, criticize and love through narratives’ (Walker, 2004, p.3). There is no claim to objectivity in narrative inquiry; instead stories can be sensitive, illogical, funny, sad and, sometimes, step into the sphere of imagination (Emihovich, 1995). Readers are

invited to understand the personal aspects of the story, and to respond to it at an emotional level (Chataika, 2006).

Some qualitative researchers and narrative analysts ask participants to construct stories in response to a specific research question; others may elicit the telling of a person's life story (Kohler-Riessman, 2013). As an emerging researcher, I was conscious that when asking an individual to tell a story, I could miss some of the richness of their experiences around particular topics.

Bell (1999) suggests that within an in-depth interview, 'people spontaneously tell stories to tie together significant events and important relationships in their experiences' (p. 10). Therefore, rather than simply asking participants to tell a story, I asked them to tell a particular story about their career progression, including any barriers they might have encountered along the way. In this way, I sought to draw upon my previous experience of other methods of qualitative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 2001; Kohler-Riessman, 2013; Stevens, 1996).

What was important was to let the senior women managers tell their stories from their own perspective; this was essential because narrative research thrives on provoking commentary on what researchers, readers and activists might do next (Chataika, 2006). This justifies narrative inquiry, as it involves using stories that are worth telling, and have moral and political purposes, to effect change in policy and practice.



### **4.3.1 Addressing criticisms of narrative enquiry**

The power of narrative should never be over-emphasised. In every story, ‘we can build impressive arguments that something is wrong, or that something works, or something comes in infinite varieties’ (Noddings & Witherell, 1991, p.280) and in doing so, move people to action. Chase (2005) viewed narrative as retrospective meaning: the making, shaping or ordering of past experiences. It is a way of understanding one’s own actions and those of others; organising events and subjects into a meaningful whole; and connecting and seeing the consequences of events and actions over time.

Critics call attention to the researcher’s presence, and why it must be taken into account from the start. This involves making decisions about whose stories to tell; which parts of the story to omit when publishing the research, how much of the narrator’s voice to include, and when to interrupt that voice with the researcher’s commentary. This poses the questions, ‘Whose story is it and whose voice is dominant?’ (Plummer, 1995; Goodley, 2000; and becomes a challenge for the reader (Chataika, 2006).

There are additional disadvantages to narrative analysis, especially when the listener fails to offer the recognition that the storyteller seeks. Not all of what the storyteller says should be recognised; but it is important to recognise the storyteller’s moral impulse, so that their life can be narrated.

Many scholars, though, object to the use of narrative inquiry:

‘From the most frequently voiced, that personal narrative is solipsistic, sentimental and self-serving to doubts about the value of

narrative studies in the academy and concomitant, ethical questions about supervision, judgments, differing values, rigor, reliability' (Chapman, 2005, p.2).

Some critics of narrative research have also looked at 'truth' and 'validity'. It becomes difficult for a single story to capture the range and richness of people's experiences (Bruner, 1986, p.146). In this regard, I interviewed five senior women managers, in higher institutions of learning, in order to obtain a general sense of their experiences across the same socio-economic backgrounds. In the process of gaining access and trust, maintaining relationships, learning and respecting cultural norms, I drew upon my interpersonal skills (Marshall & Rossman, 1995), so as to enter the lives of the participants.

However, although life histories and other modes of narrative research are becoming increasingly popular, some limitations still apply. First, there is an assumption that narrative research is limited to a small sample; this could be attributed to the fact that it involves extensive interviews. This dearth of information allows for richness in the data which may not be evident in research involving larger samples (Dhunpath, 2000).

Dhunpath (2000) acknowledges here that its status as a legitimate research method continues to be challenged by the 'positivist' or 'empiricist' approaches; both are traditional and the artificial dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative approaches applies.

To dispel some of these assumptions and limitations, I cross-checked the information with the interviewees to clarify issues that might arise. I did this by giving the transcription to the narrator so that she could check for accuracy.

Second, while biographies, life histories and other modes of narrative research are increasing in popularity as an alternative research genre, Dhunpath (2000) believes that its status as a research method continues to be challenged. Despite the ‘depth of field’ which narratives offer the world of research, a major criticism revolves around the epistemological significance of life histories. Yet education must go beyond both the empirical-analytical and historical-hermeneutic to become a form of self-knowledge (Dhunpath, 2000).

McEwan (2001) argues that the key point is not whether stories from narratives are facts, opinions or lies, but what a narrative story can tell us, as well as what it does not tell us. In turn, this opens up work for research. ‘What one believes to be true depends on who you believe yourself to be’ (Krog, 1999, p.149). In this sense, even a fact is merely an interpretation; all formal statements are contextually evaluated by the human agents implicated in the events, or by researchers seeking to read meaning into what people do or say.

Personal narratives seek to gather the ‘fragments of re-enchantment’ and suggest how collective patterns offer exemplary answers (Frank, 1995). A story brings out moral education, reminding everyone who reads it about their identity and why the identity is valuable. This is very important, especially for women who have been disadvantaged by society and are seeking a sense of

identity. The stories which people tell about their lives form one way of confronting dilemmas; women continue to fight the battle of identity in and through the stories of their lives.

Narrative shows where moments, in some collections of stories, represent a basis of authenticity (Frank, 1995). This applies not only to the individual, but to societal systems as well, as they continue to reveal moral dilemmas in story form. Members of a society can recognise each other's stories and benefit by enhancing their existing knowledge.

Narrativity means that events and lives are affirmed as being worth telling; and thus, worth living. Stories provide legitimacy to lives; according to Frank, when lives are shaped as narratives, 'they come from somewhere and are going somewhere' (Frank, 1995, p.3). Narratives do not seek self-fulfilment, but address important social issues. Answers that society wants can be derived from stories; these answers give guidance on what to do next.

A necessary, but not sufficient, assumption is that, although personal stories can be a response to disenchantment, they can also lead to the beginning of political debate about how certain issues should be addressed. Narrative analysis brings humility to stories, as they carry assumptions embedded in rhetoric. Here, as Frank again puts it:

'As stories develop their own preferred rhetoric, narrative analysis can assist in the project of unpacking the assumptions embedded in that rhetoric' (Frank, 1995, p.6).

This leads to questions of appropriateness, and implications for the issue of moral uncertainty – central in a discussion of storytelling. The basic problem, according to Weiler and Middleton (1999), is neither the moral uncertainty involved in telling stories about how other people live, nor the epistemological challenge involved in casting these stories in a scholarly genre, but the openness with which matters are being discussed. As a researcher soliciting stories, I did not wish merely to collect data; but to seek the participant's 'assent' to enter into a relationship and become part of that person's ongoing struggle in a context where the subjugation of women and the existence of male dominance is still prevalent.

However, Smith and Watson (2002) support narratives as a good research method when they say:

'We are habitual authenticators of own lives. Every day, we are confessing and constructing personal narratives in every possible format' (pp. 2-3).

Biographies have always been part of the human condition. Through a story, a human makes meaning of life's events, traumas and tragedies. Chapman (2005), notes that lives are told daily, in a repetition of stories, from the beginning to the end, rewriting and reforming ourselves. Indeed, people write a form of life story 'which constitute an object of knowledge' (Chapman, 2005). In other words, as discussed above, people use stories to explain things.

Life itself is a story we live by; it stands to reason that people should make meaning of their lives through stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). We all

tell stories; they are part of our everyday lives. Across all cultures, people can think, talk and write narratives. Stories are so firmly entrenched in human life that we become familiar with their form in early childhood. According to Polkinghorne (1995):

‘A storied narrative is the linguistic form that preserves the complexity of human action with its interrelationships of temporal sequence, human motivation, chance happenings, and changing interpersonal and environmental contexts’ (p.7).

The stories which the Emirati senior women managers told, or re-told, relate to processes of change and continuity in personal and social growth. The story helped them to construct meaning and make sense of new life experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). Ospina & Dodge (2005) consider that narrative inquiry assumes that narratives convey meanings, incentives, beliefs, values, and emotions which reflect a situated society.

Bruner (1990) observed that, thus far, the psychology of thought has concentrated on the paradigmatic at the expense of narrative. Bruner (1987) also stipulated that he cannot imagine a more important psychological research project than one focused on the development of narratives. From my point of view, personal stories are best expressed by Polkinghorne’s discussion of what he terms ‘self-stories’ (1996, p.300).

When the women told their stories, they were shaping their lives in the process. They were also constructing their lives, experience and societal reality. The accounts of their personal and professional lives would provide the basis for

understanding wider society and placing the story of an individual alongside a broader contextual analysis.

Individual narratives also provide access to the meaning structures which they construct in order to make sense of experience and reality over time; when people tell stories about themselves, they construct themselves in a certain way. They may portray themselves in the different roles that relate to their lives, such as a parent or a professional person. With respect to the women I interviewed, their narrative construction portrayed them in a particular way, according to their experiences from childhood to adulthood.

By giving totally free rein to subjective story-telling, the narrative analyst taps a rich vein of anecdotal information at the expense of all social scientific consideration. According to Walker (2004), this is what makes feminist research different from traditional methodologies. As Walker (2004) notes, 'the discussion of narrative and other speech events at the discourse level rarely allows us to prove anything'.

The assumption here is that the process of selection being carried out by the interviewee, while presenting their story, is not haphazard or arbitrary. It is a process which takes place simultaneously against a backdrop of a biological structure of meaning. The current critique calls attention to the researcher's presence: it involves making decisions about whose stories to tell.

#### **4.4 The narrative interview**

Qualitative research interviews can take varying forms. While the narrative interview is very similar to an open-ended, fairly informal, qualitative interview, its main concern lies in the significance of telling stories. Kohler-Riessman (2013) notes that narrative interviewers can give explicit instructions to participants, telling them that a story is required and explaining to them how the story might be structured. My preference was to provide a structured framework, which the interviewees could follow in piecing together their life stories. As the narrative interview enables the participant to narrate the stories of their experiences within an atmosphere of rapport, respect and empathy were important features. There was always the recognition that a narrative is jointly constructed by the participant and the interviewer.

I endeavoured to build a relationship of trust with my research participants. I met each of them more than once, as the interviews were long, and lasted up to four hours in total. This created a feeling of trust and rapport between us, and gave a sense of belonging for both; it made the whole interview process productive, with rich personal and professional data collected. We both felt quite at home, and assurances of confidentiality, essential in such a conservative culture, made the interviewees very happy to share their stories with me.

According to Habermas (1992), it is important to use such an approach as a way of being with another: aimed primarily at mutual understanding rather than success, efficiency, or power relations. Rubin and Rubin (1995) also note



that an interview can be conceived as a 'guided conversation', where the interviewer prepares a few topics or questions to guide the participants. I adopted this approach to ensure that each interview flowed as smoothly and naturally as possible.

I was an outsider, who had no connection with the interviewees prior to the interviews. Thus it was paramount that I established relationships in which mutual understanding was developed in order to uncover the information needed for my research. I also gave my word that actual transcripts would be made available so that participants could confirm the accuracy of the information recorded.

With their consent, I recorded the interviews with an audiotape recorder and transcribed them within the stipulated timescales. I then asked the interviewees to confirm the accuracy of the information, and clarify any issues, before the final write-ups. In some cases, the interviewees used Arabic which required translation.

All of the recorded interviews were very clear and audible. They were recorded in quiet places where there was no noise that would affect the sound. I also kept a written record to help cross-check the accuracy later.

In this part of the research, I did not limit either the duration or the scope of the narrative. This allowed me to capture what was significant to each participant: by identifying issues emphasised on the one hand, or trivialised on the other.

#### **4.4.1 Purposive sampling**

I purposively selected five participants with similar careers and educational backgrounds (all managers in HE). Two of the women were Deans; one was a Departmental Chair; another was a Dean who was moving to another post just after the interview. All the women are Emirati citizens who had received most of their higher education in Western countries. All wore the *abaya* (a loose fitting black outer garment worn in public) and a black *shayla* (a large piece of black fabric covering the head and sometimes the face). All had moved up the seniority ladder in different ways; these will be discussed at length. One of the women is married with children. Another is divorced with children. The other three are single, with no children.

#### **4.4.2 Procedure**

I elected to interview five women, all of whom work at higher learning institutions and hold senior management positions, ranging from Dean to Chair. My choice of participants was influenced by whether I would be able to obtain sufficient information to reflect a range of experiences. While it would not be right to ‘generalise’ results of a qualitative study to the wider population, as is possible in quantitative research, it is reasonable to expect people in similar situations to make plausible connections to each other’s experiences. However, because of personal limitations with regard to time and weather conditions, I was only able to interview senior women managers based in Al Ain, where I work.

Before all of the scheduled interviews, I sent each interviewee, who had agreed to be interviewed, a consent letter which they needed to sign and present to me on the day of the interview. The consent letter gave them the right to withdraw from the interview at any time. I also explained (although the information was included in the consent letter) that the interviews would be audio recorded in order to facilitate the accurate transcription of the interview.

I assured the interviewees of the confidentiality of the information gathered from their interviews; I also assured them that none of the tapes containing the information would be used after the completion of my study. Instead, they would be kept in a safe place for a year or two before being destroyed.

#### **4.5 Data collection**

This study draws on data collected from April 2011 to January 2012, through in-depth, one-to-one, four-hour interviews for individual interviewees. Data were collected from five senior women managers in higher education; this was despite the challenges I faced in collecting data in a conservative environment where some of the information included topics which are sensitive within an Arab context. Where clarification was needed, it was requested by email.

As soon as consent was sought, interview dates and times were arranged, either by email or over the telephone. Sometimes I had to book appointments via the women's secretaries. Interviews took place in a variety of places, as per individual need; venues included their offices; over a cup of coffee in a shopping mall (in this case, taking into particular consideration the privacy

needed to share information freely); their homes; or even at a university library.

It was important to ensure that the interviewees were comfortable in their environment, so that I could encourage them to trust me and share in-depth, personal information.

Some of the interviews could last for as long as four hours, and required two or three appointments. As the respondents had very busy schedules, at times it was very difficult to keep appointments; rearranging some of these proved a challenge.

#### **4.5.1 Interview approach**

Unstructured interviews have become the principal means through which feminist researchers have sought to achieve the active involvement of interviewees in the construction of data about their lives. Interview methods offer the most straightforward application of feminist values and beliefs. The focus on an interviewee's experience, and building shared understanding, reflects the value placed on personal stories and connected relationships. In the practice of feminist interview research, the researcher often has a different relationship with participants in that they often disclose their own stories and experiences.

It is vital to stress the importance of the relationship between the interviewer and the participant being founded on trust, empathy and respect for each other's knowledge of what is being researched. Such a relationship facilitates

the construction of a narrative which has negotiated meanings, experiences and explanations of events (Fraser, 2004). Participants are able to voice their perceptions of their experiences, while I recognise that the women in my study are the experts in making sense of their own world.

The conversations and relationship between interviewer and interviewee within a narrative inquiry reflect Morawski (1994)'s idea that language and social relations are pivotal to the creation of knowledge.

In the case of this research project, the initial meeting covered practical points such as explaining the purpose of the interview; signing written consent forms; and clarifying the confidentiality issues associated with gathering of personal information. I then asked the interviewees to tell me their stories in the way that they chose. I encouraged them to tell me their stories from their childhood moving through their education, youth, career and professional lives. I listened to the stories without interruption, except on occasions where I thought I needed more clarification or insights.

It was important for me to listen with empathy to their experiences, demonstrating an appropriate show of emotions, gestures and facial expressions. These made it easier for the interviewees to relate their experiences easily and comfortably. It was also important to make little interjections, which further encouraged the interviewees to talk freely and feel relaxed. The environment was, then, that of trust and shared responsibility,

where the interviewer and interviewee both had a part to play. Listening to the women's accounts represented an empathic way of entering their worlds.

According to Morley (2003):

‘Storytelling can be thought of as a way of caring, caring for the individual who is telling the story, providing her with a vehicle for looking over her life, and caring for the listener who gains from the wisdom of the storyteller’s experiences’ (p.68).

#### **4.5.2 Language**

Although the interviews were conducted mainly in English, the women tended to code-switch as part of the process of cultural adaptation. As highlighted by Mishler (1990), ‘Through language we describe objects and events, explain how something works and why something happened, express feelings and disbelief so, develop logical arguments, persuade others to a course of action, and narrative experiences’ (p. 67).

Three participants used both English and Arabic on topics related to their religious and cultural background. Therefore, it seemed possible that there was a relationship between a participant’s particular reality and the language they chose for particular situations. Zentella (2008) notes that ‘bilinguals display their gender, class, racial, ethnic and other identities by following the social and linguistic rules for the ways of speaking that reflect those identities in their homes and primary networks’ (p. 6).

As bilinguals, with English very much their second language, the participants effectively found themselves forced at times to re-construct their own

identities. Their switching from English to Arabic was quite minor: as I do not speak Arabic, they responded in English to ensure that I understood. However, their English language skills were not that proficient: meaning that their speech featured many digressions as they thought of a suitable word to use. This is when they resorted to Arabic to try and put a point across. Wei (2000) and Poplack (1979) confirm this phenomenon, noting that proficiency in either language may vary according to skills in writing, reading, listening and speaking. I did not criticise them when they were forced to switch to Arabic or encountered first language interference when using English.

Bailey (2002) posits that an individual is categorized by their first language (p. 99). Fishman (1965) highlights how multilingual settings allow bilinguals to make use of their knowledge of two languages and alternate them for communicative purposes. Sapir (1923) considers that through language, we express our reality: ‘No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality’ (p. 4). Thus when the participants decided to switch, they both strengthened and exposed their identity. I noted a number of occasions when code-switching appeared to be a matter of convenience, especially during the following extract from one of the participants:

“I am patient, I listen more than talking. The word is like a horse, if it is still in your mouth, you can control it. I make compromises and work as a team. Mother always said if you are in a shop with goods- كل بضاعة اذا

قلبتهم نقصت الا الكلام اذا قلبتة زاد (if you turn all goods they decrease only words if turned they increase) and if you are nervous you will say something wrong. Try to relax and say it later through discussion. No-one has the right to always speak but it is important to give others a chance, respecting others opinion as our religion teaches وفق قول الامام (According to the words of Imam Shafi'i, my opinion is right and could be wrong and the other's is wrong and could be right).

From 1990, there have been a lot of changes about women's participation mostly in the private sector, for example Shekha Lubna – Minister of Economic and Planning and Foreign Trading, Mariam Al Rumi is Minister of Social Affairs and Maitha Al Shamsi **ميثا الشامسي وزيرة الدولة**, (Maitha Al Shamisi – Minister & Reem Al Hashemy – Minister) . I am one of the two women in the Economic Council among 40 men. We still have a long way to go but things have improved. The pace is slow though, especially in high positions like at universities and big organizations. I do not agree with that, it does not matter whether a man or woman.

It was very different in the beginning, but pioneers started and began women's empowerment so it is all by merit if they get a job now, although some get to big positions without qualifications because of the image created by our media and whether they are known by decision makers and some may be related to decision makers who manipulate the system. However, some are focused and would plan to get to positions even without qualifications, because they know people and how to get what they want. But even if they are in those positions, the country will not benefit from them because they do not have the skills to save other people. I do not support such people and such a system. But now a lot of qualified people are competing for jobs and the situation may change.



There is not wasta but some ladies know how to play the game, they know what they want and how to get there. If I want wasta I would use it but I do not believe and like it- I even hate the word because you are taking the right of other people, if you put yourself in their position, would you like it? طالب الولاية لا يولي (who asks for the state will not get it). The one who asks for that position should not get it because he does not deserve it because if he did, he would get without asking في الادارة في الاسلام هناك محاسبة مالية للولاه و هنا قول منثور و بيت شعر لذلك "نحج اذا حجوا و نفروا اذا غزوا فاننا لهم وفرة و لسنا بذي وفر" (in Islam there is a very clear way of dealing with administration and politics but people do not read the heritage in the history, the Koran and experiences. People are exploiting the situation).

I hope for men and women to be in those positions by merit with the right person in the right position but it appears it is not the case here. In Islam, it is dangerous to give a job to someone why is not qualified for the job. When you see this indicator of people who do not deserve the position then people are not following Islamic teaching- عندما يسند الامر الي غير أهله - (when a task is assigned not to a responsible person). Society must analyse the situation all the time and if they see any weakness in the system and they keep quiet then their Islam is weak and not good من رأي منكم منكرا فليغيره بيده أو بلسانه أو بقلبه و ذلك أضعف الايمان (If someone sees anything wrong he either fix it with his hand or words or heart and this is the least that can be done - Prophet Mohamed).

This extract demonstrates the interference of the mother tongue when the interviewee wanted to emphasize a certain point. There was also a tendency to make direct translations: which at times does not make sense in the case of Arabic to English.

## **4.6 Narrative analysis**

A thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was adopted for this study. The thematic approach is useful for theorising across a number of cases by finding common thematic elements across research participants and the events that they report. A typology can be constructed to elaborate a developing theory. As interest lies in the content of speech, analysts interpret what is said by focusing on the meaning that any competent user of the language would find in a story.

Emphasis is on the content of a text: 'what' is said more than 'how' it is said; the 'told' rather than the 'telling'. An (unacknowledged) philosophy of language underpins the approach: language is a direct and unambiguous route to meaning. As investigators grounding their analysis in the data, researchers collect many stories and inductively create conceptual groupings from the data. A typology of narratives organised by theme forms the typical representational strategy, with case studies or vignettes providing illustration.

In this case, in-text immersion revealed aspects of how participants made sense of their lives and lived experiences through thematic organisation. The participants' transcripts were cross-analysed, in order to discover how widespread their experiences had been. The transcripts were coded so as to identify meaningful information indicating the five interviewees' developmental stages and what societal and cultural contexts had influenced these. Upon further analysis, these experiences could be grouped into themes which would be discussed in detail.

As Braun and Clarke (2006, pp. 77-101) explain, thematic analysis does not merely identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) within the data; it also ‘interprets various aspects of the research topic’. The researcher plays an *active* role in ‘identifying patterns/themes, selecting which are of interest, and reporting them to the readers’ (ibid).

‘As thematic analysis does not require the detailed theoretical and technological knowledge of approaches such as grounded theory and discourse analysis, it can offer a more accessible form of analysis, particularly for those early in a qualitative research career’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Thus in the case of this study, it was left to the researcher’s judgement to evaluate and code the key themes, and draw them out from the narratives provided by the five women. This process went beyond mere semantic analysis of the data, and at times sought to identify underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations: necessary for a form of thematic analysis which involved searching *across* a data set, in order to draw out repeated patterns of meaning (ibid).

The analysis involved continually moving back and forth across the whole data set (the five narratives provided by the five women under investigation), and was performed according to the following process, set out by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. *Familiarising oneself with the data*: The data was repeatedly read and re-read in an *active* way, and notes pertaining to subsequent coding were made.

2. *Transcription of verbal data*: The narratives were transcribed by the researcher into written form.

3. *Generating initial codes*: Any potentially interesting aspects from the dataset, which was worked through systematically, were drawn out on the basis that they *may* have formed the basis of repeated patterns across the data. As many potential themes/patterns as possible were coded at this point.

4. *Searching for themes*: This phase involved organising the codes into broader potential themes. Some codes went on to form main themes; others became sub-themes; others were ultimately discarded.

5. *Reviewing themes*: Once the potential themes had been identified, these began to be refined by the researcher. Did each potential theme form a meaningful, coherent pattern? Were there clear, identifiable distinctions between themes? In cases of lack of coherence, should the theme be reworked, treated as a sub-theme, or discarded? And moreover, did the themes accurately reflect the ‘meanings’ evident in the dataset as a whole?

6. *Defining and naming themes*: The essence of each theme was identified: on the basis of what aspects each theme contained. It was important then to consider how each theme fitted into the broader overall story and analysis which this thesis represents: thus each theme was evaluated both of itself, in relation to the other themes, and whether it contained sub-themes which could also be set out.

By the end of this stage, the key themes and sub-themes had been clearly identified. These were named as follows: (1) Support received from different individuals at different times; (2) Opportunities provided by political, cultural and structural change in the UAE; (3) Personal resilience and resolve to succeed; (4) Importance of the Islamic faith. All four key themes, along with all related sub-themes, are discussed at length and juxtaposed against the literature in Chapter 6: the meta-analysis, discussion of findings and conclusion.

*7. Producing the research report:* Finally, the research was written up in a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting way. Examples and extracts from the five narratives were carefully selected to provide comprehensive evidence of the research's findings: embedded within an analytical narrative which does not merely describe the data, but makes key arguments in relation to this research.

This process required several drafts and re-drafts as certain themes were discarded; others turned into sub-themes, and the data analysed and re-analysed in order to produce a set of coherent, valid arguments drawn from the five narratives (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

To provide the example of one participant: early in Ayesha's set of interviews, she referred admiringly to her aunt and mother. The part of the interview pertaining to this was transcribed as follows:

‘I had an aunt-umm... eh, God bless her soul and she was the most influential and I considered her as a real leader, a woman leader in the family. You know that eh... in the family, one person has to be chosen to go for basic Koran and Mathematical and numerical information and because my family had a female girls she was the oldest so she had to be educated. She went into basic education like the Koran usually and they are about six girls and did not have a sibling who is a boy at that time and then came my father.

My father was about 7 or 8 and he had to go to school and therefore my aunt has to stay at home and that gave her the... she was very active, she was into the passion of learning and that basic knowledge she used to in order to be very effective so she was the leader of the family - everybody went to her for any opinion eh... she instilled this in these her sisters. She learnt to do quite a lot of jobs and she used to take women in her house.

Her house was like a place where you have people are working from morning to night, teaching them how to cook, how to make dress, they came for embroidery so everybody was bringing their own things after finishing their daily chores in the house. They will bring their sewing and all of them will come and get advice, ‘what should I do with this?’, and she was very excellent in embroidery and in making local dresses. They used to do it by hand because they didn’t have machines at that time and she was very helpful in this so people came there to learn.

Not only this... she also became educated in local medicine so her help was about that also. She used to treat people and take them even those that are less fortunate. She would take them into her house, she would accommodate them. So I grew up.

That encouraged me and gave me a push in life and created my first skills on how women are supposed to live and how important women are even your gender aside being a man or woman. Also I used to look at my

mother, my aunties working in the fields doing all the daily chores themselves and taking care of the whole business in my family’.

From this rather rambling account, key sections were reproduced in Section 5.2.3, Ayesha’s pen portrait – but based on careful comparison with the other four women under investigation, went on to form evidence for the key theme, ‘Support received from different individuals (in this case, Ayesha’s mother and aunt) at different times’.

In accordance with the steps set out by Braun and Clarke (2006), the same process was repeated for Ayesha’s entire transcript, as well as those of her four fellow interviewees. These transcripts were compared with one another: enabling key themes and sub-themes to be drawn out, and others discarded.

#### **4.7 Ethical considerations**

The issue of moral uncertainty is central to the discussion of storytelling. The basic problem is neither the moral uncertainty involved in telling stories about how other people live, nor the epistemological one involved in casting these stories in a scholarly genre, but the openness with which matters are being discussed (Weiler and Middleton, 1999, p.3).

For ethical reasons, everything said by respondents was treated in strict confidence. Information that might be sensitive, personally damaging or compromising for respondents was disregarded in the final write-up. The ownership and confidentiality of each interview would reside jointly between the researcher and the interviewee. No data of any particular interview would

be released without the interviewee's consent. The presentations would be anonymised to protect the identities of the interviewees.

To begin with, an assessment of benefit versus harm was made. As a researcher, my primary responsibility is to do no harm, in terms of my decisions and actions regarding my work. What may constitute harm is, to some extent, culturally specific in my case. When dealing with conversational interviews, I worked to extract personal information from the women (Cowles, 1988). Thus, the research might have stumbled upon highly emotionally charged issues which could impact on the individual's personal identity. The interview centred on events which were consequential to the participant (Riessman, 1993). Again, participants might have found themselves revealing information that they later decided was too sensitive to report (Cowles, 1988). All of these issues were respected.

Sometimes the interpretation and analysis of participants' stories have led to a sense of betrayal (Josselson, 1996).

'We have paid less attention to how what we write down may affect those about whom we write... we often lose sight of the additional authority our words and ideas carry when transferred to the permanence of print' (Josselson, 1996, p.61).

#### **4.7.1 Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is a basic human right, regarded as an integral component of the protection and promotion of human dignity. Any information disclosed in the context of my research was held as confidential. I also endeavoured to



ensure that confidentiality was upheld by monitoring how personal information was controlled and disseminated (Josselson, 1996). I was guided by a statement that included a pledge not to disclose the participants' identity and to keep all interview notes confidential. These notes often require considerable detail and actual quotes from participants, or even the whole narrative, so that the reader has the ability to evaluate the researcher's interpretation of the data themselves (Chataika, 2006).

As narrative research usually involves 'informalised' interviews, which may be misconstrued by the participants as fun and interactive in a way that does not occur in more traditional methods of research, the problem could have arisen that the participants simply forgot that they were taking part in actual research (Chataika, 2006). This did not prove the case, however. Instead, the participants considered the research to constitute a serious platform from which they could share their life experiences.

The principle of informed consent arises from the participants' right to freedom of self-determination. Accordingly, I endeavoured to protect their rights by giving them the opportunity to willingly participate through informed decision. As I was dealing with academic participants, they had experience of performing research themselves and were aware of the procedures, making my work, in this case, easy.

According to Cowles (1988), participants may have their own reasons for agreeing to be interviewed and many are able to set limits on what information

they reveal. From this, Josselson (1996) concluded that her participants' experiences 'become just one more of the many life experiences in which a person learns about himself or herself' (p.69).

Issues such as culture, existing knowledge and beliefs, and especially sensitive areas such as gender, can be emotive, preventing the researcher from seeing a different version of reality .

There is a risk that researchers may suppress the disclosure of certain stories in favour of those that would promote their own research interests. It was important therefore that I presented the stories in an impartial way. However, moving from stories to texts might have been problematic (Goodley, 2000). As such, misrepresentation of actual facts through translating speech to prose (especially in my case where, at times, I sought the assistance of an Arabic translator), could occur, contaminating the information. A translator may also ascribe intentions to actions after the event, exaggerate, rehearse stories, or lie (Lesters, 1999); this was guarded against by presenting the transcripts to the respondents for validation purposes.

To protect the identity of the interviewees, pseudonyms were used in the narrative constructions and in narrative analysis. Biographical or other information which might identify the interviewees was omitted, where necessary, while at the same time providing adequate details to assist in understanding the meaning in the narrative accounts. I have indicated where I

have omitted words with the use of ‘...’. I have also indicated in italics where I have anonymised details to protect the identity of my interviewees.

#### **4.7.2 Credibility**

Credibility in qualitative research is different from that in quantitative research; it involves whether descriptions and explanations are credible. The purpose of credibility is to demonstrate that the enquiry was conducted in such a manner that the subject under study was appropriately identified and described. As a qualitative researcher, I present what I consider to be credible in-depth interpretations of the narrative constructions derived from the analysis of the Emirati women under study. Riessman (1993) suggests the criteria of persuasiveness, plausibility and coherence. I adopted a reasoned approach throughout my research; and present a coherent account, supported by evidence, from the narrative constructions of my interpretation.

#### **4.7.3 Confirmability**

Lincoln and Guba (2001) set out the idea of ‘confirmability’: which captures the traditional concept of objectivity, because it is highly possible that results could be contradictory. They emphasise the need for any findings to be confirmed by another person. The reader should be able to agree, or confirm, the interpretations made; and conclusions be drawn on the basis of this. I attempted to note and account for any changing conditions in the setting and the interviewees, and have represented their voices by using their own words as much as possible. I have also kept the voice recordings and transcripts; these will be made available to check for confirmability.

#### **4.7.4 Dependability**

Dependability refers to the possibility of constant results if the studies were to be repeated. It is impossible to replicate qualitative research, as the social world is always being constructed and constantly in flux. Therefore, the concept of replicability is highly problematic in this case.

Riessman (1993) suggests the criterion of dependability or confirmability as the possibility of confirming the interpretation and auditing the written documentation of the research and interpretation process through field notes, research texts and research journals.

Riessman (1993) further suggests that to use the criteria of correspondence, where the researcher takes the results back to those studied, could result in research that is dependable, as it would have been confirmed as correct by the respondents. In my case, I provided the interviewees with the opportunity to confirm the transcripts of their interviews. In fact, according to Riessman (1993) the responsibility of the final research lies with the researcher, in terms of distinguishing the difference between the researcher's views of the subjects and their own views.

#### **4.8 Validity, reliability and generalisability**

Issues surrounding validity, reliability and generalisability constitute a highly contentious area within qualitative research. Differing views are held; and some, such as Mishler (1990) and Blumenfield-Jones (1995), have suggested new terms and definitions which demonstrate a concerted attempt to bring a

sense of credibility to the qualitative field. This section considers my own position in the case of narrative research.

#### **4.8.1 Validity**

Narrative research does not provide certainty or an actual ‘truth’, but rather an appearance of truth or reality: that is to say, ‘verisimilitude’. Trying to validate stories for consistency, or stability, is opposed to the idea of narrative truth as stories and, as Sandelowski (1991) argues, narratives are positioned in a ‘hermeneutic circle of (re)interpretation’ and can change from telling to telling. Further, the attempt to ‘validate’ stories is contrary to the tenets of social constructionism, whereby it is claimed that language socially constructs a representation of reality.

Bruner (1990)’s perspective is that in narrative research, validity – as an interpretive concept, rather than an objective one – is subjective; and that the plausibility of the conclusion is what counts. The argument is that narrative research in education can claim that stories told, or written, are comprehensive in the sense of symbolic expectations, and that they have been produced correctly.

Additionally, Pollio et al. (1997) argue that integrative validity in qualitative research amounts to ‘whether a reader, adopting the same viewpoint as articulated by the researcher can also see what the researcher saw, whether or not he agrees with it’ (p. 271).

For any phenomenological research to be judged valid, it has to be rigorous and appropriate in methodological concerns, and be plausible in experiential concerns. Riessman (1993) considers that validation and the limits of narrative analysis to constitute unresolved dilemmas. She concludes that there is no canonical approach in interpretative work, and that different validation procedures are better suited to some research problems than others.

A methodological standpoint is, by definition, partial, incomplete and historically contingent (Riessman, 1993). However, narrative analysis allows for a systematic study of personal experiences; the interviewees construct meanings from these experiences. Meanings of experiences are best given by the persons who experience them. Thus, the preoccupation with validity, reliability, generalisation and the theoretical method of biography may not take precedence at the expense of the meaning and interpretations attached to the narrative constructions of the women (Denzin, 1989; Bradley, 2005).

The processes of analysis, evaluation and interpretation are, therefore, neither mechanical nor terminal. They are always emergent, unpredictable and unfinished (Denzin & Lincoln, 2006).

#### **4.8.2 Reliability**

In narrative studies, reliability is drawn from ordinary, everyday meaning; not that defined by formal science for use in qualitative research. 'Reliability' refers to the dependability of data. There are no formal indicators of reliability; instead, narrative research relies upon care being taken with the interviews and

transcription of the tapes, and the researcher presenting a thorough description of the interview process (Polkinghorne, 1988).

In the analysis of the interviews, I therefore referred both to the transcripts and the tapes. This procedure enables the researcher to have a richer understanding of the interview; the tapes allowed me to recall the contextual setting of the interview. I listened to the tapes repeatedly to clear up any uncertainties. I also referred the transcripts back to the women, all of whom had provided their written consent for the interviews to be audiotaped.

#### **4.8.3 Generalisability**

In narrative inquiry, the concept of ‘generalisation’ bears very similar arguments. The term is mostly employed in quantitative, rather than qualitative, research. In this case, the narrative does not present generalised rules which allow us to anticipate the same results if the original conditions are repeated. However, we do feel a sense of connection with the people who shared the same experiences.

In my study, for example, we can identify commonalities in how the women under scrutiny constructed their experiences from childhood to adulthood. These constructions may be interpreted in terms of their perceptions and identities; we cannot, however, make any generalisations that all women had the same career experiences and that all women grew up in the same way as those in the study. What we can say is that more than one way exists in which an individual will construct their experience.

## **4.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has laid out the theoretical framework behind the choice of a feminist, narrative methodology for this research study; and justified that selection in depth. It went on to elaborate on the data collection methods to be employed, and my position and role as researcher. Further, it considered ethical issues surrounding narrative inquiry and feminism, as well as criticisms encircling both genres.

Feminist research methodology and narrative research are wholly dedicated to giving voices to the voiceless; and an audience, through both the listener and the text, which will change, or enhance, perspectives in the academy on women's life experiences. In this spirit, the next chapter presents the participants' personal experiences in their own vivid and sentimental ways.



## **Chapter 5: Narrative Findings**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter adopts a feminist, narrative approach in order to draw together and present the research findings. By way of commencing the analysis and introducing the five Emirati women who participated in the study, the first section of the chapter opens with individual pen portraits of their early lives. In so doing, it touches on their family background; early formative influences; home and school lives; role models and influential individuals; and cultural influences.

In the next section, the chapter moves on to look at the women's lives as young adults, considering a range of emergent themes such as where and when they obtained their higher education; their possible involvement in education which prepared them for leadership; as well as other leadership development activities and training; influential collegiate or national policies; and the role and support of colleagues.

The chapter subsequently moves on to explore the working lives of the five women, identifying where they had worked and in what positions they had served. The analysis reveals how these women had been influenced en route to obtaining such positions, their common career goals and aspirations in HE positions, and their leadership philosophies.

This section of the chapter also uncovers the challenges faced by these Emirati women while working with men – a theme closely linked to the barriers and glass ceilings encountered by women in the workplace – before going on to identify possible areas for improvement. Their understandings of effective leadership and leadership styles are subsequently analysed and discussed; before an attempt is made to establish whether the women discussed may or may not be seen to believe in a feminist philosophy.

## **5.2 Individual portraits**

### **5.2.1 Asma**

The first of the five Emirati women to be profiled is Asma. Hailing from Dubai, educated at the University of Cairo, and holding a PhD from the University of London, Asma is a fully qualified psychiatrist who has held positions as Assistant Dean, Vice-Dean and Dean of various universities, before becoming President of a university in Bahrain. Yet she comes from a very humble background: neither of her parents were educated, although her mother ‘taught herself to read and to have basic mathematics’ in order to develop and run her own business and, notably, was ‘determined to see that her six brothers and sisters get degree education’.

This sense of aspiration appears to have been vitally important, instilling in Asma and her twelve siblings – all of whom are university educated, two of whom also hold doctorates – resolve, determination, ambition and a real work ethic. As a young child, she recalls that her father ‘wasn’t interested’ in the

news or current affairs, but her mother was, meaning that she would regularly discuss ‘what was in the newspaper’ with her children.

That Asma’s mother had set up her own business was, as she underscores, ‘unusual at that time in Dubai or even in other parts of the Emirates’. The picture that emerges here of her mother is that of an extremely strong woman, hugely respected in the local community, and a vitally important role model for Asma and her siblings. As she explains, where she was brought up, ‘everyone introduces themselves with the name of their mother... most of these mothers were really very powerful and strong... our (role) models were women’.

Asma provides no specific information on the exact setting of where she grew up, but seems to acknowledge the ‘rags to riches’ element of her story when stating that: ‘I remember that I did live in a house without electricity and then within a few years I’m living in Europe and I’m studying in London University’. At the very least, this hints at a poor, rural upbringing.

Asma’s early childhood education was religious and conservative. As she explains, ‘I’m from the generation who started education in Quranic School... a traditional school... where we go and learn how to read the Quran until age 7. Then I went to the Al Khansa School, one of the very first few schools in Dubai.’

In this case, what Asma considered as pre-school education chiefly entailed the development of skills in reading the Quran. Emirati women are required to

possess a strong spiritual education before starting school; yet at the time when she was a young child, girls' schools were still rare in the UAE.

Asma repeatedly refers to her mother as her key role model and influential individual: indeed, she even appears to have heavily influenced the decisions of her neighbours regarding the focus of their children's studies. 'The neighbourhood looked to my mother's decision: if she let us continue, they would let their children... it was all (my) mother's decision, never (my) father's decision'.

Unhappily, Asma provides no information on activities performed at school, or her perceptions during her later youth – but when it came to deciding what to study at university, she 'intentionally chose medicine... it was just a sort of challenge; they said science is difficult, medicine is more difficult so I said "OK, I'll go for it"'.

It is unclear exactly why she opted for such a difficult challenge; but the example provided by her mother, whom she cites again and again in her testimony, presumably left her believing that nothing was impossible. It must be stressed, however, that this represents an assumption on the interviewer's part, and cannot be backed up with substantive evidence.

### **5.2.2 Fatima**

The second of the women to be profiled, Fatima, holds a Master's and PhD in Political Science from the University of Cairo. She has experience of 'teaching more than 16 subjects', was head of a university Political Science department,

has many publications to her name, and is a member of the Dubai Government Economic Council.

Like Asma, Fatima comes from a conservative familial background, in which neither of her parents were formally educated. Her father, however, a figure of huge influence in her life, ‘is intelligent... he educated himself’, and provided enormous encouragement throughout Fatima’s school education. More encouragement, or so she says, than in the case of her solitary sibling, her brother.

During her early childhood, Fatima does not recall having experienced any different treatment to that encountered by boys of her age whom she played with; and at school, ‘We had a lot of care: from the teacher, from the parents, and the teacher dealt with his job as a messenger: as he is a prophet to give his message to the students’.

Disappointingly, Fatima provides precious little information regarding either the setting of where she was brought up, or any influential individuals other than her father, who appears to have been as critical in her upbringing as Asma’s mother was in hers. However, what is clear is that the values instilled in her from a very young age inform her approach to her professional life now, and are extremely important to her:

‘From (when) we were small, they told us: “Be honest. Don’t cheat. Don’t put yourself before... others; and when you do anything, just be sure that God sees you... if... you do the right things... God will help you’.

Remarkably, Fatima considers both that Emirati education now is no better than that she received; and even that she perhaps received *better* treatment than that enjoyed by boys. When it came to her pursuing her studies, however:

‘At that time, there was no choice to work, because my family asked me to go to school to teach History or to the hospital, where they allowed me to work; but I chose to be a journalist and they refused, and thank God they refused... at that time I decided to continue my Master’s and PhD degree in Cairo, because... there wasn’t a Master’s in my country’.

Here, and somewhat in contradiction of her belief that she had enjoyed preferential treatment, Fatima appears to allude to a clear lack of professional choices for women at the time, as well as assumptions on the part of Emirati society as to what female jobs involved (i.e. teaching or nursing). This is in clear accordance with the findings of Mazawi (2007) and Mostafa (2005). The support of her family, who appear to have backed her continuing studies in Egypt mainly because of cultural similarities in terms of faith and tradition, was clearly of key importance at this stage.

Interestingly, Fatima also seems to hint that young women in today’s UAE are not as appreciative of the efforts of her, or the preceding, generation as they perhaps should be; nor, in her view, are they as qualified either:

‘Most notable are changes that have occurred towards the treatment of women in UAE. But now many things in my society have changed so to find the women in high positions or in politics or any subject it is very easy now, because things have changed but in my generation or the generation before I think they were pioneers...but

what happened now with the empowered women...they choose any name without strong background, then when she or he is in the position, I think you can see the difference between someone who built herself up day by day and someone who gets the job suddenly, just because she has a chance in what they call 'empowered women', or 'empowering the new generation'...

...And also, the Arab world in the 1960s and 1970s was totally different than (in the) 1980s and 1990s... I feel with this all Arabs – you call it revolution or changes as if we are in the 1950s or 1960s in the Arab world. People try to change their life to find a new future, but still we don't know what is behind this?

Here, Fatima's comments indicate a huge cultural shift over this period, and that massively more opportunities are now enjoyed by Emirati women and girls in comparison to when she was growing up: so much so that in her view, young women in the contemporary UAE effectively take these opportunities for granted, and are almost oblivious regarding the struggles undergone by Fatima's generation in order to realise these.

### **5.2.3 Ayesha**

Ayesha was brought up in the city of Timba, on the UAE's eastern coast. Holding an undergraduate degree from the University of the UAE, she went on to obtain both a Master's and PhD in the UK, before returning and holding posts as Associate Dean, Assistant Dean and now Dean of Students at her current institution.

She spoke at considerable length regarding her extremely modest and highly unusual background. Her parents, who were both illiterate, 'had two

professions. By day they become sea and fishermen... and at the same time, worked in agriculture'. Moreover:

'We never bought things like bigger families... we never used to buy things except rice, flour but groceries... for example, we used to bring from the fields onions, whatever, they are seasonal. The same with meat because, having lived from the sea, those people were very dependent on the seafood so we never used to buy these'.

Ayesha further alluded to 'summer houses which were basically made of palm trees, because we did not have air conditioning at the time'. The picture this paints is of a remarkably humble upbringing, with parents who both held informal occupations, and in which money was clearly in scarce supply.

The first of six children, during her early childhood years Ayesha absorbed herself in 'very fascinating things for me to do – the building of the house itself – how the friends and families and neighbours would build the houses'. These sorts of activities set her apart from the other four women being profiled, but she was about to enjoy a significant stroke of fortune:

'I had my education in ...school... from my primary to my secondary school... The ruler of the Emirates, he was an advocate of education. He established a school and sent his daughters to school and therefore we had an opportunity actually early enough for me... I was really lucky'.

Moreover, she was also fortunate in having a number of influential familial individuals playing a part in her early life. As she explains:

'(In the) neighbourhood I grew up in an extended family, my aunts ... all lived in a big house and when they got married, they just



moved out of the fence but they are closer...so the whole area was actually your family. (I was) brought up in an extended family with sisters, aunts, father, mother, uncles, grandmother and grandfather, all living in one place’.

Within this extended family, one aunt in particular was of huge importance, and is recalled by Ayesha with much fondness:

‘I had an aunt... God bless her soul and she was the most influential and I considered her as a real leader, a woman leader in the family... one person has to be chosen to go for basic Quran and mathematical and numerical information and because my family had a female girl she was the oldest so she had to be educated... She went into basic education like Quran usually, and they are about six girls and did not have a sibling who was a boy at that time... in order to be very effective so she was the leader of the family...everybody went to her for any opinion... she instilled this in her sisters. She learnt to do quite a lot of jobs and she used to take women in her house... Her house was like a place where you have people are working from morning to night...and all of them will come and get advice... she was excellent in embroidery and in making local dresses...she was very helpful in this so people came there to learn... Not only this... she also became educated in local medicine so helped...treat people and take even those that are less fortunate. She would take them into her house... she would accommodate them. So I grew up. That encouraged me and gave me a push in life and created my first skills on how women are supposed to live and how important women are... Also I used to look at my mother, my aunties working in the fields doing all the daily chores.’

From the above, we can see that Ayesha was influenced by her aunts and her mother, but above all by her eldest aunt. She helped Ayesha understand that

women can play a genuinely equal role: her eldest aunt was both leader and confidant, and a vital role model, instilling in her qualities of resolve and determination which she would draw upon later.

Examples such as the above enabled women like Ayesha to appreciate that, contrary to traditional societal values prevalent in the country at the time, women could be family leaders; her eldest aunt, indeed, played a part in breaking down barriers for others. A further key virtue in Ayesha was nourished when she observed her aunt advising and helping others, even providing medicinal treatment to those in need.

Ayesha also learnt how to multi-task through observing her role models:

‘She learnt to do quite a lot of jobs and she used to take women in her house... So I grew up... That encouraged me and gave me a push in life and created my first skills on how women are supposed to live and how important women are’.

All the successful women under discussion in this study are able to effectively multi-task between field activities and business roles. This owes a very great deal to the examples provided by role models such as Ayesha’s aunt. Moreover, those whom she treated, advised, and/or helped in knitting and embroidery work will then have passed this on to their husbands, brothers and fathers.

As Ayesha also noted, in a comment pertaining to her own position as a role model now, as well as that of her family when she was growing up:

‘By default, if you are an old person or if you are older than your siblings, you become the leader, or you are looked at as the leader... and on this shoulder are many responsibilities.’

When asked about cultural changes she experienced in wider Emirati society during her youth, Ayesha was again very forthcoming:

‘Definitely there are changes that took place as part of civic society and modernity in the UAE, starting from the 1980s, started to take big strides in education and economics. There are a lot of issues that started to thrive after the oil boom. Definitely this has affected and impacted us in one way or another’.

She added:

‘The way you have been brought up in an extended family and suddenly you find yourself in a house with someone and the separation started to happen... How you lived in an extended family and how later you are alone’.

Here, Ayesha again alludes to the societal changes also touched upon by her fellow interviewees; but of greater impact upon her was when she went to study overseas, and found herself away from her family: a clear downside to the academic opportunities she enjoyed.

Ayesha encountered a great deal of cultural influence when studying for her degree abroad:

‘I remember when we first met at university ...coming from a place quite a bit remote... So you come from your tradition. I remember they used to laugh at us because at home anyone who comes up to your house you are supposed to stand up.... and they would say why did you stand up...but it was part of your grooming – the way you

have been brought up and the respect is still part of me...I mean, learning through experience of human administration...that by itself has given me... confidence, created inside of me assertiveness in taking decisions and so on and courage also in taking decisions and to communicate them’.

Interestingly, these experiences did not negatively impact on the career development of Ayesha in any way; in fact, to judge from her testimony, they plainly helped to strengthen her leadership ability.

Again, though, it is important to underscore here just how fortunate Ayesha was in being part of the very first influx of Emirati women able to enjoy academic and professional opportunities denied to her female forbears. Previously, women had been subject to the requirement and expectation that they should stay at home, either to look after relatives, or get married at an early age (Mazawi, 2007).

As Ayesha reminds us, ‘my father was about 7 or 8 and he had to go to school and therefore my aunt had to stay at home’. This sort of barrier existed because of the clear gender disparities in Emirati society at that time: ‘School did not exist, so when they were about 13 or 15 they got married and had kids’.

Critically, however, Ayesha’s father insisted that his daughters were educated to university level. Contrary to the cultural norms and expectations of the time, she won the support of both her parents, albeit after having to adopt considerable amounts of patience and persuasion:

‘Going for a BA, to be educated and then having to go to study abroad, this was a big question... to leave... it was a challenge for me to convince my parents that I was going abroad – but I did in the end. I went and they said she will go for her MA and she will find it difficult when she comes back; but I was more assertive to finish my studies and I did.’

Ayesha, then, faced real difficulties in convincing her parents that she should be allowed to study for a Master’s overseas. It was not that they were opposed to her continuing education at all, merely that they did not want it to occur abroad. Yet Ayesha was able to break down these traditional and cultural barriers, so creating a huge opportunity for her continued personal and professional development.

#### **5.2.4 Amna**

The eldest of seven children – with four sisters and two brothers – Amna grew up in a small Bedouin village, going on to major in Public Administration at the UAE University. She continued her studies abroad, obtaining both her Master’s and PhD in the US, before returning to her alma mater to become first, Assistant Dean of Student Affairs, then, as at the time of being interviewed, Department Chair of the School of Education.

Both Amna’s parents were illiterate: as she acknowledged, ‘they didn’t know the value of education at that time.’ Yet the government ‘push(ed) us to be educated... cared about our education... They gave us food to motivate us and our parents to let us be educated’. This government support appears to have been critical in Amna’s education.

She was brought up in ‘a place quite a bit remote from Sharjah, Dubai, Abu Dhabi... a little bit far away from the main city centre’. She further explained that:

‘There were not enough facilities. The distance from my village is 30-35 minutes, so it was easy to go to other Emirates. When I was young, it was one and half hours from my village by bus... just riding the bus scared me how I would go far away.’

Again, her comments here clearly suggest a poor, rural upbringing. Her early childhood, though, appears to have been simple enough: ‘We were playing with boys. Everything was very simple at that time... I also liked to play with my brothers, sisters and our neighbours’.

It can perhaps be intuited here that playing with children of the opposite gender helped foster Amna’s sense of understanding and co-operation. But for the most part, her being allowed to interact freely with boys stopped relatively early in her school life:

‘Boys were in another school without mixing. But we knew each other because we were together up to Grade 3. While at high school, we played sports of course. We even had Physical Education teachers who taught us sports. But this teacher did not allow us to mix with the boys even when we went to another class... but every now and then the other teacher would allow us to go and play whatever we wanted.’

At school, Amna’s teachers motivated her to enjoy learning and treated her well. These role models – especially, her History teacher – played a significant role in generating hope and fostering a spirit of resolve, determination and hard

work. And Amna would go on to follow their example and become a role model to her sister: ‘I even encouraged my younger sister to follow my footsteps; nobody said anything to my sister and now she is in the USA’.

The focus, though, was very much on traditional forms of learning, not on any extra-curricular activities: ‘Sometimes we were late in our curriculum. The teacher took advantage of the physical education period to cover (academic subjects) because it was not taken seriously at the time’.

As her account suggests, women’s sport may not have been taken seriously by all schools, and was certainly treated as subordinate to the academic curriculum, which her teacher sought to cover when students were behind in their work.

When asked to recall changes in broader society during her youth, Amna displayed awareness of these, but did not appear to have been particularly impacted by them: ‘Yes, the changes at that time were very difficult. Because my life is very simple... there were not many changes that happened except I went abroad to study’.

It is easy to assume that such changes would have had a more dramatic effect on her life and career than they actually appear to have done. As she added rather poignantly, ‘We finished the Bachelor’s degree and I am the only one who got a PhD - the rest got married’.

Amna’s family – but more especially her mother and uncle – encouraged her in her education and were highly influential. As she elaborated:

‘Without any certification, how will I continue in life? Being in the house is not enough - so my mother stayed behind me at that time, and also stuck behind me when I finished my Bachelor’s degree because my father was with me. He saw a good student so he wanted the best for me; however, he got problems from my cousins who did not like the idea of me going to study in the USA... so my mother and my uncle stuck behind me and also my brother as I went to do my Master’s then my PhD and then I got back to the university... And when I got back, my father was very proud of me.’

The above provides at least some indication that Amna’s ultimate success was not merely a result of her ability and determination, but also the product of collective effort and the support of both nuclear and extended family members and, at least arguably, of the Islamic faith instilled during the pre-school period: a key commonality amongst all five interviewees.

Moreover, highly significantly, so firmly did her mother stay behind her during Amna’s academic development that this succeeded in changing her father’s and his cousin’s rather more traditional, conservative positions:

‘My family was resistant when I had to go abroad to study. It had not happened before that the first daughter had to go to university. Most girls got married by the 10<sup>th</sup> grade or G11 so my father was telling me that when I finished high school, I did not have to go to university; I could get married. But my mother said no, and that I could continue with my education... without any certification, how will I continue in life?’

In this case, then, while Amna’s father and cousin posed something of an initial challenge – ‘at that young age, my cousin did not like the idea that I was going



abroad, because beforehand, it was hard for a boy to go to the USA' – this was faced down by the intervention of her mother, and a government scholarship was provided for her.

Thus through a combination of governmental financial support and Amna's mother's emotional and moral support, she was allowed to travel in order to take her degree. Her mother had one central priority guiding her, namely to, as Amna explained, do everything in her power to help her daughter 'achieve her goal'.

### **5.2.5 Amal**

Finally, we turn to Amal, the sole interviewee who did not come from a humble background. With educated parents and a wealthy family containing five sisters and three brothers, Amal was a star student throughout her school career: going on to obtain a Master's and PhD in Education in the UK, and to become first an Assistant Professor and Course Director, then Director of the English Language Centre at the University of Sharjah.

When describing her family background, she stated: 'I am from a high standard family (which is) educated and speaks four languages'. Her father was 'a head of the custom hall in the UAE: prestigious job and a well-known businessman with three big companies to run'.

Amal was the only participant in this research to come from a stable financial background, emphasising her 'happy family (with a) father (who) became

richer’; and that she was brought up in an urban area, in ‘a clean, luxurious, big villa with all modern facilities’.

She went on to elaborate that she also had a happy and active childhood, playing with boys and girls in a safe local neighbourhood. This recalls Amna’s recollections of also having played with members of the opposite gender at this time. When it was time to start her schooling, though, she ‘joined KG1 for one year at the age of 5, joined school at the age of 6... mixed school till the age of 9, joined girls’ school at the age of 10’.

At school, Amal was highly active, and appears to have been involved in far more extra-curricular activities than at least three of the other women being profiled in this study. She had taken part in:

‘Gymnastics, swimming, dance, art drawing and needle work, school theatre plays: I participated in many school plays, choir: played music, clubs: only school clubs... All school activities. Mental and sporting competitions, reading, playing music, needle and fine art’.

Amal recognised her parents, relatives, neighbours, religion, coaches and teachers all as having been very influential and supportive in her academic and career achievements. As she explained, she ‘got (her) seriousness, honesty and hard work from Dad and kindness and caring from Mum’. Her relatives helped her in ‘building good relation(ships with) sisters and brothers’; neighbours helped her to develop ‘respect and caring for people’s privacy’; and teachers helped her be honest, loving and ‘give with no limitations, and hard work’. Being a Muslim contributed to her ‘honesty, positivity, and behaving well’;

and finally, her coaches guided her in becoming ‘serious and perfect by practice’.

The most influential individual in her life, however, was her ‘English teacher at the age of 14. She was a real mum who really believed that I’d be something in the English field’. She was also influenced by ‘my mentor in methodology courses and in-service training courses’ as well as her father. Interestingly, that her English teacher was herself female enabled her to be viewed as a role model by Amal, underscoring the huge importance of women in moulding and motivating female students.

At high school, she continued to perform in: ‘4-H, dance, art, plays, choir, clubs, church, scouts... (and as) head of the class, head of the sports team, head of the school parties team’. This experience of holding such positions even at this stage perhaps provides something of an insight into how she was able to begin displaying, exercising and developing her leadership capabilities from a relatively early age. However trivial these might at first appear, it must have provided some degree of useful experience for the future.

It must be emphasised, however, that it is essentially impossible to reach any generalisable conclusion regarding the impact of sport and other extra-curricular activities upon her subsequent development as a manager and leader; and that it is extremely dangerous to overplay the significance of such anecdotal accounts as those provided by Amal.

At her secondary education drew towards a close, she continued to enjoy opportunities for further growth:

‘No challenges but lots of opportunities to be better, read more, participate actively at school activities... Lots of free time, less temptations for outdoor activities at that age. School was our club, theatre, cinema.’

Again, this rather set her apart from the other four interviewees. When asked about cultural changes in wider society which she had perceived during her youth, Amal commented:

‘No change that I can recall... I was settled with no changes. I moved through my teenage years smoothly... Nothing... except fewer chances for higher education. Mostly ready to get married at early age.’

She went on to state:

‘Yes, in the 1980s, women felt shy and unaccepted to work with a man. I refused some promotions for prestigious jobs in the 1980s because I felt myself that it’s unaccepted by society. This idea remained till 1995, after that a real change took place and women could work in any job.’

Yet despite this all-too-clear awareness of continuing societal expectations of women in the Emirati workplace, Amal added: ‘No, (it’s not a question of) being treated differently. It’s you who feel that it’s incorrect. But you can do it’. When Amal overcame this self-doubt and did go on to subsequently accept promotions, her attitude changed as she found that women were just as equipped for these positions as men.

The point to make here that it was Amal's feeling of self-worth instilled by the dominant patriarchal culture that prevented her from going for more prestigious jobs, even though those opportunities existed. So in essence she internalises the conditions of her own oppression, and blames herself rather than the predominant culture and the feelings it has instilled within her for not taking up more prestigious posts sooner.

The chapter now moves on to discuss the women's lives as young adults, looking at where they studied, the influential individuals they encountered, and to what extent their prolonged university education prepared them for subsequent positions in leadership. How much support did they receive, academically and professionally? How far did their experiences as young adults influence their subsequent leadership styles, discussed at length in Section 5.6 below?

Thus the next section explores the extent to which these women perceived a link between the resolve, determination, ambition and discipline instilled by their families when they were children, and their subsequent professional careers in management and leadership.

## **5.3 Young adulthood stage**

### **5.3.1 College education**

UNESCO (2010) and Abdulla and Ridge (2011), have found that increasing numbers of women are enrolling in higher education; a large proportion of

these within the region covered by the Gulf Co-Operation Council (GCC). This is highly significant: Arab states and the broader region have had a number of issues to deal with concerning the empowerment of women and their general contribution to the civil, political, and intellectual arenas.

The women interviewed possessed certain similarities with regard to their levels of education, college attended, and degrees obtained. Amal entered university at age 21; at the time she was already married with one daughter, and pregnant with her second child. She later divorced at age 24.

‘We lived in a flat in Al Ain provided by the university. I had another daughter too. So when I graduated I had three daughters.’

Amna revealed that:

‘I completed my high school and came to the university – the UAE University – and I majored in Public Administration... they continued paying after I got my PhD’.

Ayesha added:

‘Because there were no universities, the daughters of the rulers themselves had to go to Kuwait in order to get their further education. HH Sheikh Zayed (Let his soul rest in peace)...he took the decision to start a university in the country... both male and female...so he really empowered women. I remember when we first lucky, we got the chance to come and study here at the UAE University... and studied linguistics.’

The initiative of HH Sheikh Zayed, alluded to above, was vital. The University was established at much the same time as his daughters went abroad to study: the Sheikh had noted the need for women to enjoy access to higher education.

Given that leaders such as Zayed were prepared to commit resources in this way, it is clearly incumbent upon the current UAE government to provide more such opportunities, and ensure that the country's women are not left behind. That three of the women under analysis in this study obtained their undergraduate degrees from UAE University itself showcases the difference that access to such opportunities can make.

Asma noted:

‘While I was in Cairo, I found myself diverted... although I’m a medical student, most of the time, I was attending a lot of activities in culture and politics, art and cinema; very little time for my career as a medical student. This opened doors for me to be very close to a very defined type of people... three with PhDs, me from London University... or another one and my sister from Cairo... I decided to focus on medicine because I realised that when I became a doctor,...I would be putting my patients at risk if I was half a doctor... thank God, I became a very good psychiatrist and got my PhD from London University. I have published around 45 papers, all in international journals.’

Fatima and Asma, then, obtained their undergraduate degrees from Cairo University in Egypt. Moreover, all five women hold PhDs. Their family members had tried to stop them pursuing their studies abroad at first, yet they persevered, succeeded, and retained a clear sense of spirituality and faith in the process. Medical, political and teaching careers constituted the dreams of most of the women under discussion. Three of them showed an interest in medicine; although in Asma's case, despite being a medical student, she acknowledged

that she had spent most of her time attending cultural and political activities. Politics, in other words, were her true calling.

The analysis also revealed that two of the women studied teaching during their undergraduate degrees (Ayesha and Amal), while another pursued public administration (Amna).

In college, the Emirati women were influenced by a number of further individuals. In Amal's case, this individual was her 'English Language Supervisor... an honest and caring supervisor'. Amna elaborated that:

'They were hoping that I was going to continue and go back to that university... the Faculty members in the college were motivating me because they saw me as a distinguished student.'

This pair of responses suggests that the most influential people in the continued career development of these particular women came from their respective faculties. Most of the participants also shared a similar educational background in terms of colleges they had attended and courses they had enrolled in. Amal, for example, had attended 'many courses', though whether these were relevant leadership courses is unclear. Amna 'did my Bachelor's degree in public administration in this university': a clearly relevant course, given that it dealt with the management of people.

Ayesha attended the Oriental Institute at Oxford University, where she:

'Did a lot of grads from the British Council... in higher education, there are a lot of programmes that we went through at university that actually are advocating, promoting these leadership programmes.'



Ayesha and Amna also stated that their university had a programme designed to develop women's leadership:

'There is a programme at this university... women were focused on in positions of leadership ...but some of these programmes are not made specifically for women to be leaders, but as a leader in general.'

Finally, Fatima had been:

'Involved in attending workshops, conferences and lectures where I presented... I was selected to attend a workshop in Jordan.'

These statements point towards the very strong academic backgrounds of all the women under exploration: all were experienced in attending conferences, workshops and research programmes.

### **5.3.2 Institutional support**

In terms of the support provided by their institutions for the development of women in their careers. Amal said that her institution had programmes for both male and female managers, according to their specific needs. These programmes included HR courses, decision-making, time and team work management, assessment and evaluation, using technology, strategic planning, and budget and finance. Amna similarly explained that:

'The University is encouraging Emirati students to take on teaching and leadership responsibility....they are sending many abroad to get an education...Many of us go through that... They give us training in our area, like workshops on leadership and how to chair a department. I have done a lot of workshops to train others... The

funding of women's research and conference expenses is also supported by my institution.'

From this, many opportunities for women to further their studies at UAE University can be identified. Amal and Amna's comments are verified by Ayesha, who confirms that the institution has special programmes designed to develop women:

'Yes of course... my colleagues... wanted to establish what is called women's studies... that course is going to create what is called a feminist movement... this is offered and it got a lot of students into it - educated women, and I think this also pushed us to establish... a family centre and a women's centre... we are preparing for a women centre.'

Moreover, thanks to her Islamic cultural background, Ayesha also focused on providing supportive leadership and encouraging others, which provides a reminder that the women under scrutiny in this study not only value their own development, but also that of their fellow women.

These initiatives and support programmes are geared to help female students achieve higher academic qualifications, which can then aid them in rising to leading positions. The ultimate aim is of a virtuous cycle of sustainable women's leadership and career development.

A variety of activities, forms of education and events helped the women to develop their careers in leadership. To this end, Amal joined leadership courses, practised leadership activities, observed effective role models around the world, and attended conferences. This is similar to the experiences of

Fatima: who ‘attend(ed) many conferences in Europe, Arab countries, Gulf countries’. Asma also spoke of having been appointed to represent UAE in the GCC:

‘Then Sheikh Nahyan, the Minister of Higher Education, nominates my name for UAE government to appoint me as a President for a university in Bahrain, because that university belongs to the GCC.’

Indeed, both Asma and Fatima attended conferences in which they represented the UAE. In the latter’s case, the conferences:

‘..focused on women’s freedom, women’s security development, and security political strategies in Arab world civilisation dialogues, peace culture but from an Arab view’.

Thus the women have been involved not merely in developing themselves as individuals, but in their whole society. As Fatima identified in her narrative, women not only in the UAE, but across the GCC, have been politically and socially oppressed. She attended an economic council, where:

‘..There are 14 men and 2 women... I’m far away from their decision’.

Ayesha also stated that:

‘We are traditionally here going to a country which is completely different from you in religion, in culture, in lifestyle - it wasn’t easy... but that gave me a sense from the beginning, from a younger age, how to understand people and how you adjust and how you compromise... it also affected my specialisation later... I think it gave me also the skills which talent creates...2 girls, we left the class...“you’re empowered you knew how to react”... I lived in Britain for about 7 years, and didn’t have any issue.’

Thus, the various people and cultures encountered by Ayesha helped her develop characteristics and an understanding of leadership. The opportunity to study abroad in countries such as Egypt, the UK and Germany prepared the women under scrutiny to interact with many cultures, which was critical to their subsequent success as leaders of HE institutions.

Amal highlighted 'leading change' as among the main competencies which she had developed through leadership training. This compares with what Fatima had focused on during the conferences she had attended, i.e. women's freedom, women's security development, and security strategies in the Arab world. Such dialogues can be considered as one means of leading change.

Moreover, other core competencies, such as organisation, decision-making, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills compare favourably with how Ayesha developed her leadership career through intercultural interactions during her studies in Germany, where she learned about the best ways in which a leader can react and treat different people from different cultural backgrounds in the workplace.

Three of the women acknowledged that other developmental activities which they had been involved in had also helped them build their careers. These included teaching, research, publishing, and tackling resistance to change – as summarised by Ayesha:

'I talk about research, publishing and teaching ... I became a member of Sharjah Consultative Council... one of the programmes that prepared women to be leaders in high education.'

Fatima commented that:

‘I teach... I found myself in teaching, research and community service’.

Thus, in parallel with the background of the author, teaching has aided the career development of two of the women under examination. Perhaps this is because of the exposure to various characters and cultures they receive while interacting with students. In this sense, teaching constitutes a means of an individual getting to know those people they are required to manage, and of helping to solve their daily life problems while at college or university.

The concept of professional support systems should not be confused with the educational support provided by higher institutions to female students. Rather, as Amal explained, they are fully comprehensive, and consist of policies, colleagues, supervisors, peers, staff and facilities. In this regard, Ayesha also highlighted policies, colleagues and supervisors:

‘The policies of the UAE University have given women help in order to develop their skills and also the national... that was a big support for us. The policy does not prevent women from being faculty somewhere... Even we are different from other regional universities in the region but as a woman, I can teach in both campuses.’

Insofar as both respondents quoted policy, Ayesha made it clear that UAE national policy, which allows women to teach in two universities, has played a major role in empowering them, and enabling them to realise their full potential.

Organisationally, support programmes are in place which are specifically designed to help women employees. Such programmes provide considerable support for any Emirati woman seeking to develop their professional capabilities. Amal made reference to her university's strong organisational culture, which is flexible, clear and visible, and fosters team building, networking and relationship skills.

#### **5.4 Working lives**

Over the past thirty years, women such as Dr Maitha Al Shamsi, Minister of State of Education, have played increasingly crucial roles in the field of education, and made many important inputs into the advancement of the Emirati nation. According to Dr Al Shamsi, more than 50% of the government workforce is comprised of women, of which around 30% hold senior posts. These numbers, however, exclude women working in top level posts within the armed forces, police and customs and technical positions such as medicine, nursing and pharmacy.

Dr Rima Sabban, sociologist at the University of Zayed, opines that Emirati women are more likely to reach top administrative posts when compared to their male colleagues as a result of society now promoting equality. However, as noted above, the latest research conducted by Dent (2012) finds that the strategies and customs implemented in the Middle Eastern workplace favour women only in theory. Very few women actually hold top administrative posts, particularly in the UAE, where real equality is simply absent.

Of the five Emirati women under analysis by this study, some of them moved into employment immediately after completion of their secondary education.

As Amal noted:

‘Got employed at the age of 19 years old as a school teacher after finishing my secondary school... involved in school committees only.’

Amna’s employment began following her undergraduate course:

‘When I finished my Bachelor’s degree, I was employed at the university as an assistant teacher and they were preparing me for a higher position as I was very talented.’

Amal added that:

‘I work for these roles and (am) promoted... according to my appraisal reports.’

The women were all initially employed in teaching jobs; their talents led them to be promoted to leadership positions on entirely meritocratic grounds. Such findings contradict those of Mazawi (2007) and Seikaly (1998), which suggest that social mobility and connections were as important as, if not more important than, attainment and qualifications if women were to progress in Emirati society.

The working lives of the five women have been marked not merely by professional and political aspects, but also socio-economic concerns. Although Amal is divorced, she has three daughters, and five grandchildren. Given that her daughters are all adults themselves, and living in their own homes, Amal

does not have many social commitments to attend to. Religion plays a critical role in her life, and overall she believes that the most important qualities in leadership pertain to how far someone is:

‘Qualified and competent...The traditions and customs have a bit of influence in the way you deal with men...I always keep distant in social relations but very close in work relations. Muslim men know this... with globalisation, men from other cultures must be familiar with it.’

What is clear from this is that, entirely in accordance with the literature (for example, Gallant, 2010), Islamic traditions and customs continue to play a central role in influencing how women such as Amal behave in the workplace. Yet it is their academic achievements which play the greatest role in developing their competencies. The manner in which Amal was brought up also influences her workplace behaviour, given the cultural attachments and strictness which her family instilled in her (discussed in Section 5.2.5). She does not regard dealing with men in the workplace as any sort of challenge: as far as she is concerned, it is most important to remain focused on working relationships and respect.

Amna commented that:

‘I am married with 4 children. I was lucky I got a husband... he does not feel threatened by my PhD because I do not have to show that I have a PhD or anything. My family time is very important... I give my family the time. It is all about professional ethics, whereby I do my best at work so everything is fine.’



As with Amal, Amna also has children to bring up. She respects her husband by not showing off her doctorate, yet her comments might suggest that in the UAE, some men remain uncomfortable with the idea of marrying and remaining with educated women.

Ayesha is unmarried, but admitted that ‘being Arabic and Islamic’ has influenced how she behaves in the workplace, as a result of the leadership morals instilled in her by her faith. This is similar to the comments of Amal, and again suggests that the faith of these women heavily impacts upon their conduct at work. Similarly strong sets of morals, founded upon Islamic principles (Gallant, 2010), appear to be required by other women seeking to achieve leadership positions, not least because, as Ayesha highlighted, of the pressing need to serve as a role model to others.

Amal further considered high levels of education – and especially the individual’s urge to obtain that education – as critical if others are to emulate her success. All of these women have obtained very high academic qualifications; none can be considered under-qualified in any way.

Fatima is also unmarried. She commented that:

‘I have this personality or this belief from my family because from when we were small, they told us: be honest, don’t cheat, don’t put yourself before the others; and when you do anything, just be sure that God will see you... if all these people are against you and you do the right things, be strong that God will help you.’

This again correlates with the findings from Amal, Amna and Ayesha, and underscores the essential point that trustworthiness is paramount in any successful or strong leader. Yet Fatima revealed that her colleagues give her:

‘..a very, very, very difficult time... The same as with the economic council... there are 14 men and 2 women’.

In the face of this clear example of attempted marginalisation (Smith, 2006; Morley, 1999; Thomas & Davies, 2002; Barry et al., 2001; Itzin, 1995), she maintains her leadership principles and refuses to support what she regards as wrong ideas. As with Amal, who linked her workplace practices with the way in which she was brought up, Fatima emphasised that her principles had been acquired from her family, especially her father. The analysis also established that the top HE positions are filled by both married and unmarried women; thus, the success of these women does not appear to be linked to their marital status.

The majority of the women, however, still yearn for higher positions, despite having served as Deans and Faculty Directors. Amal stated:

‘I was the director of the Excellence for Learning Centre (ELC) (not any more). I was really happy, although I feel that I can be a successful Dean as well. I believe that I have more skills and qualifications that I am not practising in this job... I’ll start a new leadership job soon.’

All the women had worked in paid and unpaid employment. At age 32, Amal ‘became a school principal assistant, and moved to be a senior teacher as I

preferred that'. Her leadership roles at that stage involved 'supervising English language teachers'. Amna commented that:

'After working here as an assistant teacher, they continued paying after I got my PhD. But the amount was different because I was on a scholarship. When I came back and started teaching here, my salary was different.'

Finally, Asma revealed that:

'... In a different period, I was here as Assistant Dean just immediately after I finished my PhD and then became... Vice Dean and then Dean'.

Thus each has served as an assistant: Amal as assistant principal, Amna as an assistant teacher, and Asma as an assistant Dean and Vice Dean. Initially, Amna pursued Public Administration while serving as an assistant teacher: instead of working in other organisations, she had an urge to work on behalf of many young students at college level.

Overall, a key attribute in the majority of these women appears to lie in their natural compassion, and desire to help others. This apparent 'femininity' is at odds with the findings of Goode & Bagilhole (1998) and Priola (2004), who suggested that many female managers face a tension between these natural qualities and the more 'masculine' approach expected of leaders: yet such a tension does not appear to have impacted upon the five women under analysis.

Moreover, all five served a long, comprehensive apprenticeship, in which they worked their way up, proved their dedication and commitment, and gained invaluable experience through performing a variety of different roles.

After Ayesha completed her undergraduate degree, she became a faculty member: ‘One of the things I feel proud of’. Given that Ayesha was one of the first female pioneers at UAE University, and that Amal and Amna both worked there, it is apparent that the majority of these women enjoyed greater opportunities to be employed by this particular University. This proposition is further strengthened by Fatima’s narrative:

‘When I come to UAE, I tried to find a job... 7 years I tried to find a job in the university, but I didn’t have a chance until I finished. I went direct to Sheikh Nahyan, and he said we accept you because your paper did not reach my office all these 7 years, and then I started... thinking I can’t teach the boys, so I said I want to teach the girls; they said not to try, and when I taught the boys and the girls I found the boys to be helpful... good enough, so I taught both from that time till now. I’ve taught more than 16 subjects until now and I found myself in teaching... And for the position which I had before, I started teaching political science... and I found myself in research and community service. That is my story in education and then I became a member of the university council... from 2004 till now, I’ve been a member of the Dubai Government Economic Council, but still I’m teaching in the university council.’

Even though she was a Political Science graduate, Ayesha decided to enter the teaching profession. This is similar to how Amna, a graduate in Public Administration, also became a teacher at UAE University.

As has been noted, the majority of the women discussed by this study underwent various prior positions, and were charged with different leadership roles. It has been identified that these women were selected for leadership

based on their highly distinguished qualifications and performance capabilities. Amal was selected by the Ministry of Education following a series of excellent appraisals over a period of years. Fatima believes that she was selected by the government because of her academic background, a statement largely echoed by Asma. Requisite, high level qualifications and proven, high quality performance were key to all this.

Amal has served as the English Language Centre Director at the University of Sharjah over the last two years. Currently, Amna is Departmental Chair at the School of Education, a position she rose to having previously served as Assistant Dean of Students' Affairs. In addition to being a faculty member, Ayesha served as Assistant Dean for Student Affairs, Associate Dean, Head of Residential College and Dean of Students. Asma also served as a Vice Dean, Dean, and then eight years as a President. Again, this all demonstrates the rich levels of experience which these women have obtained in gradually rising to their current positions.

#### **5.4.1 Personal sacrifices**

The relatively few women in HEI positions would suggest that the success enjoyed by the women under discussion in this study is not at all easy to come by, requiring very considerable degrees of personal sacrifice along the way. Yet surprisingly, three (Asma, Fatima and Amna) of the respondents rejected this premise, and suggested that they had not sacrificed anything. Amal remarked:

‘For me, no sacrifice for the position... A man won’t sacrifice for his family or delay any chances he has because of his family commitments. A woman will do it with pleasure.’

Ayesha noted that:

‘Personal sacrifice, when you enter a leadership position... by default, if you are an old person or if you are older than your siblings, you become the leader or you are looked at as the leader... on this shoulder falls a lot of responsibilities... I have to take care of my brothers and my sisters; they look to me as their role model here.’

She had to manage both a professional and a family life, as Ayesha had to be a role model to and look after her siblings. Amal also spoke of sacrificing herself for the sake of her family, which a man is not expected to do. Mostafa (2005) claims that for Emirati women seeking to achieve top level leadership positions, it is often necessary to sacrifice either their career or their family (Mostafa, 2005) and that top leadership positions in HE institutions are more challenging for married than unmarried women, due to the double responsibility which is entailed.

Perhaps notably, three of the women are unmarried by choice (Asma, Fatima, and Ayesha); and another, Amal, is divorced, but has three daughters and many grandchildren. Amna, meanwhile, is:

‘Married with 4 children ... My family time is very important and I leave all the work here when I go home - that is why I manage to cope with family life.’

Moreover, Ayesha spoke of men being uneasy with educated women, especially when it comes to ‘higher levels: MA, PhD’. Even the married Amna acknowledged that:

‘I was lucky I got a husband when I came back from the (United) States, and he does not feel threatened by my PhD because I do not have to show that I have a PhD or anything.’

This suggests that a number of Emirati men may still feel highly uncomfortable about marrying educated women and, beyond that, it is very apparent that in order to prosper professionally, conscious sacrifices of the prospect of a happy married life were taken by at least three of the women. The prospect of ‘having it all’ – professional success and personal happiness – appears from this to remain problematic.

#### **5.4.2 Challenges as women managers**

As the data go on to show, the Emirati women in this study faced and continue to face many challenges, including lack of opportunities for women, and misconceptions about religion and culture.

Amal initially rejected the idea that women in such positions faced some challenges, and stated that she had not experienced any problems in dealing with men. However, she went on to acknowledge that:

‘We have challenges because of the less opportunities available for women, as there are many highly experienced male expatriates seeking well-paid jobs in the UAE.’

Ayesha considered that women in leadership positions do face a great many challenges, but argued that this did not hinder them in achieving their goals and endeavours. She also highlighted that ‘the challenges (applied to) both men and women’.

Asma considers that the perception that women in leadership positions face challenges:

‘..is the misconception sometimes of the role of the woman at the beginning... and this the misconception and the wrong detection of how a Muslim woman is actually... and about the women in the Arab or the Muslim culture that a woman is always a follower, she is not a leader; a woman is always in the home.’

Given her belief that this all amounted to a misconception, she could not agree with the proposition that such women face challenges.

Yet Fatima had not enjoyed her experience when serving as the head of a political department:

‘We are three ladies between ten men - all of them are local... and in political science, there are different issues, different attitudes, different personalities to deal with... the person who chose me to be a head, he thought that I was weak, so he could control me... he discovered I’m the one who says no between thirteen people, then he said I’m sorry to choose you... I’m kind, but ‘kind’ does not mean ‘weak’. I’m kind and strong enough to say ‘no’ if the decision is not in my department’s interest.’

Some men, then, appear to take advantage of what they view as female weakness in order to intimidate them. Yet Fatima displayed great calm in



response to this experience, valuing the interests of her department above petty, individual interests. Her experience, though, is clearly in line with the marginalisation highlighted by researchers such as Morley (1999); Thomas et al (2002); Barry et al. (2001); and Itzin (1995).

The analysis revealed that the women had faced some barriers to effective professional and career development. Amal noted that:

‘Barriers to progression... have been experienced till now... the woman is less experienced and got her status later than the man, which hindered the courage and freedom to travel and build her leadership skills.’

The breakthroughs of these women occurred, however, largely because of the efforts of the UAE government, which sponsored their university studies abroad, and in at least two cases, directly selected them to fill key leadership roles.

However, if men continue to be responsible for choosing which women can fill senior positions, they will inevitably be following their own criteria, based very often on misconceptions, perhaps even prejudice. This strongly chimes in with the findings of Bolzendahl et al (2004); Oakley (2001); and Whitehead (2001), and especially with the patriarchal difficulties highlighted by Deem et al. (2000). The latter, indeed, reached the grim conclusion that universities have ‘the dubious privilege of likely remaining the most male dominated establishments in the world in relation to career advancement’ (p. 13).

As Asma observed:

‘There are barriers still; there is challenge still; there is discrimination.’

In providing her opinion on the kind of improvements which should be adopted in terms of policy and practice, Amal said:

‘I cannot see any differences in HE leadership management between men and women... I feel women fit more for educational jobs...They can do many things at the same time... with good memory spans.’

Ayesha feels that a great many things need to be improved in HE leadership:

‘We still need to do a lot when it comes to developing leadership, being Deans of Colleges... have now more than 3 institutions, we would like one of these institutions to appoint a woman as a Vice Chancellor... a woman as a Secretary General.’

This clear need for women to rise towards higher, more prominent positions, and for far more women to be in senior management in the first place, accords with the viewpoint of Amal. In her opinion, the number of HE institutions in the UAE should be increased, thereby expanding the proportion of top leadership opportunities for women. Ayesha, meanwhile, argues that women should be allowed to participate in leadership training and HE budgeting. Common to both was the desire for more networking among UAE HE institutions, and with government ministries. This was also articulated by Asma, who called for ‘a big network’ at her institution.

Fatima, contends that all positions should be filled on merit, whether by a man or a woman:

‘I hope for men and women to be in those positions by merit, with the right person in the right position - but it appears it is not the case here.’

In essence Fatima believes some women lacking the requisite qualifications have employed dubious means to achieve their position: in other words, ‘they know people and how to get what they want’. Such women may be known by or related to key decision-makers, with the power to manipulate the system in their favour.

In her view – based predominantly on Islam – this must be changed, so that qualified people are given the opportunity to serve their country for the betterment of all. Thus, ambitious women should focus above all on obtaining high level academic qualifications, providing them with the opportunity to apply for leadership positions on merit.

However, should the UAE government carry out an investigation into the academic and professional qualifications of leaders in the country’s HE institutions, there is, it would appear, a likelihood of uncovering women who employed dubious means in order to obtain such positions. Such a move, while necessary if this is to be properly remedied, could actually prove counter-productive and a very great blow to the reputation of women in Emirati society.

## **5.5 Leadership, feminism and Islam**

It remains for this chapter to explore both the motivations and leadership styles of the women under scrutiny, as well as their views of feminism, and examine how these sit alongside both the literature and their Islamic values.

Recommendations provided by the five participants to ambitious young women seeking to follow in their footsteps in leadership are also discussed.

### **5.5.1 Motivation for leadership**

Four of the five women in this survey reported that they were motivated by both external and internal factors. Amal's reasons were summarised as: 'desire to serve, need and being qualified'. She also stated that formal education and training to become a manager in HE had provided further motivation, together with fair promotion of women (the latter, a view which she shared with Fatima).

Amal concluded by stating that women were not treated differently from men, which almost entirely contradicts the literature, and in itself provides a motivation for women to vie for leadership positions. According to Amna, not many women are in senior positions, but those who are would like to help others secure these too.

Ayesha agreed that women were not treated differently, and also contended that promotions to leadership positions are made on fair grounds. However, she went on to warn (here, confirming the enormous bulk of patriarchy-related literature):

'Don't forget that this is a society which is male dominated.'

Ayesha is motivated by the presence of many women in senior positions, which clearly contradicts Amna's view. Ayesha stated that:

‘There are a lot like the Canadian University... where the Secretary General, Dean of Students, Assistant Deans, Assistant Dean for Students, Director for Housing, and Director of Activities are all women.’

She was also motivated by the presence of women in senior government positions in the UAE; and those elected to various political positions:

‘So women started to take the lead in quite a lot of positions, and this is when I started to see that there are a lot of keys given to these women.’

Ayesha also explained how she had come to understand how the roles of a woman had changed. She was motivated to serve both at home and in the office, and eschewed traditional restrictions, which posited that women should merely take care of children and be housewives:

‘When women started to prove that they were more strong... they became very perfect in managing something... when they are given the chance in order to be managing offices, they excel.’

This natural attribute represented her key source of motivation to lead. It is a clear indicator both that these traditional constraints do still obtain (Mazawi, 2007), but that it is entirely possible to ignore and overcome them.

Fatima, meanwhile, was motivated by the changes she had witnessed in women’s participation in the private sector. She observed:

‘From 1990, there have been a lot of changes in women’s participation, mostly in the private sector: for example, Shekha Lubna... Minister of Economic and Planning and Foreign Trading; Mariam Al Rumi is Minister of Social Affairs and Maitha Al

Sham... I am one of the two women in the Economic Council among 40 men... We still have a long way to go, but things have improved. The pace is slow though, especially in high positions like at universities and big organisations... In Islam, there is a very clear way of dealing with administration and politics, but people do not read the heritage in the history, the Koran and experiences’.

Similarly, Asma commented that she was motivated by women in higher positions:

‘For example, Shekha Lubna – Minister of Economic and Planning and Foreign Trading; Mariam Al Rumi is Minister of Social Affairs and Maitha Al Shamsi, Minister... and Reem Al Hashemy – Minister.’

From the above, it can be seen that the key sources of inspiration for Fatima and Ayesha were provided by women holding positions in the government, which was also highlighted by Asma. Amna further noted that ‘many women are in these positions’, and Fatima emphasised this in the case of universities and large organisations. However, Fatima and Amna agreed that the rise of women to leadership positions remains slow, and urged women to redouble their efforts to obtain these, especially in light of the changes which both Fatima and Ayesha outlined.

### **5.5.2 Effective leadership**

According to Amal, effective leadership entailed the pursuit of an honest, ‘open door’ strategy, and making the appropriate choices at the appropriate times. She reiterated that in HE, no difference existed between male and female leaders; and emphasised that under Islam, leadership attributes needed to

include absence of favour, tolerance and forgiveness. A successful leader was, in her eyes, one who practised the above attributes.

Conversely, Amna believed that a successful leader leads by example, despite individuals in HE already being knowledgeable and aware of what is anticipated from them. She posited:

‘I should not ask my team to do what I cannot do, so leading by example. I expect my team to perform well; and if they need any support, I give them or send them on workshops or training.’

If we combine this with Amal’s view, it might be suggested that the elements outlined by her should be performed in a demonstrative manner, in order to teach others. It is also apparent that the women under discussion prefer to lead by example.

As with Amal, Ayesha regards the attributes of effective leadership as consisting of being confident, assertive in taking decisions, and possessing good communication strategies. The respondents believed that Emirati women needed to understand that leadership positions have become very competitive, with the majority filled by men: this renders confidence and good communication skills especially vital.

According to Fatima, being on the logical and correct side of the argument when making decisions is the best approach with which to achieve effective leadership. In doing this, she believes that she does not work for the position but ‘for my department, for my colleagues, for the interest of the university, for the education, and for my personal interest’. This suggests that women in

leadership positions need to ensure that they protect the interests of the institutions which they work for.

### **5.5.3 Leadership styles**

On the question of whether the women in this analysis possess different leadership styles when compared to men, Amal disputed this, but acknowledged that, ‘the difference remains in how the men or women see it’.

Amna said: ‘I listen more than talk’. Ayesha focused on developing followers: by doing this, a leader is assured of the continuity of their leadership, given the availability of those who will take over when she leaves.

Fatima preferred patience in leadership:

‘I am patient, I listen more than talk. I make compromises and work as a team... Try to relax and say it later through discussion. No-one has the right to always speak, but it is important to give others a chance, respecting other opinions as our religion teaches.’

Such patience has enabled and will continue to enable women in leadership positions to deal effectively with hot-tempered situations, without causing harm to others in the organisation.

Asma concurred with Amal’s rejection of the idea that women lead differently when compared to men. ‘Yeah, it’s true. It’s not different – it’s the time that is different’. Overall, though, what is most apparent is that none of the women have found it necessary to adopt ‘masculine’ styles of leadership, or to put aside their natural values and behaviours. This runs contrary to the findings of



Phillips and Imhoff (1997), and is a positive sign for the future of women in leadership and management positions in the UAE.

#### **5.5.4 Feminist beliefs**

It was established that all the women featured in this study disagreed on the concept of feminism. Amal rejected the idea that women are oppressed in the Arab world; but she did accept that:

‘For women to have made any significant strides in positioning themselves in HE management... They really worked hard and in many cases, they sacrificed their social lives.’

Amna’s position was that:

‘I do not believe in what you call feminism because we were brought up to believe that we respect each other, no one is big or important... based on Islamic faith... We do not see any difference with men and women so I do not believe that.... But women were not given the opportunity at the same time as men’.

Neither Amal nor Amna view themselves as in any way different from men. The denial of the existence of oppression on the part of Amal may even signify that changes are finally taking root in the UAE; this is merely the perspective of one individual, however.

According to Ayesha, women serve in higher positions due to their management capabilities as compared with those of men. She argued that the majority of companies and civic organisations prefer women managers when organising something:

‘They say, ‘please send us ladies, don’t send males or gents!’  
Because female students are more dedicated to the profession; they  
do it very professionally.’

These comments rather give the lie to the views of Amal and Amna by  
apparently underlining the unique skills which female leaders and managers  
possess.

Fatima’s comments were more in tune with those of Amna and Amal, though:

‘I’m not with feminism; I’m with a person as a human being. I don’t  
differentiate between men or women: I would support the man if he  
is more qualified or more good for the job; and I would support the  
woman if she is more good.’

Finally, Asma noted:

‘Feminism is a terminology which I don’t like very much. It gives  
me the feeling of a competition with a man... in Islam, we believe  
that we are both equal and the same, except for a few things like  
heritage... therefore, I don’t act as a woman; I act as a human being.’

Based on the provisions of the Islamic faith, treating individuals as human  
beings is considered by the women as more important than viewing some  
people as women and others as men. In this regard, the women therefore need  
to apply faith-based principles in convincing men of their roles and capabilities  
in top leadership positions.

Above all, it is apparent from the above that the strategy outlined by Gallant  
(2010) is, to some extent, being followed by the five women. In order to  
achieve what they have, they have had to gently challenge patriarchal

assumptions and discourses, while remaining true to societal and Islamic norms. Their outward rejection of feminism, despite having had to overcome numerous barriers on their way up the academic and career ladder, provides a clear indication of the essential incompatibility of Western notions of feminism with conservative Arab societies; yet that very incompatibility has not prevented them from succeeding, nor even led them to adopt more ‘masculine’ styles of leadership in order to do so.

### **5.5.5 Advice for young women**

Four of the women who were part of this study felt strongly that education contributed to the development of females who yearn to hold top leadership positions. They offered a number of recommendations for such women.

First, Amal recommended they ensure that they are highly qualified, and have the requisite knowledge to apply. She added that they should:

‘Take action on the spot after studying the situation well. Always work in a team. Be fair and honest in your evaluation. Don’t give your ears to gossip. Good work speaks louder. Don’t feel inferior to men. There are no differences in seeking knowledge and taking action. It’s you who can change the world’s mentality towards women as leaders by being good ones.’

Adding meaning to Amal’s statements, Amna argued that as the future appears far brighter for the majority of women, they should be prepared to do anything possible. On this note, however, we should remember that ‘doing anything possible’ nonetheless requires the attainment of high levels of educational qualifications and knowledge, as noted by Amal.

Asma advises young women to view themselves, first and foremost, as human beings. They should not think that their being a woman is specifically relevant to leadership. In particular, they need to respect themselves, thereby ensuring that they do not fall victims to societal discrimination.

Globalisation has resulted in huge changes in the academic and working environment. Ayesha noted that, with people now travelling to the UAE in order to work, young Emirati women need to learn how to accept and interact with people from other cultures, from 'Africa, Asia, Japan, the United States'. Young women are therefore encouraged to utilise discussion and cultural communication, in order to demonstrate to others how far the UAE has come.

Given that Asma pursued medicine, she advises and encourages more girls to study this course, in order to increase the number of women within the profession. She also believes that women students should understand that there are cultural and traditional challenges which they will face, and in which they must move from old ways of doing things to new ways, while not eschewing positive aspects of tradition.

Thus, when embarking upon higher studies, women students need to properly consider, be aware of their future, anticipate what is likely to transpire, and find solutions for it. However, these solutions should not affect how they express themselves as they strive to demonstrate qualities of good leadership, citizenship and loyalty and to maintain their dignity.

## 5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has served to validate some of the existing literature on the area – but has called other aspects of it into question. Emirati society is clearly conservative in its expectations of women, and has Islamic values at its core; yet these values do not by themselves prevent women from succeeding, as the five individuals discussed at length have demonstrated.

All have been able to follow the lead of Gallant (2010), and gently challenge patriarchal norms, while simultaneously remaining true to core Islamic teachings and values, and none have found it necessary to adopt ‘masculine’ styles of leadership. Their experiences confirm the mixed picture identified in the literature: many barriers are still encountered by Emirati women and girls, yet progress does appear to be being made, albeit perhaps not as rapidly as might be hoped for.

Overall, four clear themes have been identified in the testimony of the five women. These are as follows:

- Support received from different individuals at different times;
- Opportunities provided by political, cultural and structural change in the UAE;
- Personal resilience and resolve to succeed;
- Importance of the Islamic faith.

Accordingly, these themes will now be discussed at length in the final, concluding chapter of this thesis, which draws the entire study together, links it back to the existing literature, and provides a broader discussion on related sub-themes and key problems still facing aspiring women in Emirati society.

From this discussion will arise a series of suggestions and recommendations for politicians and policy-makers which, it is hoped, will help to ensure that future generations of Emirati women and girls do not encounter the difficulties and challenges experienced by the five women under analysis in this study, and are able to make the most of their academic and professional potential.

## **Chapter 6: Meta-analysis, Discussion of Findings and Conclusion**

### **6.1. Introduction**

This chapter provides a meta-analysis and a broader, concluding discussion of the major findings established in the narrative analysis, relating these back to the literature wherever possible, and considering whether they validate or contradict previous research findings.

As established in the previous chapter, the four emergent, overlapping themes identified in the narrative analysis were:

- Support received from different individuals at different times;
- Opportunities provided by political, cultural and structural change in the UAE;
- Personal resilience and resolve to succeed;
- Importance of the Islamic faith.

This chapter therefore begins by setting out these central themes at length and juxtaposing them against the literature, before moving into a broader discussion of related sub-findings pertaining to the difficulties encountered and sacrifices made by the women during their rise up the career ladder; their leadership styles; advice which they would give to young women seeking to follow in their footsteps; and their views on feminism, whereby classical

feminist beliefs are tested against the leadership philosophies and perceptions of the five women under scrutiny.

This will help to further establish the reliability and validity of the key themes and the study as a whole and lead this thesis to conclude by making a series of recommendations for possible improvement in the treatment of women in the Emirati workplace. It is hoped that these recommendations will be taken up and implemented by Emirati politicians and policy-makers, thereby ensuring that in future, no Emirati girl or woman is left behind.

## **6.2. Support received from different individuals at different times**

### **6.2.1 Early childhood**

The study has established that the majority of the five Emirati women under investigation by this thesis came from modest familial backgrounds, typified by poorly educated or even illiterate parents. This finding is supported by the literature. Mazawi (1999) notes that the majority of young women in HE are considered first generation university students; it is highly probable that their mothers are less educated than their fathers, for the simple reason that Emirati men have enjoyed better access to education and employment than women.

This helps to explain why the majority of women in this study had mothers who were so poorly educated, and were even unable to associate themselves with any formal job. Prevailing cultural values in the UAE, which expected women to fulfil domestic roles, inevitably resulted in their mothers not being



granted the opportunity of accessing education. That said though, many of their fathers had encountered similar difficulties: the country's first boys' school was only established in the early 1950s, while the first girls' school appeared around ten years later (Abdelkarim, 2001).

Yet although the majority of the women's parents were not educated, they did not deny their daughters the opportunity of schooling, nor deter them from advancing into higher education. Instead, they provided loving, nurturing backgrounds, however humble these appear to have been in some cases, encouraging their daughters to pursue their education and make the most of opportunities denied to them at the same age.

It is striking how aspirational a number of the participants' parents appear to have been, in terms of their own lives, but much more so with regard to the example they set their children. This sense of aspiration – whether in the form of formal or informal occupations on the part of the participants' parents – appears to have been of critical importance in the early lives of the women under discussion, instilling in them a strong sense of resolve, determination, ambition and work ethic.

The extent of the challenges encountered by these women at this stage largely depended on the level of parental support which they received. Thus, Amna was able to face down the scepticism of her father and cousins thanks to the intervention of her mother, while Ayesha's father would also ultimately be won around. In both cases, then, the women ultimately won the support of both their

parents, which they reflected as running counter to the cultural norms and expectations of the time.

Interestingly, Fatima's story was very similar. Facing down her parents' requests for her to become a teacher or nurse (both classically 'female' professions) by stating that she wanted to be a journalist instead, she was able to convince them to allow her to continue her studies in Cairo.

The tenacity of the students in wanting to succeed prepared them to fight hard for the right to be educated abroad, and to move away from the people who had been around them to offer support in order to get the qualifications they need. In all three cases, then, these women found themselves with no choice other than to travel abroad in order to continue their studies: not to have done so would have meant abandoning their goals of obtaining a Master's and/or PhD and with it their subsequent professional dreams in academia. Yet when objections presented themselves, all were ultimately able to find solutions.

### **6.2.2 Influential individuals**

Although the women had been allowed to interact freely with the opposite sex as very young children, this was not the case as they grew up. Emirati girls could only attend the same learning institutions as boys until Grade Three. Subsequent to this, they were separated and moved into girls' schools for the remainder of their education.

Pre-school education chiefly entailed the development of skills in reading the Quran. Emirati women are required to possess a solid basis of spiritual

education before starting school at between the ages of six (as in Amal's case) and seven (as with Asma). At the time when the women were young children, girls' schools were also clearly rare, as alluded to by both Ayesha and Asma.

Apparent in the above is the suggestion that separation by gender at age six or seven does not necessarily deprive girls of the interaction they enjoy during early childhood, but rather is done in order to provide a conducive, beneficial, faith-based environment. Moreover, contrary to stereotype, the Islamic faith instilled in these women by their parents and schools did not deter them from seeking to develop their careers to where they are now.

All respondents, though, were active to some degree at community level during their school lives. Not only were they focused on obtaining education in order to develop their future careers, but they were also mindful of offering help to the community. Their being active at both school and community level appears to have helped the women balance between community and professional roles.

Significantly, all the respondents identified a number of influential individuals who had supported them, ranging from parents and relatives to neighbours and teachers (see Table 1).

<b>Participant</b> <i>T</i>	Asma	Fatima	Ayesha	Amna	Amal
<b>Influential People</b> <i>b</i> <i>l</i> <i>e</i>	Mother	Father	Parents, relatives, neighbours	Parents	Parents, relatives, neighbours, religious leaders, coaches and teachers

*1: Influential individuals*

When we compare Amal and Amna, it is clear that fathers, mothers, brothers, and uncles were highly influential in their social, physical and professional development. In all examples, parental support was critical. Moreover, in both Amna and Asma's cases, their mothers had been enormously committed to the success of their daughters, regardless of support or otherwise from any other family member. The involvement of their neighbours further suggests that these women were influenced by their community.

This provides at least some indication that their success was not merely a result of their ability and determination, but also the product of collective effort and strong support from both nuclear and extended family members.

The study identified a number of specific individuals – cutting across school, college and even working life – who helped to mould the five women into the professional successes that they subsequently became. Teachers were most

influential in the case of two of the participants; an eldest aunt in the case of another; a mother in the case of another.

Moreover, fathers, mothers, brothers, and uncles were all influential in the social, physical and professional development of at least two of the women under discussion. This suggests that the success of these two women was not merely a result of their ability and determination, but also the product of collective effort and strong support from both nuclear and extended family members, and, at least arguably, of the Islamic faith instilled during the pre-school period.

Neighbours were also cited as important by two participants, suggesting that community influence was important in their cases, and in all examples, parental support was critical. The mothers of two of the women had been enormously committed to the success of their daughters, regardless of the support or otherwise from any other family member.

### 6.2.3 Female role models

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Role Model</b>
Amal	Teacher, parents
Amna	Teacher
Ayesha	Aunt, mother
Fatima	Mother
Asma	Mother

*Table 2: Role models*

The women's responses revealed that there had been specific individuals who had helped to mould them into the professional successes they subsequently became. These role models cut across school, college and even working life. A comparison between Amal and Amna indicates that teachers were most important in their cases, while Ayesha described at some length the positive influence of her eldest aunt. Asma, meanwhile, explained that her life had been influenced mainly by her mother.

Interestingly, the women themselves went on to also serve as role models to others. In their bid to break from the old traditions of the UAE, they were ready to demonstrate to their society that there is nothing wrong when women study abroad. In this regard, both Ayesha and Amna helped their younger siblings by advising them and providing them with information on what could enable them to enjoy a better future.

What is most apparent, though, is that from early childhood onwards females were the most influential role models in the lives of these women. At home, their mothers, sisters and aunts motivated them to succeed in life: some mothers had taught themselves how to read and perform simple arithmetic, others could be found working in both agricultural and other (largely informal) business-related activities.

It is difficult not to conclude that such examples would, surely, have played a considerable part in influencing the women to become self-reliant and believe

in themselves, although it should be stressed here that this constitutes an educated assumption, and cannot be proven categorically.

Moreover, mothers also played a huge part in encouraging their daughters towards higher education, holding firm in their support even when this involved their children studying overseas, and against the objections of their husbands.

Sharabi (1988) argues that in a patriarchal, Arab family, the failure or success of an individual member becomes the failure or success of the entire family; thus every family member is held responsible for any failure or success which may be experienced. Barakat (1985) goes even further, stating that any good or bad act by a woman reflects in turn on her mother, father and brother.

Thus, we can perhaps better understand here why certain objections presented themselves to the women on the part of their fathers or brothers, but also why, in some cases, their mothers provided such strong support for their ultimate decisions. The menfolk may have feared failure, and what this would reflect upon the family; the womenfolk seem to have tended towards a more positive, optimistic outlook.

Moreover, Epstein (1997) highlights that women have been successful in employment in the education arena. This can be linked to how parents and relatives of the women in this study appear to have inspired them towards taking teaching or nursing courses during their undergraduate studies, and, indeed, to why they all began working as teachers.

Female role models were also in evidence when the women were at high school. In particular, their English and History teachers encouraged their charges to work especially hard, and the example which they set reminded the women that they could also become teachers. On this basis, again it perhaps should not come as a surprise that the majority first found employment in teaching.

Although the women went on to hold higher professional positions, they continued to feel a passion for teaching, through which they could interact with, advise and encourage the next generation of girls. For these women had themselves been encouraged by female supervisors at college, whose example went against socio-cultural norms militating against women moving on into higher education. Two of the women studied teaching during their undergraduate degrees; another pursued public administration; while at least two were heavily influenced by teaching members of their faculties.

This provides a reminder of the cyclical nature of role-modelling, transcending from one generation of women to the next, one phase of life to the next. In their professional careers, the women under analysis have specifically focused on changing the status of their fellow women with respect to politics, education, economics and freedom. They have vied for political positions, with their research intended to encourage more women with similar ambitions to join them.



Educationally, the achievements of these women could provide a strong motivation for the next generation to do likewise. Economically, they have been able to successfully own and manage various enterprises, with their research in this area aimed at empowering more women in financial terms, as opposed to what Emirati culture and traditions might instead suggest.

In their hypothesis on why females want to enter higher education, Pascarella et al. (2004) explain that women view their status through direct comparison with men. It was notable that the women in this study referred often to their mothers, female teachers, department supervisors and females in higher government ministries; they may have been comparing the achievements of these women to their male counterparts, but this was not overtly stated.

Based on the 'Pollyanna hypothesis', Ahmed (2002), argues that younger women are optimistic regarding their prospects of entering higher education and securing a better future for themselves. These young women are inspired by the strides that their fellow women have made in different fields (Holland and Eisenhart, 1990), leading them to an increasingly widely held, positive world view, which holds that they will be treated as equals to men and that their professional ambitions will not be hindered.

## **6.3 Opportunities provided by political, cultural and structural change in the UAE**

### **6.3.1 Perceptions at youth stage**

The analysis revealed that the five women under discussion may or may not have experienced or perceived changes in terms of extra responsibilities, puberty, their environment or activities during their youth. Two of the women could not recall any significant changes of this kind, and certainly do not appear to have been impacted by them in any case, although another felt rather differently, highlighting the social and cultural changes which she believes were already well underway.

A further participant, however, acknowledged that it is now far easier for women to obtain high level positions in Emirati society, as well as suggesting that her education was not inferior in any way to that enjoyed by today's schoolgirls. In this, she appeared to suggest that young Emirati women are not as appreciative of the 'pioneering' generations which went before them as they perhaps ought to be; and, indeed, was the only respondent to view these changes in a somewhat negative light.

However, she nonetheless noted how many women now find themselves in high level positions, echoing the views of another participant; it is clear from this that perceptions of the treatment and role of women in the UAE have changed considerably.

Overall, what can be deduced from all this is that changes associated with the treatment experienced by the women in the study were not easy to recognise, and amounted to a great challenge, necessary to be faced down and overcome.

It should also be noted, though, that the women cited in this study may have a strong tendency to downplay both their personal achievements, and especially the impact of societal change upon them. They do not appear to view *themselves* as having individually broken down significant barriers, preferring to pass the credit on to parents, teachers, or members of their fellow or previous generations.

This may be due merely to the humility of these women, but provides a further valuable reminder that this study is based merely upon their own *perceptions* of the influences upon their success, and nothing more generalisable than that.

The changes noted by at least some of the Emirati women find support from Moghadem (2003), who argues that the Arab family is experiencing significant change, largely as a result of increasing rates of globalisation, and the resultant democratisation of family relations. That said though, Doumato (1992), albeit in an earlier study, describes the Arab world as a neo-patriarchy state, and posits that nothing has changed in relation to gender.

Sabbagh (1996) asserts that old cultures cannot be interpreted 'in the same manner that women's issues in the industrialized world are judged'. To her, the patriarchal state of the UAE is changing: initially, the extended family provided its members with every amenity, but today, the government provides

education, employment and security (Moghadam, 2006). Comparatively, these studies appear to suggest that changes have indeed occurred with regard to how the Emirati government views women, but not so much across broader UAE culture.

### **6.3.2 Cultural influences and the role of the government**

Cultural influences of the UAE, described in detail in Chapter 2, also impacted upon the development of the women. Amal turned down prestigious promotions; Fatima highlighted a lack of professional choice.

Emirati culture, then, appears to have remained fiercely resistant to the idea of women pursuing either further studies towards, or a professional career in, what it regards as non-female disciplines. The women found themselves impeded by lack of choice and cultural expectations, including among their families, particularly so in the cases of Amna, Asma and Fatima.

Traditional and cultural ideologies noted in Chapter 2 (Mazawi, 2007) continued to play their part, as, at least in some cases, did conservative familial expectations (UAE Ministry of Information and Culture, 1995; United Nations, 2007).

Yet Asma's decision to 'intentionally choose medicine' strongly speaks to the idea that if women were not prepared to accept the cultural limitations placed upon them, and fought for what they wanted to do, they were able to challenge and prevent being limited in their ambitions. That said though, how many other women from their or even subsequent generations were or are prepared to fight

in the same way? That the remaining women had their careers heavily influenced or even chosen for them by parents and relatives might perhaps suggest that it would be markedly few.

Most apparent here is that at least some of the women under scrutiny had already demonstrated their readiness to stand by their own decisions, against prevailing cultural moods, which perhaps suggests that their subsequent success owed a great deal to their personal ability to take brave, even controversial decisions against the wishes of others, even loved ones. The resolve and determination to make such decisions had, surely, been instilled in them by the parental and familial support, key role models and influential individuals we have noted above.

Yet as much as the women were prepared to stand by the difficult decisions which they had made – against the wishes of their family and loved ones in some cases – they did not forsake the cultural practice of showing respect to others, which accords with the strategy which Gallant (2010) advocates within societies of endemically conservative values and expectations of women.

Although Emirati cultural influences impacted upon the development of the women, government policies were also important. Significantly, three of the participants obtained their undergraduate degrees from UAE University, established by HH Sheikh Zayed. The Sheikh had noted the need for women to be able to access higher education; his role was pivotal in the case of at least three of the women under discussion.

Indeed, the analysis has identified that the UAE government can be considered as one of the main forces behind the success of the women in this study. In the case of one interviewee, the government's decision to provide food to poor households, as a *quid pro quo* for parents ensuring that their children went to school, had been critical to her education; the government has also made major moves to establish girls' schools in regions where they had not previously existed. In most cases, this was an initiative taken by leaders in senior positions. And as we have seen, as a result mainly of the Sheikh's efforts, the majority of the women under discussion were able to obtain their undergraduate education in the UAE instead of heading abroad, as would always previously have been necessary.

In terms of overseas studies, however, the government also moved to support exceptionally talented young women through providing sponsorship programmes and scholarships at undergraduate, post-graduate, doctoral and post-doctoral level. Governmental support enabled some of the women to attend various conferences and meetings within and outside the UAE and hence to further their professional development.

Several studies (for example, Madsen, 2009b; Ridge, 2009) concur that the UAE government is committed to ensuring equal opportunities for women. The World Bank (2006) reports that since the 1960s, the UAE government has been committed to the improvement of the position of women. This has been further highlighted through the establishment of girls' schools, middle colleges and the UAE University, as already discussed. The country's recent history of female

scholarships and employment opportunities represents clear further evidence of the government's policy, which recognises women as an equal part of society.

A recent study by UNIFEM (2010/2012) also highlights that Emirati women have been constitutionally empowered to enjoy equal opportunities. Thus, more employment opportunities are now being offered in the public sector, in particular in the civil service, where women account for 40% of total employees. In general, since the country's discovery of mass oil reserves, the role of women in Emirati society has greatly expanded, with Sheikh Zaid Bin Sultan highly committed to the participation of women among the work force. His wife, Sheikha Fatima Bint Mubarak, supported the President in achieving his vision of the UAE as a modern society based on Islamic and Arab traditions.

Baud and Mahgoub (2001) note that the rights of Emirati women are guaranteed by the country's constitution, which provides for women to enjoy equal claim to title, legal status, rights to practice professions, and access to education. A substantial proportion are employed as policewomen, criminal investigators and customs officers (UNIFEM, 2010/2012). Women are especially provided with greater employment opportunities in education: 100% and 55% of nursery and primary school teachers respectively are female, as are 65% of secondary and intermediate school teachers.

Youssef (1977) highlights that Emirati leaders acknowledge the role of education in economic and social development, and thus provide free access to

education up to the age of 16. As a result of such policies, the numbers of women high school graduates rose from 47% in 1987 to 62% in 1996. Female higher education graduates also rose: from 38% in 1977 to 79% in 1997. This suggests that the gap between men and women is indeed being bridged in the country's education system (UNIFEM, 2010/2012).

Indeed, the number of female graduates from higher education institutions has been significantly greater than that of males since 1993 (World Bank, 2006). The proportion of Emirati women graduating from HE institutions continues to rise on an annual basis, which only serves to underscore why the women featured in this study feel so able to serve in their positions and optimistic that more women will soon join them in similar posts in the future. Put simply, there are now more qualified women in the job market than men.

### **6.3.3 Institutional and professional support**

The analysis identified an array of institutional support which assisted the five women in their professional development. For example, one participant noted the provision of programmes which included HR courses, decision-making, time and team work management, assessment and evaluation, using technology, strategic planning, and budget and finance. Another highlighted the workshops she had attended on leadership and how to chair a department, and pointed out that both women's research and conference expenses were funded by her institution. A further interviewee stated that her institution had special programmes geared towards women's development.



Three of the women acknowledged that other developmental activities which they had been involved in had also helped them build their careers. These included teaching, research, publishing, and tackling resistance to change.

In terms of professional support systems – which should not be confused with the educational support provided by higher institutions to female students, and are instead fully comprehensive, consisting of policies, colleagues, supervisors, peers, staff and facilities – two of the women highlighted the vital role played by colleagues and supervisors, with one focusing in particular on the importance of UAE national policy, which enables women to teach in two universities.

The other made ample reference to her institution's strong organisational culture, which is flexible, clear and visible and fosters team building, networking and relationship skills.

A variety of activities, forms of education and events enabled the women to develop their careers in leadership. One of them related having joined leadership courses, practising leadership activities, observing effective role models around the world, and in common with two others, attending international conferences. Two of the women, indeed, actually represented the UAE at such conferences.

In the case of one interviewee, these conferences had focused on women's freedom, security development, and political strategies; in the case of another,

she had attended an economic council, where she had found herself severely in the minority in terms of its ratio of women to men.

Yet it is also clear that the various people and cultures encountered by these women – not merely at international conferences, but above all while studying abroad – helped them to develop clear leadership characteristics and an understanding of different cultures critical to their subsequent success as leaders of HE institutions.

One participant highlighted ‘leading change’ as among the main competencies which she had developed through leadership training. Other core competencies which were noted included organisation, decision-making, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills.

## **6.4 Personal resilience and resolve to succeed**

### **6.4.1 Family background**

Of the five respondents, only one, Amal, came from a well-off family. A rather more humble – indeed, largely illiterate – family background could be identified in the case of the remaining four respondents. Either their mother or father or both of their parents were illiterate. Yet despite the majority of respondents coming from humble backgrounds, all went on to achieve marked success in their professional lives.

The sample here is simply too small to be generalisable; but it can at least be concluded – in contrast with the findings of Adler and Israeli (1994) on the impact of formative experiences on subsequent professional success – that in

the case of these five women, their familial backgrounds did not prevent them from going on to achieve very considerable success, nor did the conservative, religious backgrounds noted by several of the women prove a hindrance either.

Moreover, the fact that these women came from humble backgrounds speaks to their tenacity and determination to achieve. Equally notable is how aspirational a number of the participants' parents appear to have been, with regard to the example they set their children. This sense of aspiration, whether in the form of formal or informal occupations on the part of the participants' parents, appears to have been paramount, encouraging in their daughters a strong sense of resolve, determination, ambition and work ethic.

The majority of the women's families were poor, though not so poor that this prevented their education from being treated as a priority. Three of the participants had parents who were not in formal employment; only one came from a family enjoying a stable income; and four of the five women also had many brothers and sisters. Three of the interviewees appear to have been brought up in rural settings.

The majority of the women also appear to have lacked access to many of the basic facilities which would enable them to obtain a good education. A number attended schools in far-flung locations: the means with which to get to and from school were at times limited. In some cases, their family homes at times lacked electricity, air conditioning or furniture, meaning that, for example, a number of the women encountered great difficulty in studying at night in cases

where the family income could not cover the paraffin necessary for a lamp; and that in hot conditions, daytime studies became both challenging and uncomfortable.

Studies (Ridge, 2009; Madsen, 2009a) have established that socio-economic status is closely linked to educational access in the Middle East. Educational and income levels of parents play a highly influential part in terms of access to and success in education in the Middle East; yet remarkably, all the women under scrutiny disproved this premise by all ending up in high level positions.

Educational expectation can be linked to both social and cultural capital (Sharabi, 1988). Early childhood socialisation practices and experiences, as well as social class, are factors which can fashion lifelong attitudes held by women about themselves and their capabilities. The beliefs and attitudes which others hold about women are reflected in their expectations of and daily interactions – be they overt or covert – with them.

Sharabi (1988) endorses this point of view, arguing that such capital can be acquired, exchanged and converted to other forms. He regards family background, the business level of parents, and social class as factors impacting on academic success. In this case, though, poor family background and social class can actually be regarded as motivating factors in the success of the Emirati women, who were determined to achieve very high level academic qualifications, because these could enable them to enjoy upward social mobility and a better life than their parents had experienced.

### **6.4.2 Embodied capital**

The term ‘embodied capital’ refers to what an individual knows and can do, and can be developed and improved through learning (Bourdieu, 1986). This term can be employed here in order to explain why the Emirati women, having realised that they had exceptional levels of academic ability, opted to move into higher and post-graduate education, and thereby develop their individual and professional potential, despite the cultural constraints which they encountered along the way.

So much so that when, before entering university and commencing their careers, the women found themselves impeded by lack of choice and cultural expectations – including among their families – they were able to challenge and counteract this. Their readiness to stand by their own decisions against prevailing cultural (and even familial) moods suggests that their subsequent success owed a great deal to their ability to take brave, even controversial decisions against the wishes of others, even loved ones.

The resolve and determination to make such decisions had, surely, been instilled in them by the parental and familial support, key role models and influential individuals already noted above. As a result, when parental, familial or cultural objections presented themselves, challenges were transformed into opportunities for continued personal, academic and professional development, and solutions were found, without any of the women either becoming estranged from their families, or forsaking the vital cultural practice identified by Gallant (2010) of showing respect to others.

### **6.4.3 Motivation for leadership**

In terms of their motivation to go on and fill leadership positions, four of the five women in this survey cited both external and internal factors. One noted her 'desire to serve, need and being qualified' and also emphasised that formal education and training to become a manager in HE had provided further motivation, together with fair promotion of women (the latter, a view which she shared with a fellow interviewee).

Yet she also insisted that women were not treated differently from men, which almost completely contradicts the literature, and in itself provides a motivation for women to vie for leadership positions. Another of the participants agreed with this, and argued that promotions to leadership positions are made on fair grounds. However, she went on to warn that Emirati society remains highly patriarchal and male-dominated, a point of view which certainly does conform to the literature (Gallant, 2010; Jamali, Sidani and Safieddine, 2005; Foquahaa and Maziad, 2011; Mostafa, 2005; Doumato, 1992; Barakat, 1985).

A different participant stated that she was motivated by the presence of women in senior Emirati governmental positions, and those elected to various political positions; and that she desired to serve both at home and in the office, eschewing traditional restrictions, which had it that women should merely take care of children and content themselves with being housewives.

A further interviewee was motivated by the changes she had witnessed in women's participation in the private sector; still another, by the presence of women in higher positions.

## **6.5 Importance of the Islamic faith**

### **6.5.1 Gender separation**

After Grade Three, the women had been separated from boys and moved into girl's schools for the remainder of their education. Their pre-school education involved developing their skills in reading the Quran, a key requirement for Emirati women before they start their formal schooling.

Yet what emerges from the analysis is that separation by gender at age six or seven did not lead to negative consequences in terms of the women's social development, and instead enabled them to enjoy a conducive, beneficial, faith-based academic environment. Moreover, the Islamic faith instilled in these women by their parents and schools did not deter them from seeking to develop their careers to where they are now.

In full accordance with the literature (for example, Gallant, 2010), Islamic traditions and customs continue to play a central role in influencing how Emirati women behave in the workplace. The analysis revealed all of the women to be devout, practising Muslims, which could be seen from the way in which they dressed to what they stated regarding their religion. They attributed their success to the discipline which accompanied their faith.

Islam continued to play a pivotal role in how the women related to and behaved towards other people at university. The five women under scrutiny lived responsibly and displayed respect towards all others, rising to their feet, for example, whenever a visitor entered their room.

Some of the women's relatives, especially their parents, feared that studying abroad would lead their values and attitudes to change, yet notably their faith instead helped them to uphold very high moral standards, leaving them unchanged on their return, even from secular, non-Islamic countries such as Germany.

Early childhood socialisation practices reflect society's continuing endorsement of separate gender roles for boys and girls, whereby boys are more likely to be encouraged in their pursuit of independence, exploration and achievement, whereas girls are more likely to be rewarded for co-operative and nurturing behaviour, and discouraged from active play (Lips, 1995). However, these women's pre-school years had also included a solid basis of religious education and this can help us to understand why the women in this study could not drop their faith and cultural practices while studying abroad.

### **6.5.2 Faith in the workplace**

The majority of the women believe that they do not experience major difficulties when dealing with male employees in the workplace. To them, the Islamic faith clearly defines the kind of relationship which should exist between a man and a woman: their working relationships with the opposite sex



have been shaped by this. Here, it helps that the majority of male employees in the UAE are also Muslim and therefore able to instinctively understand the kinds of working relationships favoured by female managers. Above all, the leadership traits of these women when dealing with other people at work are based on Islamic principles, such as giving generously without expecting anything in return, tolerance, and forgiveness.

One interviewee acknowledged that 'being Arabic and Islamic' has influenced how she behaves in the workplace, as a result of leadership morals instilled in her by her faith. This again suggests that the faith of these women impacts heavily upon their conduct at work. Similarly strong sets of morals, founded upon Islamic principles (Gallant, 2010), appear to be required by other women seeking to achieve leadership positions, not least given the ever-pressing need to serve as a role model to others.

## **6.6 Discussion: ongoing problems and possible solutions**

With this chapter having drawn together the four central themes which emerged in the narrative analysis, and linked these with the existing literature, it now moves onto a broader discussion of sub-findings and related themes, in particular, those pertaining to the difficulties which women continue to face in the Emirati labour market; the personal sacrifices which still appear to be necessary in the case of aspiring female leaders; the leadership styles of the five women at the heart of this analysis; areas for possible improvement outlined by the participants; and advice they would give to young women seeking to follow in their footsteps.

Following this, the thesis will conclude with a series of recommendations for Emirati politicians and policy-makers which, it is hoped, will ensure that far more women are able to rise to prominent roles in leadership and management in the future.

### **6.6.1 Paths to leadership positions**

All the five women under analysis were initially employed in teaching jobs; their talents led them to be promoted to leadership positions on entirely meritocratic grounds. Such findings contradict those of Mazawi (2007) and Seikaly (1998), which suggest that social mobility and connections are as important as, if not more important than, attainment and qualifications if women are to progress in Emirati society.

The analysis established that the top HE positions specifically related to this study are filled by both married and unmarried women; thus, the success of these women does not appear to be linked to their marital status. All have worked in paid and unpaid employment; all have been assistants at some stage during their rise up the career ladder. The majority, however, still yearn for higher positions, despite having all served as Deans and as Faculty Directors.

Perhaps above all, though, a key attribute in the majority of these women appears to revolve around their natural compassion and desire to help others. This apparent 'femininity' is at odds with the findings of Goode & Bagilhole (1998) and Priola (2004), who suggested that many female managers face a tension between these natural qualities and the more 'masculine' approach

expected of leaders – yet such a tension does not appear to have impacted upon the five women under scrutiny.

All five served a long, comprehensive apprenticeship, in which they worked their way up, proved their dedication and commitment, and gained invaluable experience through performing a variety of different roles. It has been identified that these women were selected based on their highly distinguished qualifications and performance capabilities. They have gone on to obtain rich levels of experience in gradually rising to their present positions.

The high-level leadership positions which they went on to obtain owed nothing to any form of positive discrimination: all are treated just as men in their positions would be. Women managers are motivated whenever they believe they are being treated fairly. This must be borne in mind not only in the Emirates, but also in other parts of the world, where women may still feel – indeed, are arguably *conditioned* to feel (Lips, 1995; Maguire, 1987) – that men are better suited to leadership and management positions.

### **6.6.2 Personal sacrifices**

The success enjoyed by the women under discussion usually entailed very considerable degrees of personal sacrifice along the way, with regard to which, two interviewees alluded to being role models to and looking after their families, which a man in a similar position would not be expected to do. It might, perhaps, be inferred from this that, in many cases of Emirati women seeking to achieve top level leadership positions, it is often necessary to choose

between such positions and a family life (Mostafa, 2005), and that top leadership positions in HE institutions are more challenging for married than unmarried women because of the double responsibility which is entailed.

The responses indicated that the family choices made by the Emirati women – two of whom have children, three of whom do not – did not deter their career development and achievements. However, three are unmarried by choice, while another is divorced, and that even the sole married respondent spoke of being ‘lucky’ that her husband does not feel ‘threatened’ by her holding a doctorate – rather backing up the view of another that Emirati men are ‘uneasy’ around educated women – does appear to indicate that in order to prosper professionally, conscious sacrifices of the prospect of a happy married life were taken by at least three of the women. The prospect of ‘having it all’ – professional success and personal happiness – appears from this to remain rather forlorn.

### **6.6.3 Cultural challenges**

The study has also identified that the women under scrutiny have encountered a number of different challenges, above all, those pertaining to misconceptions about religion and culture. As noted above, Emirati culture only allows girls to interact with boys up to their admission to KG3 at around age five or six – following this, they attend separate schools.

Yet although the cultural requirement of their separation from boys must surely have helped the women to develop their social, educational and professional

skills, it also limited them in other respects. While at school, their male counterparts continued to be prioritised for higher education; girls, indeed, were expected to finish high school, then simply marry and raise a family. This is underscored by the stark point that the majority of the women's mothers had not even been able to associate themselves with any formal job.

As we have seen, family members had also been greatly concerned at the prospect of the women failing to uphold their cultural traditions whereby families live together and close to one another and, instead choosing to study abroad. This constituted an objection which the women had to resist, and even force themselves through, if their higher education was to become a reality.

And such influences continued to manifest themselves in the workplace. In most cases, there were more men than women in professional organisations; thus, women in high level positions invariably found male managerial colleagues uniting with one another against them, and blocking decisions which would otherwise have been passed. Yet the women remained firm in the belief that they should serve the interests of the organisation: personal needs or feelings did not, based on their narrative testimonies, even enter the equation.

According to both the literature (Gallant, 2010; Jamali, Sidani and Safieddine, 2005(a)) and the narratives, Emirati men also tend to believe that a woman should not be a leader. To the women at the heart of this study, this represents a simple misconception of the country's culture. Their position is that both men and women are equal before God; thus their very commitment to Islam

emboldened them in serving in managerial positions, regardless of any ill feelings which this might provoke in men.

Barakat (1985) argues that Arabs are not only patriarchal, but also pyramidically hierarchical, based on gender and age. An Arab's family forms the elementary social institution, from where its members should inherit their cultural identities and constituents. This patriarchy further explains why the women had noted that men appeared uneasy with their positions and, for example, attempted to intimidate them while at meetings or conferences. This provides a reminder of how much room for improvement still remains in terms of the treatment of women in the Emirati workplace, and also suggests a certain tendency on the part of the women under analysis to adopt more of a 'glass half full' approach when reflecting on their experiences with male colleagues.

Indeed, that one of the interviewees found it necessary to 'respect' her husband by not showing off her doctorate surely suggests that some Emirati men remain uncomfortable with the idea of marrying and remaining with educated women. Thus, the narratives of the women being studied underscore how much progress is still to be made and that cultural perceptions regarding female roles are still to be fully broken down.

The analysis also revealed that during the 1980s, the UAE did not undergo any major changes regarding how women should be viewed and treated in the workplace. In effect, this left the women under analysis as guinea pigs, forced

to encounter the most difficulty so that future generations would be able to follow a similar path amid less oppressive conditions.

The women argue that the barriers and discrimination which they faced were essentially based on cultural perceptions. Although the government of the UAE has been identified as a major factor in aiding the women's academic and professional development, it also played a part in these perceptions continuing to persist.

For example, while the government encouraged the growth of women in the workplace, it shied away from advocating their filling the highest positions, an example of male Emirati rulers inevitably being influenced by the same cultural values and perceptions with which the women under study had to grapple. Further, even when women were offered positions, this was invariably done so by men in higher offices, who themselves would face huge difficulty in appointing women to such exalted posts, regardless of their academic qualifications.

In a study looking at the numbers of women serving in high level ministries and top private positions, Baud and Mahgoub (2001) found that in 1985, the proportion of women in leadership positions amounted to some 9.6%; and in 1995, to 11.7%. They also identified that the employment rate of Emirati women is much lower than that of men, and that the country's culture must provide at least part of the explanation for this.

Indeed, the authors emphasise that the entire Middle East features the lowest participation levels of women in the labour market. In 2000, female participation in the UAE job market was at 32%. This left the researchers with many questions regarding why the government was increasing accessibility to education if women could not be treated equally in the job market. ECCSR (2004) find that the low rate of female participation in the latter can be linked to socio-cultural, religious and economic reasons.

Joseph (1999) concurs that the low rates of female participation in the Emirati job market are linked to the country's traditional values and customs, which he terms as challenges to the economic prosperity of Emirati women. However, Jacobs (1999) reasons that Emirati women have dominated courses in the humanities, education and social sciences, naturally resulting in low levels of employment in vocations unrelated to these disciplines. Further studies argue similarly that the 'feminization' of such courses can be responsible for creating problems in the job market (Jarardan, 2001).

In explaining the 'hidden curriculum' in the UAE education system, Anyon (1980) concurred with Bowles and Gintis (1976) regarding the existence of unequal social relations in Emirati society, whereby values and attitudes towards school experiences are inconsistent with what is in the curriculum. This suggests that it would be advisable for Emirati women and girls to rely on their own independent decisions on how and what they want to achieve in life, or risk falling prey to finding themselves misguided and, ultimately, disillusioned.



Even with all of the above said, it should nonetheless be reiterated here that the analysis did suggest that the UAE has undergone many changes with regard to how women are now treated, be it at all-girl schools, all-female universities, or in allowing women the independence to choose to live by themselves if they are not married.

#### **6.6.4 Leadership styles and effective leadership**

When asked for her views on effective leadership, one interviewee responded that it entailed the pursuit of an honest, ‘open door’ strategy, making the appropriate choices at the appropriate time. She emphasised that under Islam, leadership attributes needed to include absence of favour, tolerance and forgiveness. A successful leader was, in her eyes, one who practised the above attributes.

However, her colleague argued that a successful leader leads by example, despite individuals in HE already being knowledgeable and aware of what is anticipated from them. A further participant focused on the core attributes of confidence, assertiveness in taking decisions, and possessing good communication strategies, suggesting at least partial conformance with the findings of Walton (1997), who identified both traditionally ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ qualities in women managers at academic institutions.

Another emphasised the need to remain on the logical and correct side of the argument when making decisions, suggesting that women in leadership

positions need to ensure that they protect the interests of the institutions that they work for.

The women were divided on whether they considered themselves to possess different leadership styles to those displayed by men. Two disputed this, but one of those accepted that the key lay in how either men or women *perceived* her style of leadership; yet the others – vindicating the arguments of Eagly and Karau (2002) – spoke of ‘listening more than talking’, patience, and ‘developing followers’, all more conciliatory, ‘feminine’ styles.

More fundamentally, though, it can again be asserted here, *pace* Gallant (2010), that religion lies at the very core of the styles of these women. They respect one another’s opinion, and allow everyone the opportunity to express their point of view. These women have logical approaches to dealing with challenges, in which they focus on serving the interests of their organisation, not of any particular individual. Above all, honesty and openness are paramount in everything they do in terms of decision and policy-making.

Overall, most apparent is that none of the women have found it necessary to consciously adopt ‘masculine’ styles of leadership, or to put aside their natural values and behaviours. This actually contradicts Walton (1997), to some extent at least; unless, that is, the qualities of confidence and clear, logical decision-making underscored by some of the women are themselves considered ‘masculine’.

### **6.6.5 Positions on feminism**

All the women featured in this study demurred from the concept of feminism. According to the provisions of the Islamic faith, the aspect of treating individuals as human beings is considered by them as more important than viewing some people as women and others as men. In this regard, the women therefore believe that they need to apply faith-based principles in convincing men of their roles and capabilities in top leadership positions.

Apparent in the above is that the strategy advanced by Gallant (2010) is, to some extent, being followed by the five women. In order to achieve what they have, they have had to gently challenge patriarchal assumptions and discourses, while remaining true to societal and Islamic norms. Their outward rejection of feminism despite having had to overcome numerous barriers on their way up the academic and career ladder provides a clear indication of the essential incompatibility of Western notions of feminism in conservative Arab societies, which confirms the position of both Gallant (2010) and Kikosky (2008), cited in Chapter 3; yet that very incompatibility has not prevented them from succeeding, nor even led them to adopt more ‘masculine’ styles of leadership in order to do so.

### **6.6.6 ‘Respectable femininity’?**

Radhakrishnan (2009) and Fernando and Cohen (2014) discuss the idea of ‘respectable femininity’: focusing the role of professional women in India and

Sri Lanka respectively. Radhakrishnan (2009) highlights how the growing numbers of career opportunities for middle-class Indian women is actually not at odds with traditional, conservative expectations. Indeed, embedded within Hindu nationalism is the idea of ‘virtuous’ women who, while pursuing new professional opportunities, ultimately remain true to the sense of ‘appropriate womanhood’ (p. 197) by prioritising their families over their careers and, in many cases, continuing to take a partner of their parents’ choosing.

The women profiled by Radhakrishnan (2009) practice balance, restraint, moderation, and ‘knowing the limit’ (p. 211): that is to say, they steer a *via media* between previous, much more restricted generations and the less fortunate lower classes on the one hand; the promiscuous, much more liberal, consumerist West on the other. Thus do they enact ‘idealized femininities’ (p. 211) which conform to cultural and societal norms: there is no sense of any kind of revolutionary feminism at work.

A similar phenomenon was observed by Fernando and Cohen (2014) in Sri Lanka: a predominantly Buddhist country and patriarchal society. The women interviewed detailed how vital it was that they adhere to moral and behavioural norms (p. 149); and overall, appeared to face even more of a struggle in balancing their professional aspirations with these norms than their Indian counterparts (p. 161).

What, then, of the women in our study? Does the idea of respectable femininity also apply to them? The United Arab Emirates is a deeply conservative society,

in which religious faith plays, if anything, an even greater role than in India and Sri Lanka; and as Section 6.6.5 noted, the five women all rejected the idea of feminism (or at least, Western conceptions) of it out of hand.

This is because, as we have seen, their understanding of their Islamic faith, which had guided them from a young age, led them to view human beings as individuals, not as human beings – but perhaps it also owed to them construing Western feminism with what we might term, ‘unrespectable femininity’. The case studies in India and Sri Lanka underscored the idea that women are allowed to pursue professional careers in those societies, as long as they remain true to traditional norms; and much the same is plainly true in the UAE, where Islamic traditions and customs play an integral role in how women behave in the workplace, and where patriarchal assumptions can only be challenged carefully and modestly (Gallant, 2010).

Thus, as we have seen in the narratives of the five women under scrutiny, listening, empathetic, conciliatory, ‘feminine’ management styles are adopted by the few fortunate enough to become managers; while most female graduates are still expected to either have a family, or pursue a career in a traditionally ‘feminine’ profession.

However, there is a significant difference between the experiences of the Emirati women and their counterparts in the South Asian sub-continent: namely, that four of our five interviewees found themselves forced to prioritise their working lives over having a family. Three are unmarried, another is

divorced; only two have children. In other words, although generalising from the findings of just five women is of course very dangerous, if their accounts are anything to go by, highly successful Emirati women have even less chance to ‘have it all’ than those in India (where, of the three case studies being considered in this section, the situation is best), or Sri Lanka (where women face more of a struggle, but not as much of one as in the UAE).

Taken in tandem with Dent (2012), who found that very few Middle Eastern women hold leading administrative posts, and that changes in government policy are frequently more theoretical than actually applied in practice, this constitutes a dispiriting finding. Opportunities for women to rise to the top in the UAE remain thin on the ground; and those able to do so have to both remain in line with a sense of ‘respectable femininity’ and, it would appear, give up on a happy family life in order to do so. There is, according to this evidence, a huge amount of work required for such a state of affairs to change.

#### **6.6.7 Advice for young women**

Four of the women who were part of this study felt strongly that education contributed to the development of young women who yearn to hold top leadership positions. They offered a number of recommendations for such women.

One reminded them of the need to ensure that they are highly qualified, and have the requisite knowledge necessary to apply for top positions. She also focused on the need for teamwork, fairness, honesty, transparency, not to pay

any attention to gossip, and perhaps most importantly, not to feel any inferiority towards men.

Another concurred with the requirement for high level educational qualifications, and argued that young, ambitious women should be prepared to do 'anything possible' in order to reach their goal.

Our third participant advised young women to view themselves, first and foremost, as human beings and to respect themselves, ensuring that they do not fall prey to societal discrimination.

Globalisation has resulted in huge changes in the academic and working environment (Giroux, 2002; Slaughter and Leslie, 2001). Thus the fourth interviewee noted that, with people now travelling to the UAE in order to work, young Emirati women need to learn how to accept and interact with people from other cultures. Young women are therefore encouraged to utilise discussion and cultural communication, in order to demonstrate to others how far the UAE has come.

Finally, our last respondent advised and encouraged more girls to study medicine, and thereby help increase the number of women within the profession. She also considered that women students should understand that there are cultural and traditional challenges which they will face, in which they must move from old ways of doing things to new ways, while not eschewing more positive traditional aspects.

Thus, in sum, when embarking upon higher studies, women students need to properly consider, be aware of their future, anticipate what is likely to transpire, and find solutions for it. Yet these solutions should not impact upon how they express themselves as they seek to demonstrate qualities of good leadership, citizenship, loyalty, while most importantly of all, maintaining their dignity at all times.

## **6.7 Strengths and limitations of the research**

### **6.7.1 Strengths**

This study draws its strengths from the sample used to represent Emirati women. This study purposefully drew upon five respondents in order to arrive at reliable, valid findings. The ages of the sample population meant that they could remember the old, pre-industrial UAE society; thus, these women had witnessed an enormous amount of very rapid change, many of them acting as agents of it, and could confidently be deployed as experts regarding the future of women in the UAE.

The study also employed valid and reliable data collection and analysis methods, which ensured that the findings could be used to help women in the UAE successfully face some of the challenges impacting upon their education and career development; and provide possible recommendations for the government and policy-makers.



### **6.7.2 Limitations**

It should be acknowledged that this study was only performed with women in Higher Education institutions. Thus, the findings lack the views of women working in other sectors of education and the wider economy. It is therefore recommended that future studies focus on women from, for example, the private sector, public organisations, middle colleges or high schools, in order to arrive at a more comprehensive, generalisable range of viewpoints.

Moreover, only women drawn from a few HE institutions in the UAE were sampled. Future studies should seek to eliminate possible biases which may be associated with this by incorporating respondents from other HE institutions. Finally, the study also did not incorporate young women; this too could result in bias, which future studies should address.

## **6.8 Recommendations**

It remains for this study to offer suggestions and recommendations regarding the kinds of improvements which should be adopted in terms of Emirati policy and practice, hopefully ensuring that future generations of the country's aspiring women do not encounter the challenges and difficulties outlined by the women who have formed the basis for this study.

### **6.8.1 Problems identified by the literature**

As noted at length in Chapter 3, several commentators – among them, Madsen (2009b); Metcalfe, (2006, 2007); Jamali et al. (2005a; 2005b) Kattara (2005) –

have identified a number of impediments which hinder the advancement of women into headship and management posts. These include:

- Biases and differentiation by employers
- Division of sexes and associations in the workplace
- Adverse viewpoints related to the professional abilities and dedication of women
- Excluding women from unofficial networking practices
- Stereotypical perspectives
- Cultural impediments which impact the entry of females into administrative positions
- Absence of suitable mentors
- Restricted training and development chances
- Patriarchal and religious gender codes
- Limited career advancement opportunities
- Marriage and motherhood roles.

Accordingly, this study now concludes by suggesting possible solutions to these problems, based on the findings from the narrative analysis of five Emirati women leaders.

### **6.8.2 Recommendations from the participants**

The majority of the five interviewees identified a clear need for women to enjoy far more opportunities of rising towards higher, more prominent positions, and for far more women to be in senior management in their chosen field. In the opinion of one, the number of HE institutions in the UAE should be increased, expanding the proportion of top leadership opportunities for women. Another considered that women should be allowed to participate in leadership training and HE budgeting. Common to both was the desire for

more networking among UAE HE institutions, and with government ministries. In line with this, a third respondent called for ‘a big network’ at her institution.

Yet one respondent demurred from the others, arguing instead that no improvements are necessary for the prospects of women filling leadership roles to be enhanced, and that all positions are filled on merit, whether by a man or a woman. This participant also alluded to not all women in top positions having followed the correct procedures, with some, who lack the requisite qualifications, appearing to have employed dubious means based not on what they know, but who they know. Such women may be known by or related to key decision-makers, with the power to manipulate the system in their favour.

In her view – based predominantly on Islam – this is not acceptable and must be changed, so that qualified people are given the opportunity to serve their country for the betterment of all. Thus ambitious women should focus above all on obtaining high-level academic qualifications: providing them with the opportunity to apply for leadership positions on merit.

### **6.8.3 Solutions recommended by this study**

The following solutions are recommended:

1. The number of Higher Education institutions in the UAE should be increased.

2. Government funding for women in further and higher education, and financial support for poor families, should also be increased, so that no woman or girl is disadvantaged by poor quality facilities or amenities, or difficult familial circumstances.

3. In all aspects of Islamic education, it must be emphasised that the Muslim faith views women as equals, and does not expect them to sacrifice their careers in order to bring up a family.

4. Organisations should support all women who face discrimination in the workplace, encourage women to report any such discrimination, and sanction and/or dismiss men responsible for this.

5. Organisations should also support women in bringing up their families: providing crèche facilities for children, and allowing female members of staff, including managers, to choose flexible hours wherever possible. They should provide career support, training and progression but also ensure cultural sensitivity

6. Maternity (and, for that matter, paternity) leave should be substantially increased and legislated for by the government.

7. The governance of universities and academic institutions should be regulated, and further research undertaken into their management culture, in particular, whether 'feminine' leadership styles are encouraged or frowned upon and whether these institutions do enough to promote fully qualified female candidates into leadership positions.

8. At school and university, women and girls should be encouraged to take leadership roles wherever possible. At all points, it should be emphasised that they do not have to sacrifice any of their classically 'feminine' qualities in these roles.

9. Men and boys should also be educated regarding this: indeed, if men and boys are encouraged not to behave in a purely 'masculine' way, but to develop qualities of empathy, emotional intelligence and listening skills, not only will discrimination against women in the workplace become less likely, but some of the stereotypes regarding both male and female leaders will hopefully begin to fade.

10. The government must draw up and implement far more stringent anti-discrimination legislation, with substantial penalties for employers who break any resulting law.

11. Laws regarding inheritance, divorce, marriage, child custody and nationality, highlighted by Gallant (2008) as clearly favouring men and discriminating against women, should be repealed and/or reformed.

12. Spouses or parents should, in no circumstances, be required to give their permission for women to work. This should be emphasised by the government and in the education of boys and girls.

These solutions, are based on a combination of education, legislation and working to change the highly conservative culture still in evidence in the UAE (as throughout most of the Arab world), and noted by the five participants in

this study. That culture can only truly change from the bottom up, and may take generations in order to fully do so; but if the country wishes to continue to grow and further punch its weight in an increasingly competitive, globalised world, it is imperative that its leaders, policy-makers and organisations take heed of this study's findings.

It cannot be right that Emirati women and girls still face substantially more challenges and obstacles if they are to succeed and fulfil their professional potential. More than that, it cannot be good for the country's economy or future prospects either. It is in *everyone's* interests – not just those of women – that the government does everything in its power to act on these recommendations: thereby ensuring that in future, no Emirati woman or girl is left behind, and that equality of opportunity is truly enjoyed by all the country's people.

Women also need to change their attitudes, values and beliefs as regards their position and concept of their role in society so that they are not regarded as second class, with reproduction and service to men as their major role, and strive to continue improving, especially in education. They need to be educated in order to understand that their culture, though part of our daily lives, will end up imprisoning them if they continue to accept the *status quo* of male domination.

Young women need to be socialised that men and women are equal and that the biological differences should not remove this social balance. The family is a major social institution and if the re-socialisation starts there, it will permeate

into society. Early childhood experiences may have a lifelong impact in terms of how men and women relate to each other. This means that promoting change among children has a powerful potential to produce change in their lives, in the present and in the future.

The challenge for current and future Emirati society is, then, to pay heed to and draw inspiration from the experiences of these women; and above all, to ensure that equal opportunity in education is matched with equal opportunity in employment. Enormous female potential continues to lie untapped, to the great detriment of both the women and their country, whose attitudes to women in the workplace must truly change if the UAE is to enjoy the successful, thriving future which is within its reach.

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**Appendix: Extract from a marked transcript of a  
participant (Ayesha)'s narrative**

Dr. Maryam (Ayesha)

Disc: 1

Day 1 (1:00pm- 2:30pm)

'My name is Dr Maryam and I am a citizen of the UAE. All the time I was brought up in a beautiful, very beautiful city called Timba in the east cost of UAE. Is that ok? All my life umm in that city. I left in the time when the UAE

is just started to be made-umm an idea of course. This does not mean that we did not have an education ah... The ruler of the Emirates, he was an advocate of education. He established a school and he sent his daughters to school and therefore we had an opportunity actually early enough for me I was really lucky.

The city I come from is a city, it is between mountains and sea and people to get an education..... that is by default had two professions. By day, they become fishermen and also at the same time, they were working in agriculture. But I think I came from a family which has this background both we had fishery, fishermen and also we have our own farm for crops with a piece of land. So I was brought up in a country where people are actually constantly they are working at that time, when I opened my eyes, I saw people working together, men and women in the field so I grew up like that.

Ahh... there were a lot of activities that we used to engage in and one of them is that because you knew as I said to you before, the city itself lies between the sea and the land and people had two trips. The one that they will come down to the sea and they will stay for about 4-5 months and after that because you know, when agriculture time they will move and I lived this type of life which was very fascinating things for me to do - the building of the house itself how the friends and families and neighbours would build the houses - the very summer houses which was basically made of palm trees, because we did not have air conditions at the time umm... and therefore the material was locally made from the indigenous habitat so we used to build by palm trees so you can

see how the season comes-umm.. you know, we used to build 4-5 houses and this family will finish and go to another family, you see, the community was really working- that was self-contained, provided itself with the economy.

I remember I was at secondary school, we never buy things like even bigger families, we never used to buy things except rice, flour but groceries, for example we used to bring from the fields you know onions whatever, they are seasonal. The same with meat because you know having lived in the sea those people were very dependent on the sea food so we never used to buy these, so I grew up in a community like this. Education was part of it umm....

Having influence plus my parents also and the community they were family and the neighbourhood I grew up in an extended family, my aunties they all lived in a big house and when they got married, they just moved out of the fence but they are closer..... so the whole area was actually your family.

I had an aunt-umm... eh, God bless her soul and she was the most influential and I considered her as a real leader, a woman leader in the family. You know that eh... in the family, one person has to be chosen to go for basic Koran and Mathematical and numerical information and because my family had a female girls she was the oldest so she had to be educated. She went into basic education like Koran usually and they are about six girls and did not have a sibling who is a boy at that time and then came my father.

My father was about 7 or 8 and he had to go to school and therefore my aunt has to stay at home and that gave her the... she was very active, she was into

the passion of learning and that basic knowledge she used to in order to be very effective so she was the leader of the family - everybody went to her for any opinion eh.. she instilled this in her sisters. She learnt to do quite a lot of jobs and she used to take women in her house.

Her house was like a place where you have people are working from morning to night, teaching them how to cook, how to make dress, they came for embroidery so everybody was bringing their own things after finishing their daily chores in the house. They will bring their sewing and all of them will come and get advice, 'what should I do with this?'' and she was very excellent in embroidery and in making local dresses. They used to do it by hand because they didn't have machines at that time and she was very helpful in this so people came there to learn.

Not only this eh... she also became educated in local medicine so her help was about that also. She used to treat people and take them even those that are less fortunate. She would take them into her house, she would accommodate them. So I grew up. That encouraged me and gave me a push in life and created my first skills on how women are supposed to live and how important women are even your gender aside being a man or woman. Also I used to look at my mother, my aunties working in the fields doing all the daily chores themselves and taking care of the whole business in my family.

I have become the oldest in my family, one sister and three brothers. So we became a very small family compared to the larger families that we used to be

but at the same time this is what really made me, created my first sense of  
eh..... the community became my mentors, I had a lot of people who are.....  
for me coaching me. I think this is what I can say about the beginning.’