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ABSTRACT

The aim of this dissertation is to examine women's careers evolving in a socio-culturally different context, such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE). While, the careers of Western women have gained considerable attention in the existing literature, the research on Arab women and their managerial careers remains scarce. The position of Arab women and their managerial careers are investigated from two different viewpoints: women's managerial career development and female managers' professional identity construction and seeks to answer to the following research questions: (1) How do the UAE national women managers construct their career development in a patriarchal working environment? (2) How do the UAE national women construct their social identities through the meanings they ascribe to their clothing while pursuing managerial careers? (3) What is the role of socio-cultural background on Arab women's managerial careers?

The study uses exploratory qualitative research techniques in the form of in-depth interviews held with fifteen female managers in the UAE. Both Grounded Theory and narrative approach were used in data analysis.

The results of this study emphasise the importance of socio-cultural context on women's careers and argues that due to the differences in personal, family and socio-economic circumstances, women's careers can be viewed as a typology. The research results produced a typology of four categories of career development of Arab women managers. In addition the results of this study show the role of professional clothing in identity formation and identify multiple coexisting identities in Arab women pursuing managerial careers.

Keywords: Women managers, career, gender, identity, professional clothing, Middle East, United Arab Emirates

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

erally showed me the way to Jyväskylä and with whom we have spent hours discussing and arguing over the various topics of science.

I own a great deal to Leena Vanhatalo who offered me a home in Jyväskylä and her motherly support and care. After a long day in the university, it was great to be received at home by a hot cup of tea and dinner. Thank you, Leena, for being there for me.

Finally, I'd like to express my deepest gratitude to my family, especially to my mother Merike who has been the greatest supporter of my doctoral studies and a great audience to listen to my stories on gender and career studies. With all my heart, I thank my most precious Jasmine, who has lived all those years in the middle of research articles and books, and who most probably knows more about the scientific world than an average 12 year old. Jasmine, you are the world to me and I thank you for bringing the greatest joy into my life.

Dubai 7.10.2011
Katlin Omair

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I   Omair, K. 2008. Women in management in the Arab context. Education, Business and Society: Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues 1(2), 107-123.

II   Omair, K. 2010. Typology of career development for Arab women managers in the United Arab Emirates. Career Development International 15(2), 121-143.

III   Omair, K. 2009. Arab women managers and identity formation through clothing. Gender in Management: An International Journal 24(6), 412-431.

1   INTRODUCTION

This dissertation focuses on the position of Arab women and their managerial careers. The growing interest in the study of women in management has been triggered by the increasing role that women are playing in public activities and by the fact that more women are pursuing careers in management around the world. Previous studies, however, have confirmed that female managers encounter more problems in relation to their careers than their male counterparts (Wajcman, 1998). A woman's world is perceived to include a particular genre of work activity, such as caring for others and maintaining their relationships, whereas a man's world has an emphasis on individual thought, independent achievement and success based on competition and hierarchy (Rudman and Phelan, 2008). At almost every level, female managers – regardless of location – complained of having to deal with blocked mobility, discrimination, and stereotypes. Much research has been carried out in this area, particularly in Western cultures, but little has been conducted in socio-culturally different contexts, such as the Arabic region.

This dissertation seeks to contribute to the existing literature on women in management by examining the career experiences of Arab women managers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

1.1   Rationale of the study

During the past decade the Middle East has gained its importance in the global sphere. It is in the interests of global peace, trade and prosperity that the region should be politically stable, with evidence of economic and social development. Moreover, new global economic powers are emerging from non-Western contexts, such as BRIC economies. Based on the history and origin of management research, however, the extant management knowledge is far from global. Tsui (2004) proposes that with the emergence of many developing economies around the world, progress in building the body of global management knowledge

could be enhanced by encouraging high quality indigenous research in these novel contexts.

The case for context-based research for Islamic Middle Eastern societies is all the more important given the 'orientalist' bias inherent in the West. Said (1978) describes orientalism as a mind-set focused on the differences between East and West, and therefore creates an Orient which does not really exist. Orientalism led the West to see Islamic culture as static in both time and place, and incapable of defining itself. The aim of this research is to give a voice to the Orient to speak for itself, and more importantly, to give a voice to Arab women in management to describe their careers.

Arab societies, especially the Gulf Arab societies, have experienced major changes during the past three decades. It is argued that these changes are best reflected by the changes in women's lives. While the last 30 years have seen few changes for women in Western countries, there have been major and significant changes for women in Arab societies. Life for Arab women has become one of the most rapidly changing elements of Arab societies. The westernization, globalization and modernizations have had an impact on increased educational attainments, positive employment experiences and a loss of idealism about the traditional female role. Women in the Arab region can no longer be described as scared, inferior, domestic women who hardly leave their houses.

Although several researched articles indicate that there may be changes in favour of women in the future due to modernization, there are others that argue that the return of fundamental views in Arab societies is more likely. The Arab societies are currently in a state of confusion. Rapid changes and the impact of westernization and modernization are contributing to this state of confusion. Arabs seem to be in a futile search for a new identity that doesn't contradict their deeply rooted traditions yet still works towards their development as a society.

During these turbulent times as Arab women are entering the labour market and rising to be the first generation of women in leadership positions, it is important to see how Arab women in managerial positions construct their professional identities and their career development.

1.2 Objective of the study and research questions

The aim of this dissertation is to contribute to the body of knowledge we have of women's managerial careers by making them visible in the Arab context, specifically in the UAE. Women's managerial careers are investigated particularly from two viewpoints: women's managerial career development and female managers' professional identity construction. In the light of the research rationale presented above, this dissertation has been accomplished through a careful literature review as well as two empirical studies. Having identified research gaps with the help of the literature review, the empirical studies were conducted with the objective of answering the following research questions:

(i)   How do the UAE national women managers construct their career development in a patriarchal working environment?

(ii)   How do the UAE national women construct their social identities through the meanings they ascribe to their clothing while pursuing managerial careers?

(iii)   What is the role of socio-cultural background on Arab women's managerial careers?

1.3   Context of the study

This dissertation seeks to explore the position of Arab women in management. The Arab region, however, consists of 25 countries from Oman on the shore of the Indian Ocean to Morocco near the Atlantic Ocean. These countries have two major similarities; the Arabic language and Islamic religion, however, major sectorial differences are present. Whilst there is the argument that Arab societies can be treated as one entity (e.g. Muna, 1980), this dissertation acknowledges that religious, economic and socio-cultural background play an important role in a woman's career and therefore concentrates on only the United Arab Emirates and Emirati women in managerial positions.

The United Arab Emirates was chosen as the research context for a number of reasons. Firstly, the UAE has historically been one of the most traditional societies when it comes to the position of women, yet today the country is the most modernized Arab country. This enormous change is also reflected in the lives of women. Secondly, its demographics are multi-cultural with expatriates comprising more than 90 per cent of the working population (Shihab, 2001). For local women managers, this means that they are not only exposed to the different cultures that expatriates bring to the country, but the business environment in which they work. Thirdly, women's professional advancement is highly encouraged by the political elite in this country. Fourthly, having lived in the UAE since 1998, I am familiar with the socio-cultural and economic environment of the UAE, and so it was more practical to carry out the research here than in another Arab country.

After the British protectorates during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, seven sheikhdoms came together in 1971 and 1972 to form the United Arab Emirates, which is now a member of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), along with Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. After the discovery of oil in the UAE more than 40 years ago, the country experienced a profound transformation from small impoverished desert principalities to a modern state with a high standard of living. The country has experienced a very rapid growth in population resulting from both a high rate of increase in the

UAE's indigenous population, and a massive inward migration of expatriates. While in 1991, the population of the UAE was 1.8 million (Shihab, 2001), in 2009 it was estimated at 8 million (UAE Yearbook, 2009). By 2006, native citizens made up only 15.4 percent of the population and just 8.9 percent of the work force (Tamnia, 2008). Most UAE nationals seek employment opportunities in the public sector due to the higher salaries, greater benefits, shorter working hours and job security. However, the official UAE, 2005 Yearbook (UAE, 2005) states that the employment of nationals in the public sector has reached "saturation point". It also highlights the fact that Emirati nationals represent only 2 per cent of the total workforce in the private sector at a time when private sector employment accounts for 52 per cent of all jobs.

The contribution of Emirati women to economic activity has increased from a mere 5.4 per cent in 1995 to 27.9 per cent in 2008. The unemployment rate among women nationals has recently reached a high of 19.7 per cent, compared to 8.2 per cent for males, despite the fact that women graduates greatly outnumber male graduates (UAE, 2009). Females constitute 66 per cent of the workforce in the government sector, of which 30 per cent are in decision-making, leadership positions.

In order to increase the employment of Emirati nationals and reduce the dependence on expatriates, the UAE government has established nationalization (Emiratization) policies. Yet, compulsory hiring of nationals has been limited to sectors such as banking (which has a 4 per cent quota), insurance (5 per cent), and trade (2 per cent for companies employing 50 workers or more). In 2006, the government added Emiratization requirements that all secretaries and PR officers must also be Emirati nationals (Business Monitor International, 2008). In reality, the implementation of Emiratization policies has been dogged with difficulties due to the fact that the labour market is facing several challenges. Renderee (2009) states that these challenges include demographic imbalances caused by easy availability of expatriate labour in the region, the relative appeal of public versus private sector employment, the limited participation of national women in the work force, excessive reliance on skilled expatriates, high rates of unemployment among poorly trained nationals, and the need for sustainable development as well as the effective governance of human capital.

When it comes to the socio-cultural context of the UAE, Emiratis are relatively uniform in terms of ethnicity, with ancient regional tribal roots and predominantly practice the austere Wahabi interpretation of Islam (as practiced in Saudi Arabia; Masoud, 1999). Wahabi theology treats the Qur'an and Hadith (the words and deeds of the Prophet Mohammad) as fundamental texts, interpreted upon the understanding of the first three generations of Islam, rejecting any newer interpretations. Regarding women's issues, the Wahabis tend to take the strongest and most conservative viewpoint when interpreting religious texts.

Despite the conservative religious doctrine predominant in the UAE, the government has been promoting education and work for women for the past decade. Neft and Levine (1997) note that Arab countries have shown the fastest

improvements in female education of all the regions. Women's literacy rates have increased threefold since 1970. Furthermore, the UAE government has taken several steps to support the employment of women. In addition to Emiratization policies, the government has established maternity leave, as well as equal pay for equal work and equal benefits for working women (Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR), 2003). However, Harry (2007) points out that the bias against women in employment could continue to impede their participation in it, suggesting that it may even worsen if they are to compete with their male counterparts for the same positions.

1.4 Research process

The very first step in this research process was to familiarize myself with the topic. Whilst there is a wealth of information available on the topic of women in employment in western cultures, there is very little that focuses on employed women in the Arabic region A great many studies have been written about Arab women in terms of their position in society, and their rights, but attempting to source literature that considers the working life of an Arab woman or their experience in a managerial career proves very difficult. The lack of information available in this area became the incentive to conduct a thorough literature search with the objective to analyse the existing scholarly writings against the western feminist theoretical framework. The first article (Omair, 2008), therefore, analysed peer-reviewed academic research articles on the topic of Arab women in management.

The results of the first article showed that the majority of research available on this subject had been conducted quantitatively, concentrating on a few, very broad topics, without going into very much detail. Because of the importance placed on a statistical evaluation of the subject area, there was no insight into the personal experiences of the women involved from a qualitative perspective. These results helped shape the research questions for this paper and directed the decision to carry out the research in the United Arab Emirates.

The second article focuses on studies into the careers of Emirati female managers and how they view their career development (Omair, 2010). As the socio-cultural context in which Emirati women work is so vastly different to that in which western women work, the careers of Emirati women must be considered independently from their western counterparts. The second article adopts a narrative approach to see how career development is constructed taking the socio-cultural context of the United Arab Emirates into consideration.

In addition, the paper proposed to test the earlier studies by (e.g. Eagly and Carli, 2007; Gersick and Kram, 2002; Powell and Mainiero, 1992; Richardson, 1996; White, 1995) which suggest that due to societal, organizational and personal influences, women's career development is best understood as reflecting several different types.

The impetus for the third article (Omair, 2009) arose from the interview data. While discussing the factors that facilitate or hinder women's career development, the topic of clothing was regularly brought up. Therefore the third article supports Goffman's (1959) assertion that people use the way they dress to convey information about themselves to others, enabling them to engage in social interactions and place themselves in certain social systems. The objective of the study therefore, was to see how Emirati women pursuing managerial careers construct their social identities through the meanings they ascribe to their clothing. Furthermore, the study sought to explore how an Emirati woman's clothing can convey information about their identity and their position in society.

Each study of this dissertation paved the way for the next as my understanding of the position of Arab women improved and my knowledge of the subject grew. Throughout the literature review and the research process, it became apparent that issues I had not previously considered, or had thought to be irrelevant, required further consideration, and as such became a part of the study.

TABLE 1   Summary of the research articles

	Article 1 *Women in management in the Arab context*	Article 2 *Typology of career development for Arab women managers*	Article 3 *Arab women managers and identity formation through clothing*
Focus of the study	To explore the position of Arab women in management in the existing research.	To explore how Arab women managers account for and construct their career development.	To explore how Arab women managers construct their social identities through the meanings they ascribe to their clothing.
Source of data	Published academic articles on the topic of women in management in the Arab region.	Interview data with 15 Emirati women managers.	Interview data with 15 Emirati women managers.
Data analysis	Quantitative and Descriptive Content Analysis	Structural Narrative Analysis	Grounded Theory approach for qualitative data analysis

1.5 Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation consists of two parts: an introductory essay and the three research articles.

In part 1 of the introductory essay, the research topic is introduced and the reasons for choosing this particular topic are discussed. The research questions, which form the basis for this paper, are then presented, followed by the intro-

duction of the context in which the research is carried out and the process that was used.

In Chapter 2, the theoretical framework for this dissertation is presented and the main concepts are explained. Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology and justifies the methods that were chosen. The three research articles that form the foundation of this dissertation are presented and discussed in Chapter 4, and in Chapter 5 the study is concluded and the contribution that this research offers is discussed in detail.

Part 2 presents the research articles in their original form.

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2   THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1   Women in management

Beliefs exist in every society concerning the roles that are appropriate for each gender, and both men and women are supposed to have, or develop characteristics consistent with one's assigned role (Elamin and Omair, 2010). Gender stereotypes are often used to support these traditional roles. These stereotypes are closely connected to the surrounding culture in that they reflect cognitive beliefs about the differences between masculinity and femininity (Best, 2004, 11). Ridgeway and Correll (2004) state that gender roles and stereotyping serve to maintain the gender system by causing men and women to behave in a way that reinforces typical beliefs about gender roles in that culture, i.e. that men have greater status and competence.

As argued by Gherardi (1996), men and women stand in a hierarchical and dichotomous relation; the "one" (men) bears positive connotations while the "other" (women) is different – the non-one. The "one" is more powerful, more acceptable, more appropriate, more mainstream, more knowable than the "other", and only the "other" is problematized. Furthermore, Ridgeway and Correll (2004) explain that at the macro level, gender involves cultural beliefs and resource distribution. At the interactional level, gender encompasses organizational practices and patterns of behaviour, and at the individual level, gender covers the self and identities. Stereotypes connected to genders are reproduced daily by attributing women with certain characteristics that men lack, and vice versa. Women as caregivers and homemakers, and men as breadwinners and leaders, are stereotypes that dictate the appropriateness of various occupations for females and males (Hoyt et al., 2009; Maier, 1997).

The dominant feature of organizations is their patriarchies (Hearn and Parkin, 1992) and organizations are often defined through masculine metaphors (Acker, 1992). Generally, management is seen as a career only for men, and the majority of top management positions are filled by men (Powell and Graves, 2003). Female managers around the world often report that they have had to

deal with blocked mobility, discrimination and stereotypes at every stage of their career. It is also commonly reported that female managers feel that they must exhibit masculine characteristics in order to be successful. Lämsä (2003) talks about the female managers' gender paradox: on one hand, if a woman as a manager deviates from the feminine norm of being a woman, she does not fulfil the model of 'a real woman'. On the other hand, if she deviates from the masculine norm of management, she does not fulfil the model of 'a real manager'.

Kanter (1977) uses the term "tokens" to describe women managers reaching high positions in male-dominated organizations. "Tokens are, ironically, both highly visible as people who are different and yet not permitted the individuality of their own unique, non-stereotypical characteristics." The smaller the number of tokens, the more visibility they gain. Although the token's presence is noticed, their achievements may not be. There is often the tendency to exaggerate the differences between tokens and dominant group members.

Women's absence from managerial positions has been tried to explain The absence of women from managerial positions is often explained by women's presumed lack of education, training, skills and experience, discrimination and bias against women, and corporate policies and procedures hindering women from applying for role in management (McKeen and Burke, 1992). Billing and Alvesson (2000) have also mentioned different socialization and psychological traits, sociological and structural explanations, and cultural contexts and the formation of identity and subjectivity.

The limitations that hinder women's progress in organizations across the developed world are well documented, including the persistence of gender stereotypes, biases in recruitment and selection practices, and the availability of very few female role models (Metcalfe, 2008). However, the progress of Arab women is complicated by the fact that the woman is subject to a number of coded and unwritten social mores in a patriarchal, male-dominated society. Next, I will look into the literature on Arab women in management.

2.2   Women in management in the Arab region

The Arab Human Development Report (2005) indicated that between 1990 and 2003, the Arab region witnessed a greater increase in the share that women had in economic activity than all other regions of the world: the increase for Arab women was 19 per cent as compared to 3 per cent for the world as a whole. However, despite the dramatic increase, the gender empowerment measure (GEM) showed that the Arab region, compared to other world regions, ranked second to last, just surpassing sub-Saharan Africa. The low percentage of women participating in the labour force is mainly ascribed to a lack of employment opportunities rather than a lack of interest (Al-Mandhry, 2000) and complicated by the fact that women are subject to a number of coded or unwritten social mores in a patriarchal male-dominated society (Omair, 2008).

In the UAE, as well as in other countries in the Gulf Arab region, the increasing participation of women in the labour market and their promotion to higher positions in organizations has also been attributed to politically led nationalization strategies designed to encourage and support the employment of nationals in preference to expatriates. Rees et al. (2007) have reported that in the UAE employers may be asked to make a choice between investing in the recruitment and development of a UAE national employee and paying a levy for employing a fully trained and experienced expatriate. For national women, nationalization of the labour market provides increased opportunities in recruitment and selection, education and training, career development and a likely increase in remuneration. However, Harry (2007) criticises the nationalization of the labour market arguing that bias against women may continue to impede their progression and participation in it. It is argued that this bias will inevitably worsen if women are to compete with their male counterparts for the same positions.

While Arab women are willing to accept more responsibilities in the political, occupational, educational and social spheres, according to Abdallah (1996) Arab men are not willing to share these responsibilities with them. The occupational fields in which men and women are employed have a strong gender bias, with a majority of women engaged in health, education and social care (Metcalfe, 2008), which are perceived to be acceptable roles for women in society (Gallant and Pounder, 2008). For instance, in Qatar, the over-employment in some female-dominated jobs is ten times the requirement (Abdalla, 1996). In some countries women are barred from certain professions, for example architecture, some fields in medicine and engineering occupations (Metcalfe, 2008). There is also evidence of physical segregation in the workplace, in the belief that a woman's exposure to men may be regarded harmful to her reputation (Gallant and Pounder, 2008; Metcalfe, 2008; Syed, 2008).

Although modernization has assisted development in economic and social spheres all over the Arab world, the cultures and customs, such as the tribal honour system that prevails on the Arabian Peninsula prior to Islam, continue to contribute to the conservative orientation towards women (Alajmi, 2001). According to the tribal honour system, the interaction between men and women not related by blood or marriage was not allowed and gender segregation practiced rigorously in the public sphere. The primary role for women was to take care of the family and household.

In developing Arab countries, changes were only accepted if they were consistent with their Arab and Islamic traditions, and were rejected if they were not (Abdalla, 1996). Where secular laws have been formally established, they cannot be enforced when they come against deeply rooted customs and traditions (Alajmi, 2001).

Al-Hibri (1982) suggested distinguishing between Islam, Islamic tradition, and culture in order to facilitate an understanding of the line between patriarchy and Islam. Islam does not forbid women from seeking an education or from pursuing work. On the contrary, Islam encourages women to be educated,

work, own property and engage in business (Al-Lamki, 1999). If, however, the women are capable of contributing positively to society or at work while remaining within Islamic boundaries, Islam does not discourage nor does it forbid women from seeking employment even in positions of authority (Kausar, 1995). In fact, some have suggested that women who can make a difference in society must work, as making the society better off is regarded as an obligation for all Muslims (Kausar, 1995; Khattab, 1996).

Several authors have agreed that the biggest obstacles for Arab women trying to progress in their careers are the patriarchal power relations that stem from pre-Islamic Arab culture and traditions, as well as patriarchal interpretation of religious texts (Syed, 2008; Alajmi, 2001; Metle, 2002; Shabaan, 1988). Consequently, women are often ill informed regarding their rights under Islamic Shari'a and other laws of the state (McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003). Furthermore, in many circumstances, Islamic materials, like all religious texts and teachings, contain some ambiguities and lend themselves to widely different interpretations and judgments (Roded, 1999).

The culturally assigned primary role for women is their commitment to the house and children (Al-Dhafiri, 1987; Neal et al., 2005; Al-Lamki, 1999; Mostafa, 2005). Gender socialization is extremely patriarchal and strongly supportive of traditional family values. (Mensch et al., 2003) Girls are socialized from their early years to acquire a domestic role that fits expected gender roles (Alajmi, 2001). According to Shah and Al-Qudsi (1990), a combination of family and career is possible only insofar as it does not interfere with one's role as a mother and wife. The traditional role of Muslim women is a source of conflict for the more aware, educated women, trying to balance the modern world with a traditionally conservative social background (Metle, 2002).

The culturally assigned roles for women as caregivers and homemakers can also be seen in organizational hierarchies. Metle (2002) suggests that there is a tacit official understanding that men should be given priority for promotion to leadership positions and that women should be discouraged from working if a man is available to fill the respective position. In their study of women managers in Lebanon, Jamali et al. (2005) found out that in recruitment and promotion decisions, preference is given to men, as women are perceived as a higher employment risk due to their familial responsibilities. In addition, women reported that they had suffered from negative perceptions of their commitment and professional qualifications. It was reported that women in Lebanon are seen as being submissive and emotional individuals while men are always perceived as being balanced, assertive, aggressive and autonomous. Women were thus perceived as unable to assume leadership positions in an environment that capitalizes on a masculine leadership prototype. Some female managers reported having to confront highly stereotypical attitudes in order that they could establish respect and authority in their positions.

According to Al-Lamki's (1999) research on Omani women, several barriers to female managers in the workplace can be observed. The reluctance of men to accept women in management, the absence of policies and legislation to

ensure the recruitment of women to management positions, a lack of professional networking, and few female role models were listed among the barriers that were observed.

Wilkinson (1996), in a study of Emirati, Omani and Bahraini women in top management positions, found that women faced challenges from overt discrimination at work, cultural taboos and lack of confidence and trust in their ability to manage. Furthermore, gender segregation also requires sex-segregated workplaces. While segregation policies are not "official", they do place restrictions on the deployment, and ultimately on training and promotion opportunities for women (Metcalfe, 2006).

Despite the discrimination, cultural and organizational barriers that women managers face in some parts of the Arab region, there are several driving forces behind their success in obtaining top management positions. Family and especially spousal support can play an important role for some women in the public arena (Al-Lamki, 1999; Wilkinson, 1996). For Arabs, the family lies at the core of society, playing a major role in political, economic, social and religious spheres. People are conscious of each other's family memberships, identities and status. Family links facilitate access to institutions, jobs and government services (McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003).

A further study conducted by Alajmi (2001) found that Saudi Arabian women define success in terms of their children's happiness, self-fulfilment and the respect of others, rather than in terms of wealth or power. McElwee and Al-Riyami (2003) suggested that most women entrepreneurs in Oman define success in terms of the reputation of their business and satisfying others, followed by self-satisfaction. The growth of their business was listed lastly.

In the Arab world, tradition dictates that a woman's primary role should be in the private sphere. Research findings show that traditional views are still evident, but that they are showing a moderate shift towards more liberal thinking (Mostafa, 2005; Askar and Ahmad, 2003). With the passing of time and especially through the effects of equal education, it is likely that tradition will have diminishing weight against the forces of modernization, and that the quantitative as well as qualitative input of women in the economy will rise (Al-Dhafiri, 1987).

2.3 Career development for women managers

A career is broadly defined as a lifelong process of work-related activities that includes both objective and subjective aspects (Hall, 2002) evolving within the context of one or two organizations and progressing in a series of linear stages (Super, 1957). Much of the research in to careers has explored the stage models of career development (Dalton et. al., 1977; Van Maanen and Schein, 1977). Career development is defined as an on-going series of stages characterized by unique concerns, themes and tasks (Greenhaus et al., 2000). A common underlying assumption behind these stage models of career development is that there

is a series of predictable tasks that happen at more or less predictable times during the course of a career (O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005). However, this traditional concept of the career has triggered several points of criticism, primarily for its overly narrow focus on the careers of white, middle class men (e.g. Levinson et al., 1978; Super, 1957; Schein, 1978).

Furthermore, there is no doubt that careers in organizations have undergone a profound transformation in recent decades as organizations have reformed and reshaped, culling layers of the management hierarchy, rethinking employment contracts and revising what they are prepared to offer their staff in terms of career management and development (Sturges, 1999). From the viewpoint of an individual, alterations in the employment relationship have paved the way for careers that emphasize dynamism, multi-directionality and flexibility as well as lifelong employability and marketability. From an organizational point of view this means moving from providing careers consisting of secure employment for all, to providing opportunities for competency-based development (Baruch, 2004).

An increasing number of careers researchers are using metaphors to describe contemporary career development. Inkson (2004, 2006) has suggested that metaphors describe the world in a vivid, lively, yet familiar way, enabling us to see events from a special perspective and clarifying trajectories of development. The process of developing and working with metaphors also stimulates creativity. Most metaphorical constructions see the career as some sort of a journey, a movement, which is influenced by personal, biological, cultural and societal factors. The different twists and turns, even stagnations, still are often best described through metaphors. Metaphors have been used for example, by the following researchers: the ''life-career rainbow''(Super, 1992), ''career map'' (Krumboltz, 1994), ''career construction'' (Savickas, 2002), ''seasons of a man's life'' (Levinson et al, 1978). In contrast there are metaphors that describe the rootedness and stability of careers, for example Schein's (1978) ''career anchors''. Furthermore, the current popularity of the notions of the "protean career" (Hall, 1996), "boundaryless career" (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), and "portfolio career" (Handy, 1989) are all based on metaphors emphasizing dynamism, change, and flexibility in career development.

Handy (1989), for example, proposed that future careers would be portfolio adventures where, rather than pursuing a single full-time job, individuals would cultivate ever-changing portfolios of different opportunities. Portfolio adventures would combine mixed patterns of employment, self-employment and other activities which do not depend on full-time contractual employment with any one employer. Arthur and Rousseau (1996) used the idea of the boundaryless career, which can be broadly described as being the opposite of the organizational career. This kind of career is characterized by mobility across organizations and employers, where the employee has transferable skills and can be sustained by external networks. In this type of career the boundaries of traditional organizational careers become blurred and patterns of paid work may be interrupted for family or personal reasons. While the boundaryless ca-

reer refers to physical and/or psychological mobility, the protean career as es-poused by Hall (1996, 2002) suggests a more holistic approach to careers – look-ing at work in the context of a person's life as a whole. The primary focus here is on the notion of value driven and self-directed career management based on individually defined goals, and is driven by psychological success rather than objective success such as pay, rank, or power.

While boundaryless and protean careers are seen as a welcome alternative to traditional career theories, Briscoe and Hall (2006) state that both of these career metaphors play out very differently in non-Western and non-Anglo cul-tures, as each of these metaphors speaks to agency, individualism, and oppor-tunity, which are as much cultural values as they are objective possibilities. This view is supported by Pringle and Mallon (2003), who argue that social struc-tures such as national context, gender and ethnicity are not given sufficient cre-dence in much of the contemporary careers literature.

Traditional career theory, with its focus on organizational careers, has also been criticised for often viewing careers from a gender-neutral position (Mavin, 2001). Bearing in mind the increasing economic participation of women and their contribution to national economies worldwide, this is highly problematic not only from a societal perspective, but also from the perspective of the indi-vidual. Indeed, it seems entirely problematic that women's values, attitudes, contexts and life experiences are not incorporated into our understanding of careers (see, e.g. Lämsä and Hiillos, 2008). However, the surge of women into the workforce during the last decades of the twentieth century and their ascent to higher positions in organizations, suggest a need for a career development theory that explicitly addresses the lives and experiences of women. This need is supported by contemporary arguments that women's careers progress differ-ently to men's as a result of organizational and societal factors (Betz, 1993; Ragins et al., 1998) or the developmental differences in men and women (Gallos, 1989), such as fundamentally different career perspectives, choices and priori-ties. The cultural expectations of women, such as employment opportunities, marital demands and childbirth have also been cited as factors that may affect a woman's career progression.

While there is a growing body of research on the managerial careers of women, it has focused largely on either the barriers women are facing in career advancement (e.g. Kottke and Agars, 2005; Gregory, 2001) or how they balance their work and non-work responsibilities (e.g. Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005; Greenhaus and Foley, 2007). Although there appears to be widespread agree-ment that women's careers are complex and multi-dimensional, (O'Neil et al., 2008), the traditional male career model remains the normative standard for judging career progress in organizations and their management (Mavin, 2001).

Furthermore, the traditional male career model does not capture the wide diversity of career forms and experiences, nor does it capture the innumerable approaches and outcomes that different women may value in different contexts (Duberley et al., 2006). Consequently, there have been calls for the adoption of a wider range of approaches to allow for more dynamic, process-based and criti-

cal analyses that take into account the temporality and context of women's careers (Collin, 1998; Young and Collin, 2004). Therefore, in order to better understand women's careers, we should incorporate not only person-centred variables such as a woman's developmental psychology, family responsibilities and broader life events, but also the external, social and cultural factors that influence women's careers.

A number of career development theories focus specifically on the experiences of women and accommodate broader life contexts. Lupine (1992), for example, identified seven career patterns for women managers – fast track careers characterized by fast progress to positions of high responsibility; linear careers characterized by slower mobility to high positions than fast track careers; lateral plus careers with "flatter" career paths where progress to higher positions took place in later stages of a career; lateral careers with mobility taking place within jobs at the same levels and upward progress now often desired due to family life; downward career recognizable by regressive job shifts; transitory careers characterized by a series of jobs unrelated to each other; and static careers taking place in the same organization at the same position.

Richardson (1996) used the metaphor of 'snake-like careers' for describing the more fluid career paths of women compared to the linear, 'ladder-like' career paths of their male colleagues. Gersick and Kram (2002) found that women in their sample followed zigzag careers paths. In their research, non-work factors and the interplay of women's personal and professional lives were taken into account. Eagly and Carli (2007) described women's careers as a complex labyrinth of issues and challenges that women need to navigate on their way to leadership positions. They cite both the obscure and obvious challenges women face such as gender discrimination, stereotypes, balancing family responsibilities with career, building social capital and professional relationships through networking, as well as organizational structures rooted in traditional ideas about the division of labour. Several other studies have also explored the influence of family responsibilities and societal, organizational and personal factors on the career outcomes of women (e.g. Powell and Mainiero, 1992; White, 1995). In general, the research on women's careers in management suggests that their career development tends to be non-linear, multidirectional, and inclusive of a diverse range of experiences from a broad range of life contexts.

2.4   Social identities

In the field of organizational and management studies, there is an ever-increasing interest towards organizational, occupational and professional identities (Alvesson et al., 2008; Watson, 2007; Pullen, 2006). Social identities, broadly defined, help individuals answer the question, "Who am I?" by delineating the social group in which they are members. Identity has two components: a personal component derived from idiosyncratic characteristics, such as personality and physical and intellectual traits, and a social component derived

from salient group memberships, such as sex, race, class, and nationality (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Work is a central source of identity (Baruch, 2004) and individual identities are substantially shaped by occupational linkages (Prasad, 1997). Suutari and Mäkelä (2007) have brought out a strong relationship between career experiences and developing a career identity with high levels of self-understanding and self-confidence.

In this dissertation, identity is viewed as socially constructed and formed by cultural and historical contexts. Berger and Luckmann (1966, p. 194) write "identity is formed by social processes. Once crystallized, it is maintained, modified, or even reshaped by social relations". In constructing self through interaction with others, the individual is also constructing society (Collin, 1996). Kerfoot and Knights (1998) argue that identity is always inescapably social and consequently a product of complex social interactions. According to Alvesson and Billing (1997), identities are formed in continuing struggles as experiences and social interactions change from moment to moment. Attitudes of approval and disapproval, support and criticism, and confirmation and disconfirmation are fundamental to its formation and development.

An individual may have numerous different selves and identities that become evident in different contexts. Coexisting identities are constructed from such aspects as age, occupation, gender, nationality, language, politics or clothing, to mention a few. Female gender identity is one aspect of their social identity. The emotional significance women attach to their gender may be shaped, at least in part, by the extent to which power differentials are constructed between the sexes in organizational settings (Ely, 1995).Discrimination and segregation are among the affecting factors that impact the attributes women will attach to themselves as individuals, and at group level. These attributions may also include stereotypical attributions. How favourably a group member perceives his or her group in relation to other relevant groups determines the adequacy of that individual's social identity in a given setting.

Social identity theory predicts that as identity group memberships become salient, there will be a tendency to polarize and exaggerate psychological and behavioural differences between individuals who fall into distinct identity categories, producing stereotypic perceptions of identity groups (Turner, 1982). These processes of comparison and attribution help to shape a woman's gender identity at work. According to Symons (1986), managing gender identity will continue to be a challenge for women, as long as they are a minority in the corporate world.

2.4.1 Identity formation through clothing

Hearn (2002, p. 40) writes that identity stands at the intersection of self-perception and the perceptions of others. Research into identity is concerned with how images and representations (physical, symbolic, verbal, textual and behavioural) become imbued with meaning and are taken as being part of one's identity (Beech, 2008). Literature on identity formation emphasizes that dressing symbolically is a useful way of understanding how people constitute and

represent themselves, both as individuals and as group members (Rafaeli and Pratt, 1993). Similarly, Goffman (1959) suggests that people use dress to purposefully convey information about themselves to others, enabling them to engage in social interactions and place themselves in social systems. Furthermore, dress provides information regarding, for example, professional and gender identities (Pratt and Rahaeli, 1997) and political, economic or religious status (El Guindi, 2005). Dress is also one means by which power and control are exercised in organizations (Humphreys and Brown, 2002). Trice and Beyer (1993) emphasize that the meaning of symbols is context specific, therefore, depend on time and place, and is subject to continuous redefinition.

Tseëlon (1995) argues that female identity is realized through the presentation of many selves, and clothes are a vital expression of this self-realization. Scholars studying women in organizations have argued that dress and appearance are more sensitive issues for women than men (Kanter, 1977), as women in male-oriented organizations have a greater need for credibility, acceptance and legitimacy. Feminist literature has stressed that the perception of women workers, in contrast to men, centres on visual appearance. However, visibility seems to heighten the perception of women as sexual (Sheppard, 1989) and women in their pursuit to gain visibility in a male-dominated business culture, often face the dilemma of appearing either too feminine or too masculine (Wolf, 1991). The danger of appearing too feminine means possible loss of credibility, and women may be perceived as sexual objects instead of professionals. As Wajcman (1998) puts it, a woman's clothing must avoid drawing attention to her body, but must not be comparable to the male business suit either. The focus is on how to create an appearance of wealth and status which conveys authority and power, while de-emphasizing sexuality.

In organizations, people are required to take on various corporate personas, which are likely to differ from the ones that they adopt in other parts of their lives and, indeed, these personas may conflict with one another (Watson, 2007). For example, the literature on Western female managers shows that often women borrow masculine traits or modes of appearance in order to appear more powerful. The padded suit shoulders, the understated colours and conservative styling all mimic male dress. Arab women do not have the option to gain more power and authority by mimicking male dress as it is forbidden in Islam. On the contrary, their dress emphasizes femininity.

2.4.2 Tradition of Islamic clothing

Islamic dress generally refers to a style of clothing that may cover the woman's entire body, and usually excludes the hands and face. The word *hijab* in Arabic refers to "veil" or "head scarf". Women in the Arab Gulf region wear the black *abaya*, which is a full-length cloak with matching head cover. Some wear the *niqab*, which covers most of the face, leaving only the eyes uncovered, or the *burqa*, which covers the face completely. Muslim women in other parts of the Arab world are freer to vary the colours or designs of their outfits.

The practice of veiling was also common before the rise of Islam in the sixth century. The extent to which veiling was practiced varied greatly between countries due to social and economic contexts. In Assyrian society for example, the veil served to mark the upper classes, and also to differentiate between women who were considered "respectable" and those who were perceived as publicly available (Lerner, 1986).

Mernissi (1991) points to evidence demonstrating that historically the hijab was seen as a status symbol, and that the Prophet's wives and many women at the earlier stages of Islam, wore hijab to be distinguished from other women, as in those days, women, especially slaves, were sexually harassed and abused by men in the streets. In Medieval Islam and until the first decades of the twentieth century, the veil continued to be worn mainly by urban upper and middle class women, whereas rural and lower class women wore the veil, but not in any strict fashion (Golley, 2004).

The use of the hijab among Muslim women is based on religious doctrine, although the Qur'an does not mention that it should be mandatory (Kandiyoti, 1991). A range of opinions exists among Muslims regarding the times and places that women are expected to be veiled – ranging from only at times of prayer to all of the time (Zwick and Chelariu, 2006). Sidani (2005) discussed three interpretations of the religious text, with particular regard to women's dress and their participation in public life.

The traditional discourse is dominant in the Arabian Peninsula and represents the Wahabi school of thought, which adheres to early Muslim orthodoxy. It takes the early years of Islam and the traditions of the day as the example to be followed. It rejects all of the changes that stand in contrast to it, favouring the conventional orthodoxy instead. The traditionalist view on the matter of female dress is that the woman should cover all of her body, including the face and hands. Interaction between men and women that are not related by blood or marriage is not permissible without the presence of a male from the female's family. From the viewpoint of female managers in contemporary working life, this suggests that women can only leave the private spheres when completely covered and accompanied by a male guardian, and that women's managerial careers are only possible in segregated work places, where the interaction of men and women is prohibited.

Modernist discourse, presented mostly by Egyptian scholars, state that Islam provides a significant sense of equality between the two genders and that certain traditions and customs restrict a woman's mobility and development. Al-Ghazali (1989), the prominent modernist scholar, indicated that the facial veiling, prevalent in many Muslim societies, is related to tribal and traditional norms and not to injunctions of Islam. According to modernists, reform needs to take place at several levels in society, in particular at a cultural and educational level.

Modernist discourse states that men and women should have equal rights in the pursuit of their careers, and that reforms are needed to emphasize the

contribution of women in society and their right to choose the way they dress. In this view, therefore, women should be free to reject the face veil.

Feminist discourse goes further than in the sense that it sees the need for legal reforms and new interpretations of religious texts. Feminists provide a more liberal view on segregation and state that a woman's work outside the home involving mixed gender activities is acceptable, providing the woman is suitably attired (Maumoon, 1999). The exact mode of clothing is under debate among scholars. For instance, Smith (1999) writes that the Qur'an, despite what some Muslim women seem to think, does not actually specify how much of the body has to be covered. Many Muslim women therefore say that because veiling is not mentioned in the Qur'an, it is a custom and not scripturally sanctioned (Ali, 2005). More radical feminists emphasize the need for the reinterpretation of religious texts regarding women's rights, and the view that allowing women to work is un-Islamic.

Existing scholarly writings on the subject of the hijab can be criticised for taking a narrow focus. The dominant Western understanding of Arab women's dress (the hijab) is that it is oppressive and restricting. Wearing the hijab is seen as symbolic of the oppression of Muslim women, and the majority of Western literature suggests that this practice is a sign of the subjugation of Muslim women, and therefore should be condemned (Ruby, 2006). Middle Eastern writings present the debate between traditionalist and feminist views on how, or whether at all, the hijab should be worn. None of the research, however, considers the woman's own experiences of wearing the hijab, or the different aspects of a woman's life, for example, her professional life and the role of clothing in her public life.

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3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the research strategy is described in more detail, and the ontological and epistemological reference points of the study are discussed.

3.1 Research strategy

The present study set out to investigate the opinions, views and experiences of Arab women in managerial positions in the United Arab Emirates, and to explore how the participants construct their professional identity and career development.. Therefore, in the light of the above, the qualitative research strategy was chosen as it allows the participants to construct their own reality based on their specific context and circumstances. In short, qualitative research looks to study the subject in a natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

Quantitative research is often seen as hard, reliable and masculine, and research participants must be capable of providing objective and factual depictions about the world in which they live(Oakley, 2000). However, the concepts of gender, management, identity and career are subjective because they are rooted in individual experiences, and as such can be unclear or elusive. A meaningful understanding of these concepts cannot be reached through standardized surveys of qualitative research.

Qualitative research has instead offered means to capture a wide-angled view of the world with its subjective multiple truths. The aim of the qualitative researcher is not to provide generalizations, and it has been argued that validity and reliability are not relevant in qualitative research (Prasad and Prasad, 2002). The very notion of generalization assumes that findings can be applied to other cases as well. However, as the aim of qualitative research is to bring new knowledge through describing a phenomenon in terms of individual experiences,, it would be impossible "to find laws and regularities that can apply to

all situations" (Alasuutari, 1995). Qualitative research assumes that phenomena are historically, contextually, and culturally conditioned. It is on this assumption that the ontological and epistemological foundations of this study are based.

3.2   Social constructivist and narrative approach

The ontological and epistemological approaches of this study are based on constructivism and the key concepts of this research such as management, gender, careers and identity are approached in the view that they are socially constructed. Constructivism traditionally assumes a relativist ontology in which multiple realities exist. Individuals are seen as part of their social systems and are affected by social human interaction. An individual's perception of reality is adaptable, active and pluralistic (Goodman, 1978; Guba and Lincoln, 1989), and is created by their interaction with the environment and the context (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 1991). Constructivism stands in stark contrast to objective ontology and the scientific view that a single reality exists, which operates according to immutable natural laws.

Social constructivism adopts subjectivist epistemology, as opposed to objectivism. Dualist objective epistemology asserts that the researcher must remain distant and detached from the phenomenon studied, taking care to ensure that any affecting factors that may influence the outcome are excluded.. Subjective epistemology, on the other hand, encourages the researcher to form their own understanding and interpretation of the subject.. In this way, the conventional distinction between ontology and epistemology is blurred (Bateson, 1972).

Constructivism has been used in the field of psychology for over a quarter of a century by psychologists such as Bruner (1990), Kelly (1955), Piaget (1969), von Glasersfeld (1993), and Vygotsky (1978). The theory of constructivism is concerned with the individual and how they develop their knowledge and understanding from social construction, whereby knowledge and meaning are historically and culturally constructed through social processes and action (Young and Collin, 2004). Viewing reality as subjectively constructed leads researchers toward new methodologies, such as ethnographic, narrative or discourse analysis, which incorporate wider life experiences, such as time and context.

Social processes and events are, above all, linguistically produced. Language is essential for people to gain an understanding of the reality of everyday life (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), it creates and reflects social realities (Cohen et al., 2004), we create our histories and destinies through language (Gergen and Gergen, 2003) and organizations are, first and foremost, forms of language (Gergen, 1994). Language, however, is not a transparent and neutral medium of information but is dynamic, complex, and ever-changing, just as the meanings and interpretations of reality change in accordance with social, historical and cultural contexts (Richardson, 2003; Young and Collin, 2004; Silverman, 2003).

Language is the medium through which our subjectivity is constructed (Bruni et al., 2004). According to Cameron (1992), using language is the social practice through which humans make public sense of private experience.

In this study, the key concepts of gender, identity and career are intertwined with the use of language. In gender studies, the use of language plays a very important role, and as Gherardi (1995) puts it, by language we separate, differentiate and use power, and in this, men and women stand in dichotomous and hierarchical relation. Language is also closely tied in with the concept of identity, as not only do we express ourselves in this way, we also construct our own identity based on how others see us in conjunction with the use of language. Czarniawska-Joerges (2004) argues that identity is created by an individual's interaction with the social environment, with all its rules, institutions, values, and, above all, language. Furthermore, as McAdams (1985) points out, describing identity in narrative terms may create coherence and consistency. In terms of career studies, language has been seen as a convenient medium for perceiving, accounting for, and constructing career development, and it allows for a more holistic view of the socially and culturally embedded nature of careers (Bruner, 1985, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1995).

In the light of the above, this study uses a narrative methodology. The narrative approach views reality as a plurality of small narratives which are always under construction. According to Ricoeur (1991), a human being's existence in the world consists of three relationships, which are mediated by narratives. First, our relationship with the surrounding world is mediated by narratives. Second, narratives mediate between an individual and other people. Third, there is a relationship between a person and his/her self and identity. Narratives help us put our thoughts, personal views, and experiences into words and help us to better understand and clarify our own thoughts and experiences. Bruner (1991) claims that narratives are versions of reality that operate as instruments of the mind in the construction of the reality.

The construction of the self and the narrative in its various forms, are dependent upon the meaning we attach to temporal and social contexts, and in relationships with others (Young and Collin, 2004). Organizations and careers operate in social contexts. There are many factors that influence them, such as social and power structures, political decision-making, general economic trends, technological development, and wider societal norms and structures. Both formal and informal communication, dialogue and interaction in an organization are constituted mainly by knowledge that is mediated through narratives (Lämsä and Sintonen, 2006). Grant et al. (2004) explain that the current interest in organizational storytelling is part of a broader tendency of 'narrativization' of organizational theory, that emphasizes language, scripts, metaphors, talk, stories and narratives as opposed to the material realities of organizations, such as structure, power, technology and so forth.

According to Heikkinen (2003), narrative methodology is preferred because it is based on the assumption that, knowledge is relative – dependent upon time, place and the position of the observer. It is also assumed that

knowledge is a thread of narratives, which is constantly forming and changing, sourcing new material from an ever-changing cultural pool of stories. Narrative methodology also assumes that the composition of identity is also based on ever-changing narratives of the self.. Lincoln and Denzin (2000) describe this paradigm as a move away from macro-narratives towards the point of view of the individual, which gives a voice to new, previously unheard views.

There are two modes of analysis in narrative analysis, which according to Bruner (1985) are based on two modes of 'knowing'. First is the paradigmatic cognition (logic-scientific cognition), which is the cognition of logics and mathematics, the precise definition of concepts, and the presentation of categorizations. Second is the narrative cognition, which is the production of a thematically and logically proceeding narrative from past events (e.g. history). The analysis of narratives is based on the first paradigmatic cognition, where material is categorized into different categories and types. Narrative analysis, which is more the creation of a synthesis than categorization (Polkinghorne 1995), is based on narrative cognition.

In this study, narrativity is used in various ways. Data was gathered through narrative in-depth interviews where the reality is constructed narratively between the respondent and the interviewer. A structural narrative analysis (Labov and Waletzky (1967) was used to interpret the respondents' experiences. The main research question in this study is concerned with how the individual constructs their identity or career development. This study also reports its empirical findings narratively.

3.3   Data collection and analysis

The empirical data for this dissertation was gathered using in-depth interviews with fifteen female managers in the United Arab Emirates that took place in January 2007. All of the women participating in the study held professional positions in their organizations: seven women held middle managerial, and eight held top managerial positions. Out of all of the women, four worked for government institutions, three in banking and finance, three in education and the rest in various, mostly Arab-owned, private organizations. All interview participants had higher education qualifications with five holding master degrees, and ten holding bachelor degrees either from their home country or abroad. Interviewees ranged between 24 and 45 years of age.

The qualitative research interview questions were designed to gain an understanding of the participants' everyday lives. The main task in interviewing is to elicit responses that are both factual and meaningful, though it is usually more difficult to interview on a meaningful level (Kvale, 1996). Interviewing is the most popular research method in organizational studies (Aaltio, 2002) and is widely used within the constructivist paradigm. Kidd (2004) notes that interview techniques are a successful way of obtaining a deep understanding of the participants' thoughts, feelings, and ideas.

The focus of this study and the phenomena were relatively under-studied in the academic world, as was seen in Article 1, therefore there was little existing theory to test. The research questions were designed following Glaser's (2002) inductive logic, where the researcher may have some basic knowledge about the phenomenon but no particular theoretical framework on which to base their empirical analysis. This was found to be particularly useful for this piece of research as the open ended interview questions and narrative research logic, allowed for new themes to emerge from the date, such as the importance of clothing in establishing one's managerial identity.

In terms of sampling strategies, a mixed sampling strategy was used, incorporating both purposive and snowball approaches (Bryman, 2004). The specific aim was to generate a heterogeneous sample of Emirati female managers that represented different groups in the social hierarchy. Given the knowledge I had already acquired of the socio-cultural aspect of the United Arab Emirates, I felt that class and background would play an important part in women's careers, and so it was necessary to find participants from a wide spectrum of the social hierarchy.

Finding relevant respondents, however, was perhaps the most difficult part of the research process. I had initially attempted to source contact information via corporate websites, which proved difficult, as Arab companies do not publicise their employees contact details. As my initial attempt at sourcing information had proven unsuccessful, I went on to try to contact potential candidates by contacting their employers via telephone or email. I found that on explaining the nature of the research, however, employers became less responsive to the idea. Given the difficulties I had thus far experienced, I decided that approaching employers in person by making an appointment to meet with them may prove far more successful. I then took the decision to contact Business-women Councils, which operate under the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in three different cities – Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah. In approaching the task in this way I was able to convey the importance of the research, whilst assuring the full anonymity of the respondents. This proved more successful and I found that they were more willing to provide contacts. Ironically, at times, it was necessary for me to contact a male chairman in order to get access to a female manager's contact details. Once the first contacts had been established, I found that respondents were willing to suggest other contacts.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face in comfortable settings, either in the respondent's own offices, their homes, or in local cafes. With the participants' permission, the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. At the outset of the interview, the purpose of the research was explained to the participants before they were asked to speak about their career from their own perspective. The participants were asked open-ended questions that explored their career choice, changes and turning points in their careers, as well as factors that they felt had facilitated or hindered their overall career development. Open-ended questions afforded the respondents the opportunity to express

their ideas widely, which led to alternative topics such as clothing, identity and gender dynamics in their organization.

The empirical data obtained from the research, was analysed using narrative analysis and grounded theory. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory is especially useful when the area under investigation is new, without a theoretical framework attached to it, or when hoping to add a new perspective to its study. Data analysis was conducted using the MAXQDA computer software. The career stories that emerged in each interview were constructed based on a structural narrative analysis as presented by Labov and Waletzky (1967).

3.4   The role of the researcher

Narrative research differs from objective realist research, as it acknowledges the presence of the researcher. The researcher does not play an objective or neutral, observational part, but takes on a collaborative role with the research subjects (Lincoln and Denzin, 2000). According to Marschan-Piekkari et al. (2004), the interviewer and interviewee create a shared context for the exchange of experiences, ideas and meaning. The wider cultural, organizational, and educational contexts of both the interviewer and the interviewee form the framework of the interview.

My role as a researcher in the present study was to provide a facilitating context for the interviewees to share and express their experiences about their managerial careers. I learnt that when conducting research in a culturally different context from my own, it is important to first gain the trust of the participant for them to feel comfortable enough to share their - at times intimate - experiences. Women's lives, especially personal experiences, are not publicly discussed in the Arab world. Being a Western researcher, not only did I have to guarantee the full anonymity of the respondents, but gain their trust so that they might feel able to talk openly.

Several respondents had not participated in this kind of research before and so were a little hesitant or shy. Some of the participants were particularly anxious about the use of a Dictaphone. Using a friendly approach I was able to reassure the participants of their anonymity, as well as the importance of the research. I was also able to help them feel more relaxed about the presence of a Dictaphone.

In each case, the purpose of the research was explained in depth, as were other details of the research, such as where it was likely to be published, which was of particular interest to several respondents.

Various barriers were encountered during the interview, specifically around language, as neither the respondents nor I are native English speakers. The terminology that was used also presented a problem, as gender issues are not widely discussed in the Arab world. To overcome these difficulties it was necessary to explain certain terms to the participants.

I believe the fact that I was a female researcher played an important role in the research process. The subject of gender, or issues relating to the lives of women are considered private and are not publicly spoken about so as to protect the chastity of the women involved. Moreover, it is a tradition in the Islamic Gulf region, not to criticise, complain or talk about negative issues. I also believe the results would have been different had the researcher been a male or indeed a woman from the same cultural background.

To what extent a researcher is aware of the impact they may have on the research they are engaged in is a flexible process. It is my view that a researcher's personality, outlook and experience play an important role in carrying out narrative research. The truth in narrative research, is subjectively constructed by the respondents, however, the researcher plays a part in this construction.

Denzin (1996) warns about the risks of too much reflexivity. Reflexivity can turn into a biased description of the researcher's own ideas. During the research process I was fully aware of my influence and I saw my role primarily as a facilitator, making the respondents comfortable enough to discuss personal issues.

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4 SUMMARY AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE ARTICLES

4.1 Article 1: Women in Management in the Arab context

Aim of the article:
> To explore the position of Arab women in management in the extant literature, point out coherent clusters of research and identify knowledge gaps.

Theoretical framework:
> Women in management (Kanter, 1977, Calás and Smircich, 1996), Feminist theories (Lorber, 2001), Women's careers (Powell and Graves, 2003).

Methodology:
> Quantitative and descriptive content analysis

Main findings:
> The statistical analysis of research shows that the topic of Arab women in management has gained more importance within the last decade. The thematic overview of research shows that authors have concentrated only on a few very broad topics, without much diversity or depth.

Publication:
> *Education, Business and Society: Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues* 2008, 1(2), 107-123.

The first study of this dissertation aimed to review the field of study in order to create a basis for future research. The study was based on the notion that while the study of women and their working lives has gained considerable attention among Western researchers, the position of women in management in different cultural contexts has been given little attention. The Arab region was chosen as the context for this study because in the last few decades there have been significant changes in the lives of women native to the region. Women are increas-

ingly entering the work force and reaching high positions in organizations. The stereotypical views about a woman's position, however, are in stark contrast to the statistics that represent the economic contribution of Arab women, which show a remarkable increase over the last decades. Taking this into consideration, it was important to explore the existing research that looks at the position of Arab women in management.

In shaping the theoretical background the study considers the literature on women in management by Kanter (1977) and Calás and Smircich (1996). Kanter used the term "token" to refer to the relatively few women that have reached prominent positions in management. Furthermore, female managers are often treated as symbolic or representative of all women. Calás and Smircich criticise feminist literature for the comparisons it draws between women and men, and suggest that women perform just as well, or even better, than men by releasing themselves from the cultural implications of being female and from any gender-defined role. However, the main theoretical framework in the article draws on feminist theory as presented by Lorber (2001). Lorber suggests that feminist theory can be divided into three directions: gender reform feminism, gender resistance feminism and gender rebellion feminism. Gender reform feminism asserts that gender differences are not based on biological reason, and that the socialization of gender roles produces individual differences in the characteristics of men and women. Gender resistance feminism emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the views and experiences of women that contribute to their effective management style. Gender rebellion feminism sets to challenge the ways in which men and women are defined, and draw attention to the relationship between knowledge, discourse, language and power. Such classification forms the main framework for this study, as it presents a synthesis of feminist thought that explains the underlying cause for the under-representation of women in higher positions within organizations.

The articles that were analysed for this study showed that the previous literature on Arab women in management tends to favour the approach taken by gender reform feminism, which takes a female manager's gender as a research category. Generally speaking, this finding is consistent with other literature on the topic of women in management, which, it has been argued, is predominantly interested in comparisons between women and men (Callas and Smircich, 1996). Although this kind of research makes an important contribution to the literature, its crucial limitation is that it involves a rather simplistic idea of gender (Alvesson and Billing, 1997; Kark, 2004). In the majority of these studies, gender is treated as a variable; a characteristic of the individual, showing only simple statistical connections, whereas more comprehensive cultural patterns and structures that can lead to gender inequalities and differences are not considered (Alvesson and Billing, 1997).

Moreover, the article analysis showed that few studies favour gender resistance feminism while only one study favoured gender rebellion feminism. The research delved more deeply into the situations and experiences of women, and made their specific experiences of management more visible. It also at-

tempted to offer an explanation for the lower organizational, cultural or national status that has been attributed to women. The article analysis also showed that although these studies have brought forward the underlying cultural or societal factors that contribute to the lower status of women, they do not propose a new social order, or suggest the possible advantages that women in management can have for corporate effectiveness.

The analysis of the studies in this paper showed that the majority of research has been published from 2000 onwards and methodologically quantitative research methods were preferred. The majority of the research on women managers in the Arab world tends to concentrate on a few very broad topics, without much diversity or depth. The themes covered in the research are mostly limited to attitudes towards women who work, the career barriers women face in management, and the supporting factors of women's managerial careers. What is particularly interesting is that the studies did not attempt to equalize women with men, but rather explained the societal norms that are responsible for the position of women in public or private spheres. Only to a certain extent do any of the studies provide alternative thinking or cultural discourse that considers the advantages that women may offer as leaders, or support their advancement in management. Moreover, the research tends to provide an overall picture or a statistical analysis, without really providing a voice for female managers. Nor does the research discuss the advantages of a woman's approach to management.

Based on the first study of the dissertation it is suggested that due to the scarcity of studies about the topic in general, there is an urgent need for more research on women and management in the Arab world. However, there is an even more urgent need for studies that deal with topics by applying a deeper understanding of a woman's perspective, their advancement in managerial careers and the factors that influence their managerial work. Studies that bring forth the experiences of female managers themselves would be especially fruitful.

The value of this study is that it might be considered as the first study to give a systematic overview of the literature on women in management in the Arab region. This is especially useful both for practitioners and researchers studying Arab women in management. The limitations of the study lie in the search method and its time frame. There may be several studies on women in management in the Arab region that are not published in peer-reviewed journals or do not appear in analysed databases. Furthermore, the framework used was selected for its simplicity in categorizing the studies. However, it can be criticised for being too general in nature since feminism is a broad and complex area of research and that a more structurally detailed analysis can be made.

4.2 Article 2: Typology of Career Development for Arab female Managers in the United Arab Emirates

Aim of the article:

> To explore how female managers in the United Arab Emirates account for and construct their career development.

Theoretical framework:

> Career theory (Levinson, 1978; Super, 1957), women's career development models (O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005; Powell and Mainiero, 1992).

Methodology:

> In-depth interviews, narrative analysis (Bruner, 1985; 1991; Polkinghorne, 1995), social constructivism, especially that of narrative approach.

Main findings:

> The study proposed a typology distinguishing four types of career development among female managers in the United Arab Emirates: a progressive, moderate, facilitated and idealistic career type. Furthermore, the article empirically confirms the starting point of the dissertation; that the societal context plays an important role in understanding women's careers in management. In the context in which the study was carried out (the United Arab Emirates), the social status of a woman and her family, as well as the nature of family connections in society, are significant in the development of a woman's career.

Publication:

> *Career Development International* 2010, 15(2), 121-143.

The aim of the second article was to empirically examine the careers of women in management within the socio-cultural context of the Arab region, as this context differs to those examined in other mainstream literature. Since too little work has been done to fully understand how a socio-cultural context is related to women's career development in management, this article aimed to contribute to the existing gap in research by increasing a context-sensitive understanding of the topic.

The study draws on criticism of the notion of early career theory (Levinson, 1978), which views the career from a gender-neutral position. Despite their position as being gender neutral, most of the studies based on the early theory use data collected from white Anglo Saxon men (Powell and Mainiero, 1992; Stead, 2004) and, in fact, are not gender neutral but rather tend to reflect the experiences and life model of these particular men. Therefore they can hardly capture the essence of the career development of women.

Several authors have suggested that there is a need for a career development theory that will explicitly address the lives and experiences of different

kinds of women (e.g. Lämsä and Hiillos, 2008, Mavin, 2001). This is supported by the idea that women's careers progress differently to men's as a result of the developmental differences between the sexes (Gallos, 1989), as well as organizational and societal factors (Betz, 1993, Ragins et al, 1998). Several studies have explored influences, such as family responsibilities, societal, organizational and personal factors on the career outcomes of women (e.g. Powell and Mainiero, 1992; White, 1995). However, they are not part of the mainstream management literature, and have had little impact on the future careers of women in management (Mavin, 2001). This article proposes the question of whether it is possible to describe a woman's career development through a single model as presented in previous studies, (O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005), when external, social, cultural, and changing contextual factors can all be said to have an influence.

Since women's career development in management has not been investigated to any great degree in an Arab context (Omair, 2008), this study looked to explore how fifteen female managers in the United Arab Emirates narrate the development of their career. The research produced a typology of four categories of career development: "Progressive career", "Moderate career", "Facilitated career" and "Idealistic career".

Women in the "progressive career" group, despite belonging to middle class families with only a few powerful social networks, had overcome their career barriers with hard work and persistence, often by adopting a boundaryless career orientation (Hall, 1996, 2002), where their careers evolved across several organizations. Women in the "moderate career" group, like those in the "progressive career" group, belonged to middle class families; however, their families were less liberal towards their career choices than was the case with the "progressive career" group. Women in the "moderate career" group had not been able to advance to higher positions in organizations, either as a result of failed attempts, lack of interest, or lack of family connections. The careers of the women in this group evolved in the same organization, and included short breaks to balance work and family responsibilities. The careers of the women in the "facilitated career" group were located in organizations that belonged to male members of their family. It is notable that "facilitated careers" evolved in the "safe" environment of a family business where few barriers were encountered and where the lower levels of the organization were passed over so that careers began at the higher levels immediately after graduation. Women in the "idealistic career" group belonged to the ruling family group in the UAE with the highest social status in society. Women from this group reported fewer barriers than any of the other groups. Other than social pressure to "perform" and the concomitant influence on career choices, they reported no barriers to career advancement. Their high social status earned significant public attention in UAE society and resulted in the pressure to choose a career in social and philanthropic domains.

The results of this study contribute to the previously under-studied topic of Arab women managers and their careers. The results show that due to the differences in personal, familial or socio-economic circumstances, women's ca-

reers can be viewed through a typology. This paper supports previous research (e.g. Betz, 1993; Kirchmeyer, 2002; O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005; Ragins et al., 1998; Rhode and Kellerman, 2007) that suggests that women encounter gender-based barriers in their career development. In this study, barriers were experienced either personally in the woman's own career development or were perceived to occur in UAE society in general.

This study also suggests that within the context of the United Arab Emirates, the family - particularly the social status of the family- plays a central role in the career development of women. While family connections can act as a significant boost for some women's careers, a lack of connections can severely inhibit the careers of other women. Moreover, despite the substantial volume of research on women's careers and the work-family relationship (Byron, 2005; Eby et al. 2005), this study suggests that previous studies overlook the complexity of familial influence in some societies such as the UAE. Indeed, this paper suggests that in the context of the UAE there are clear social differences between families, and different families play different roles in the career development of women.

This study is limited in the sense that generalizations extended to other Arab women must be made with caution, given the societal, organizational, and broader contextual differences that exist within the Arab region. Furthermore, the author acknowledges that the outcome of the research is limited to the willingness and openness of the respondents in discussing sensitive personal issues.

4.3   Article 3: Female Arab managers and the formation of identity through clothing

Aim of the article:
> To explore how Arab female managers construct their social identities through the meanings they ascribe to their clothing while pursuing managerial careers.

Theoretical framework:
> Social identity, symbols, dress (Goffman, 1959; Wolf, 1991, Tseëlon, 1995), Women in management (Kanter, 1977).

Methodology:
> In-depth interviews, social constructivism, Grounded Theory.

Main findings:
> This paper identifies multiple coexisting identities in Arab women pursuing managerial careers. While the contradiction is found in the identity as a woman and as a manager, the normative dimensions of identity formation such as, being a Muslim and an Emirati serve to enhance women's gendered managerial identity.

Publication:
> *Gender in Management: An International Journal* 2009, 24(6), 412-431.

The third article was initiated to examine female managers' identity formation in male-dominated work environments, in the context of the United Arab Emirates, and how they use symbols, such as their dress, to manage the tension between their gender and their organizational roles. During the interviews with the women, the role of clothing and professional appearance was emphasized and often brought forward, making it clear that this topic, which in this context has not yet been studied, deserves attention.

The adopted framework by Goffman (1959) suggests that people use dress to purposefully convey information about themselves to others, enabling them to engage in social interactions and place themselves in social systems. Wolf (1991) describes how women in their pursuit to gain visibility in a male-dominated business culture, often face the dilemma of appearing either too feminine or too masculine. The emotional significance that women attach to their gender may be shaped at least in part by the extent to which power differentials are constructed along sex lines in organizational settings (Ely, 1995). Discrimination and segregation are examples that affect women's group- and self-attributions, including stereotypical attributions. These processes of comparison and attribution help to shape a woman's gender identity at work. In this study, particular interest was given to dress and its association with social identities. It is argued that dress is a convenient medium through which women can express multiple, and contradictory, even conflicting identities in organizational settings within the Arab context.

The empirical study in the third article used exploratory qualitative research techniques in the form of in-depth interviews. Interviews were held with fifteen Arab women in positions of management within various industries. As previously stated by several authors (Tseëlon, 1995; Beech, 2008), this study argues that multiple identities can exist within the same individual, and identifies four coexisting identities: being a Muslim in contrast to non-Muslims, being an Emirati in a highly multi-cultural society, and lastly, being a woman and a manager pursuing a career in a patriarchal society.

The results of this study show that women's identities are unstable and are constantly re-constructed in response to changes that may occur within the context. The results of this study show that the women's identities, as Muslims and as Emiratis, are subject to conformity and preservation, and that neither of these identities provides discomfort for women in their working life. A contradiction was noted, however, between the two identities of being a woman and being a manager. While pursuing their managerial careers, the women faced discrimination by being under-valued due to their clothing, and as a result, experienced fewer opportunities for career advancement compared to their male colleagues. The idea of a woman as a manager is still loaded with traditional ideas that women are inferior to men and therefore less capable in leadership positions. Furthermore, as the clothing worn by Arab women is visually different and feminine compared to that of men, they have very few opportunities to mimic a man's dress or hide their femininity. As the idea of a woman dressed in traditional clothes is to emphasize her religiousness, women have gained,

among other things, respect, and the image of being serious and professional. In addition, the "right clothing" opens a door to the public sphere to pursue a professional career, and guarantees easy interaction with males without being dubbed immoral. The traditional dress also becomes a tool to avoid sexual harassment and to gain sexual neutrality in managerial work.

As a contribution to the existing literature, the results of this study show how wearing traditional Arab women's dress as professional attire holds contradicting connotations. On the one hand, being visibly femininely dressed may result in being discriminated against and under-valued, yet on the other, the normative religious connotations associated with Arab women's dress symbolise seriousness, trustworthiness and honesty, which are much valued attributes in managerial work.

The limitations of the article lie in both the small sample pool and the fact that other identities could be found if the research questions were posed differently. Furthermore, these results should be viewed as context and time specific and generalizations to other Arab countries cannot be made.

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5 CONCLUDING MARKS

The aim of this dissertation was to examine women's careers in the United Arab Emirates from two angles: women's managerial career development and female managers' professional identity construction.

My first research question looked at how the UAE national female managers constructed their career development in a patriarchal working environment. Previous research on women's careers has largely focused on barriers women are facing in career advancement (e.g. Kottke and Agars, 2005; Gregory, 2001) or how they balance their work and non-work responsibilities (e.g. Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005; Greenhaus and Foley, 2007). My point of argument is in line with Duberley et al. (2006) and Young and Collin (2004) that traditional career models cannot capture the wide variety of approaches that women in different contexts may experience. Secondly, this dissertation questions the idea of a single form of career development (e.g. O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005).

The results of this research show that there are various ways in which a woman's career in management may develop within the context of the United Arab Emirates. Four different types of career development were observed in this dissertation – a progressive, moderate, facilitated and idealistic career types – but others may be found as well. In all four career types, the societal and family background played a significant role in women's career outcomes. Family connections can provide several opportunities for a woman's career development and advance their careers in a non-traditional manner. Social status plays a significant role in determining a career course or its outcomes. For example, the results of this research suggest that women belonging to higher social class face fewer barriers in their career development.

The majority of existing research on women's work-family issues tends to argue the existence of conflict (Blair-Loy, 2003; Byron, 2005), and only a few studies in the field of management have proposed positive interdependencies between work and family (Rothbard, 2001; Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). In the case of Arab societies, several studies have stressed the conflict between the working lives of women and their family's support (e.g. Abdallah, 1996; Jamali et al. 2005). On the contrary, the results of this paper show that families were

perceived as being generally supportive of women pursuing careers. There was no evidence of conflict between family and career aspirations for any of the participants. The explanation for this lies in the consultative nature of decision-making that takes place in Emirati societies, where women consult with the male members of their family about their career aspirations. The sense of responsibility felt by men towards the women in their families, meant that they were more likely support their careers, either by providing opportunities or by giving advice and encouragement.

My second research question looked at how the UAE national women constructed their social identities through the meanings they ascribed to their clothing while pursuing managerial careers. The results support the idea by Tseëlon (1995) and Beech (2008) who argue that multiple identities may exist within the same individual. Four distinct identities – being a Muslim, an Emirati, a woman and a manager – were identified. Furthermore, this research supports the notion by Rafaeli and Pratt (1993) that how people dress is important to how they express themselves as individuals or as group members. .

This dissertation contributes to the existing literature on professional identity and clothing, by highlighting the ways in which professional clothing can facilitate or hinder the managerial careers of women. . In addition, the results contribute to the existing literature by explaining the clothing strategies women have adopted in order to either improve their position in organizations or as a means to pursue their managerial careers in a public sphere.

My third research question was concerned with how the socio-cultural background of Arab women can impact their managerial careers he results suggest that a woman's gender alone is often too narrow a perspective to facilitate a complete understanding of women's careers in management. It is important to take into account other forms of diversity both in research and in practice. The results from the United Arab Emirates particularly stress the role of socio-cultural background and social class in women's career development. This sets limitations on the extent to which these results can be generalized to other contexts, such as western societies.

This research contributes to the literature on Arab women in management. For researchers, the results of this study provide a solid base for understanding the position of Arab women in organizational settings and the factors that influence their managerial careers. In terms of public policy making, the results of this study did not reveal that nationalization policies have had an impact on the participant's careers. A public discourse in support of women's economic participation and career advancement is needed in order to change the patriarchal traditional attitudes towards women in management.

For practitioners, the results of this study provide useful information on the complexities of women's managerial careers, and the struggles and barriers they face. The results also show the identity conflict that comes with being a woman and a manager. For practitioners in the Middle East, the findings signal the need to incorporate the centrality of family and family relationships in their management practices, and the development of their policies for female em-

ployees. The impact of perceived organizational culture as being "safe" for women has also been shown to be an important point for consideration, as have perceived opportunities for advancement beyond the "glass ceiling". Another point for consideration is the attitudes of male employees and managers towards women in the work place.

With regard to the limitations of the study, this research was conducted in the United Arab Emirates and although several authors have indicated that Arab societies exhibit similarities (Metcalfe, 2008; Muna, 1980), generalization in respect of other Arab countries should be made with caution.

Moreover, due to the methodology that was chosen for this study, the aim of the research was not to present the ultimate truth, as "truth is unattainable because reality itself is not single or static, and reality is also inevitably influenced and altered by any processes through which a researcher attempts to investigate and represent it" (Taylor, 2001). Rather, this research offers situated knowledge, a glimpse into the managerial careers of fifteen Arab women, and the 'truths' that I have interpreted from my research data, which are located within a particular community at a particular time.

Due to the scarcity of research available on the topic on Arab women in management, this dissertation forms a solid base for future researchers to look into the managerial careers of Arab women, and professional identity construction. As this dissertation emphasizes the importance of socio-economic context in women's career development, it would be fruitful to expand similar research towards other Arab countries in order to avoid viewing the region as a homogenous unit.

While conducting this research, I saw the need to further explore the ways in which Arab women balance their work and family life. It would be interesting to explore the impact of the increasing participation of women in the labour market on spousal and familial relationships, and how family dynamics are changing in Arab countries.

The results of this research indicate the importance of family support and influence on a woman's career development. Spousal support could be investigated in further detail, considering the fact that women consult their male family members about their career decisions and that by law women need permission from their husband or father before they can take up a position in an organization.

This research studied women and their managerial careers but it may also be worth studying male and female managers in interaction to see how gender dynamics change in these situations.

Finally, while the interviewees of this study revealed the patriarchal attitudinal barriers that they faced in their careers, it would be interesting to see what kinds of support, if any at all, women receive from fellow female colleagues, mentors or supervisors. Although this study did touch on the subject of envy between female colleagues, it did not discuss the matter to any great extent, and so the attitudinal barriers of other women could deserve further investigation.

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ARTICLE

I

WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT IN THE ARAB CONTEXT

by

Omair, Katlin 2008

Education, Business and Society: Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues 1(2), 107-123

Women in management in the Arab context

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to explore the position of Arab women in management by examining the existing research on gender and management in the Arab region in order to obtain an overall picture of the advancement of Arab women in their professional lives, point out coherent clusters of research and identify knowledge gaps in existing research.

Design/methodology/approach – The study conducts a content analysis of academic articles in order to provide a quantitative as well as qualitative thematic overview of the topics emerged from the literature.

Findings – The statistical analysis of researches shows that, the topic of women in management is gaining more importance. The thematic overview of researches shows that authors have concentrated only on few and very broad topics, without much diversity or depth.

Practical implications – The paper provides practitioners some understanding of the position of Arab women in management and factors that influence their professional lives. The paper sets a solid base of previous studies for future researchers studying women in management in the Arab region.

Originality/value – The paper might be considered as the first study to give a systematic overview of the literature on women in management in the Arab region.

Keywords Gender, Women executives, Middle East, Careers

Paper type Literature review

Introduction

The study of women and their working lives has gained considerable attention among western researchers; however, these studies have mostly been limited to European and North American settings and women in different cultural contexts have been given little attention. While, the last 30 years have seen few changes for women in Western countries, there have been major and significant changes for women in Arab societies. Life for Arab women has become one of the most rapidly changing elements in Arab societies. Women in the Arab region can no longer be described as scared, inferior, domestic women who hardly leave their houses. Recently, women hold ministerial and parliamentary positions, they run businesses and sit as presidents in national universities. Women in the Arab region are increasingly entering the work force and rising to managerial positions. A working Arab woman is thus no longer an exception, but rather a growing trend. In general, the Arab region is under close attention from all over the world and Arab societies are currently in a state of confusion. Rapid changes, the impact of westernization and modernization are contributing to this state of confusion. Arabs seem to be in a futile search for a new identity that will not contradict their deeply rooted traditions and at the same time connect them to the future and development.

In this paper, the term Arab world refers to the term Arab League[1], used by the United Nations, and describing the 22 countries in the Middle East, linked by their geographic proximity and cultural, religious as well as historical similarities.

Some of these countries, for example Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, are among the richest in the world due to oil exports, others, such as for example, Somalia or the Sudan are among the poorest, yet all of them are vulnerable due to their relatively undiversified economies and limited exports (UNDPFW, 2004).

The participation of Arab women in all arenas – be it political, economic, or social – is complicated by the fact that the woman is subject to a number of coded and unwritten social mores in a patriarchal, male-dominated society. As Abdel Kader (1987) rightly points out, Arab women have suffered from a triple bias: male bias, a class bias and a western bias. Thus, Arab women have seldom been brought forth in discussions. This is true not only for Arab women in general, but also for those in management – the group we focus on in this paper. As most of the work in the area of management focuses on men and western women, it can be argued that it is important to make the position of Arab women in management more visible. Therefore, in this paper we enrich existing scholarship by focusing on the perspective of women in management in the Arab world, a topic largely overlooked in the current formation of knowledge about gender and management. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the understandings of the topic by analyzing academic work conducted and published. Thus, this paper reports on secondary data on gender and management in the Arab region and conducts a content analysis in order to provide a quantitative as well as qualitative thematic overview of existent studies. Such knowledge is particularly important in order to obtain an overall picture of the topic to identify research trends and gaps, and worthy areas for future study.

In 2001, the participation of women in the global economy was estimated at 55.2 per cent, with corresponding rates in East Asia and the Pacific at 70 per cent, South Asia at 43.6 per cent, and Latin America and the Caribbean at 42 per cent. By stark contrast, a very modest 29 per cent of Arab women participated in the national economies of the Arab region (UNDP, 2003). The percentage change in female labour participation overall for the Middle East and North Africa regions between 1960 and 2000 was 47 per cent (World Bank, 2003). This masks the dramatic increases in certain regions between 1960 and 2000: Bahrain has seen women's labour participation increase by 668 per cent, Kuwait 486 per cent, and UAE 548 per cent, while Yemen's female labour participation increased only 15 per cent (World Bank, 2003). Consequently, the participation of Arab women in the labour force is still low compared to other regions in the world, not reflecting their educational attainment and capabilities. Al-Mandhry (2000) suggests that, the low percentage of women participating in the labour force is mainly attributable to a lack of employment opportunities rather than a lack of interest.

Arab women's work activities have traditionally been carried out in exclusively female circumstances, as most Arab societies maintain a strict code of gender segregation in public, at prayer and even at home (Guthrie, 2001). Typically, women entrepreneurs are concentrated in the service sector and local market, where less is required for initial investment and life experiences/hobbies can be expressed and developed. Often women engage in sectors that are traditionally female: nursing, teaching and clerical work (Metle, 2002). As a result, some women graduates are unemployed and the popular teaching occupations are over-employed. In Qatar, the over-employment in some female-dominated jobs is ten times the need (Abdalla, 1996).

This paper is organized as follows: firstly, a short overview of the literature dealing with women in management is provided, identifying the main directions taken by research into women in management. This will form a framework against which research into Arab societies can then be analyzed. Secondly, the method used in this paper is introduced. Thirdly, a quantitative and descriptive content analysis of research output on Arab women in management is presented. Finally, the last chapter presents a discussion of the results and offers suggestions for future research.

An overview of women in management literature

The growing interest in the study of women in management has been triggered by the increasing role that women have taken in public activities. In line with the increasing role that women play in the economy, more women globally are pursuing careers in management (Omar and Davidson, 2001). Moreover, cross-cultural studies on women as managers have found that this rising trend is common in many countries, along with evidence indicating that women managers worldwide share a number of similarities (Adler and Izraeli, 1994).

Generally, management is seen as a career only for men, and the majority of top management positions are filled by men (Powell and Graves, 2003). At almost every level, women managers globally are described as having to deal with blocked mobility, discrimination and stereotypes. Women managers are commonly reported to be negatively affected by a self belief that successful managers must exhibit male attributes, that women are not able to combine their roles as wife, mother and executive and that others, especially men, were not willing to work under a woman boss. Women managers are also often found in lower management positions that gave them little access to power and meaningful challenges (Omar and Davidson, 2001).

According to Powell and Graves (2003), women in management literature dates back to the 1960s and 1970s. In particular, the work *Men and Women of the Corporation* by Kanter (1977) can be regarded as seminal. Kanter used the term "token" to refer to the relatively few women given prominent positions in management. A few women managers are tokens often treated as symbols or representatives for all women. As a result, their thoughts, beliefs and actions are likely to be taken as typical of all women. Since Kanter's work, the amount of literature on the topic in management has grown considerably. In this paper, to be able to get an overview of this literature, we will view it through the lenses of feminist theory. Lorber (2001) suggests that, this theory be divided into three frameworks: gender reform feminism, gender resistance feminism and gender rebellion feminism. Thus, this classification of women in management literature can also work as a framework for this paper within which research in the Arab world can be analysed.

Gender reform feminism is an approach represented by liberal feminists and is based on assumptions about similarities between the sexes. This approach asserts that men and women are similar in their common humanity (Lorber, 2001). It is mostly interested in comparisons between men and women in terms of inequality and discrimination and aims to explain such phenomena (Alvesson and Billing, 1997). The method of research applied by researchers representing this perspective is mostly quantitative, viewing gender as a variable and considering women as a research category (Kark, 2004).

Gender resistance feminism puts the perspectives and practices of women at the centre of the analysis (Calàs and Smircich, 1996). According to this strand, gender

differences should not be eliminated, but rather, celebrated (Ely and Meyerson, 2000). Studies in this stream of literature stress the importance of women's voice, and experiences that contribute to an effective management style. They emphasize the positive value of qualities identified in women (e.g. sensitive, supportive and emotionally expressive), and highlight the benefits of women's way of knowing (e.g. intuitive, non-verbal and spiritual) (Jagger, 1983). In terms of methodology, alternative approaches that allow more room for the personal experiences and critical insights are usually preferred by the gender resistance perspective (Kark, 2004). This frequently applies to the qualitative approach (Alvesson and Billing, 1997).

Gender rebellion feminists suggest that rather than focusing on the female advantage and how women can contribute to the existing system, they should rather challenge the way men or women are defined. This stream calls attention to the relationship between knowledge, discourse, language and power, revealing the ways in which the theories privilege stereotypically masculine attributes and demonstrating how the gendered assumptions underlying the theories can limit our understanding of organizations (Mumby and Putnam, 1992). Researchers following this perspective use strategies of text deconstruction that are sensitive to the suppressed interests of members of marginalized groups (Martin, 2000). This applies to both quantitative and qualitative approaches to research.

Method
In this study, a quantitative content analysis in applied in order to provide an overview of the quantitative aspects of the research, and a descriptive content analysis in order provide a qualitative overview of the major topics emerging from the research. In this study, the aim of the quantitative analysis is to describe the theoretical roots and methodologies that underpin the research field, the main topics, the authors, the point of time and geographical location, as well as publication patterns. Descriptive content analysis is especially useful first for obtaining an overview of the main results reported in the research and secondly, to identify the knowledge gaps in the extant research.

The articles on women in management in the Arab world were searched using the academic journal databases – Emerald, EBSCO and Pro Quest. The research process, which took place in May 2006, can be divided into three stages.

In the initial phase of the literature search, we selected a set of keywords "women", "Middle East", "management" and "careers" in order to conduct an electronic search in the academic databases. At this phase of the process it became clear that relevant articles were not only categorized by such broad keywords; for example, instead of the keyword "Middle East" the name of the specific country where the research took place was often used. Also instead of the very broad term "management", specific themes were identified with keywords like "attitude surveys", "entrepreneurship" or "executives".

The search then continued by looking for articles using references. This was done either manually by sorting through articles in the references lists or by using the cross-reference search engines in the databases.

In the final stage of the filtering process, we read through and carefully selected those articles that described Arab women in management. This was necessary since the majority of the articles did not deal with women in management. For example, several papers looked at such topics as the position of women in society or societal expectations of the role of women in general. Many studies described how governments have

advanced the position of women and were encouraging women to participate in the labour market. Several studies were conducted among students about their career expectations for the future.

As a result of this process, a total of 20 articles about women in management in the Arab world formed the documentary data for the content analysis in this paper (Appendix). The analysis was then carried out partly quantitatively and partly qualitatively. In the quantitative part, the main statistics from these articles will be presented. The qualitative part will present the results from the qualitative content analysis of the main topics of the articles.

Reasearch on women in management in the Arab world
Quantitative content analysis
The articles on women in management in the Arab region analyzed for this paper tended to favour the approach taken by gender reform feminism, viewing women as a research category – 16 out of 20 articles. The majority of the studies here researched male and female respondents and often explored differences in attitudes and perceptions. The method adopted was mostly quantitative, with just three articles out of 16 based on qualitative research methods. This finding is consistent with women in management literature in general, which, it has been argued, is mostly interested in comparisons between women and men (Calàs and Smircich, 1996).

Only three articles favoured gender resistance feminism. The studies here looked more deeply into women's situation and experiences and tried to explain the lower status attributed to women, either at the organizational, cultural or national level. All of the studies used qualitative methodology. A typical feature for this research was that it stressed the importance of women's voice as well as female behaviour in the managerial role.

Just one article followed gender rebellion feminism. It was the paper, "Women, work, and Islam in Arab societies" by Sidani (2005), who presented the different discourses on the status and responsibilities of women, which are deeply rooted in Arab societies.

Regarding the timing of the publications it appeared that, there were very few studies of Arab women in management conducted prior to 2000. Just one article was from the 1980s and six articles from the 1990s – the majority of the research, that is 13 articles, were published 2000 or later. This implies that due to recent trends with more and more women entering the labour market as well as occupying higher positions, there is a growing research interest in Arab women in management.

When the articles were viewed from a geographical viewpoint, the analysis showed that the research tended to focus on specific countries with Egypt, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Lebanon, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman being represented. However, as mentioned earlier that the Arab world consists of 22 countries, the geographical spread of interest in the topic seems to be quite restricted. Research tends to be carried in the wealthier Gulf region and Egypt, with no data available from other Arab countries, for example, the poorer countries in North Africa.

Most women in management literature world-wide is written by female authors; however, it was interesting to see that 11 out of the 20 articles about Arab women in management were written by male authors. This cannot only be explained by asserting that academic research in the Arab region is mostly pursued by male academics,

as education is a field, which is highly favourable for an Arab woman to engage in. Altogether four articles were written by non-Arabs – two male and two female authors.

The articles were published in various academic journals, and the publication sphere was dispersed; that is, that there was mostly one article on this topic per journal with just a few exceptions. Six articles were published in the *Women in Management Review*, and two articles published in the *Journal of Social Sciences*.

Just two articles out of 20 were conceptual/theoretical papers, with others being empirical papers. In terms of methodology, six empirical studies out of 18 favoured qualitative research methods. The qualitative research papers were based on either in-depth or semi-structured interviews. The majority of the publications (i.e. 12 articles) applied quantitative methodology and used questionnaires and international research scales, such as, for example, a scale showing attitudes towards women (Abdalla, 1996).

Descriptive content analysis
Most favourably, the studies on women in management in the Arab world deal with the existence of barriers to careers for women, with eight articles writing on such topics. The second most common theme among the research was attitudes towards women, which was discussed in six articles. The third most common theme was driving forces for success or factors that help women in their advancement, which were reported in five studies. Work-family issues were described in four studies. Reasons for working were reported in three studies and role models in two studies. Together, with other topics, the majority of the research brought out cultural factors that influence Arab women in management. An overview of the research topics will now follow.

Career barriers. In the study of public sector employees in Kuwait, Metle (2002) found that although the position of women has improved, they are still far from achieving equality, especially equality in advancement. Women are recruited to civil service and private positions on an equal pay basis, but none hold decision-making positions such as men hold. Women are prevented from taking key power positions in the Kuwaiti Government sector. Moreover, according to Metle's study, another interpretation relating to women's feelings might be that there is a tacit official understanding that men should be given priority and that women should be discouraged from working wherever men can replace them. Seikaly (1994) found that women are convinced that the general employment policy of the government sector in Bahrain is to block the promotion of women, even when they are better qualified, more thoroughly trained and have more experience than men.

Wilkinson (1996), in a study among the UAE, Oman and Bahraini women in top management positions, found that the challenges faced by those women were overt discrimination at work, cultural taboos, negative attitudes towards working women and lack of confidence and trust in women managers.

Jamali *et al.* (2005) studied constraints facing women managers in Lebanon. The study revealed that, the strongest barriers to career advancement stemmed from cultural expectations and patriarchal attitudes, which emphasize the role of women as mothers and homemakers. It is interesting to note that several women in the study did not object to traditional expectations. Women can aspire and have the potential to reach the highest management positions, but the primary concern and role of a woman should continue to revolve around the family. The other constraints that were reported in the study by

Jamali *et al.* (2005) were of an attitudinal and structural nature stemming from within the corporate environment. Women were perceived as a higher employment risk than their male counterparts. It was commonly assumed that women are less reliable due to their familial responsibilities. In addition, women reported having suffered from negative perceptions of their commitment and professional qualifications. It was reported that women in Lebanon are seen as being submissive and emotional individuals while men are always perceived as being balanced, assertive, aggressive and autonomous. Women were thus not perceived as fit to assume leadership positions in an environment that capitalizes on a masculine leadership prototype. Some women managers reported having to openly confront highly stereotypical attitudes to establish respect and authority in their positions. Ironically, these attitudes stemmed not only from male subordinates and colleagues, but also from women. Aside from cultural and attitudinal barriers, women managers identified numerous constraints of a structural nature, including exclusion from formal and informal networks, the absence of relevant benefits and exclusion from corporate developmental assignments that are used to groom male managers for senior leadership in their companies. Some of the women managers pointed out that not all organizations in Lebanon have cultures that enhance gender interaction; many organizations have a strong masculine culture, which translates more concretely into structural arrangements that isolate and alienate women. An Islamic perspective of gender segregation was also discussed by Metcalfe (2006), who suggested that while segregation policies are not "official", they do place restrictions on deployment and ultimately on training and promotion opportunities for women.

According to Al-Lamki's (1999) research among Omani women, the main obstacles for women managers were limited opportunities to higher education, discriminatory appointment and promotion practices, traditional attitudes of male bosses towards working women, male dominated domain, male resistance to women in management, absence of policies and legislation to ensure participation of women in management positions, a lack of professional networking, a lack of female role models, a lack of professional management development programs, a lack of sufficient number of quality day-care centres, dual responsibilities of traditional and professional roles, balancing traditional and professional roles and family obligations as a wife and a mother for child-bearing and child-rearing. In addition, Al-Lamki (1999) added that in Oman, the absence of human resource policies and strategies to promote the recruitment and development of female managers at work was a deterrent to gender diversity. There were no programs to facilitate the advancement of women as role models, no mentoring programs, a lack of management training programs and active shunning of affirmative action. Al-Lamki (1999) also argued that several women managers in the study reported feeling an inferiority complex towards men in the management cadre as well as facing the conflicting roles of domesticated wife and mother, and that of a professional woman. Similarly, studies by Omar and Davidson (2001) and Kattara (2005) reported that men controlled key networks that have access to the organization's powerhouse and valuable organizational information, and men were more likely to be mentors.

McElwee and Al-Riyami (2003), in their study about women entrepreneurs in Oman, revealed that the majority of women feel there is a lack of networking among businesswomen for exchanging information, discussing issues and seeking advice on common topics. Some of these women have started to form such networks. In addition, support services such as nurseries, kindergartens, vocational training, employment-related

information and access to development loans, which can enhance women's participation in economic activity and increase their contribution to development, are in short supply.

In general, the studies on barriers to women's careers in the Arab world are similar to those that western women face, yet there is also a strong impact from traditional views that place women in an inferior position.

Attitudes towards women who work. Abdalla (1996) studied attitudes towards women in the Arabian Gulf region and found that women are still locked into restrictive traditional roles. The results revealed that there exists a wide gender gap with women having more favourable attitudes towards working women. The results suggested that while Arab women are willing to accept more responsibilities in the political, occupational, educational and social spheres, Arab men are not willing to share these responsibilities with them. The study concluded that, the situation may change in favour of women in the near future, particularly in terms of educational and employment opportunities.

Results reported by Mensch *et al.* (2003) found evidence of extremely strong traditional attitudes about gender roles among Egyptian boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 19. Gender socialization was found to be extremely patriarchal and strongly supportive of traditional family values, with a particular emphasis on women's primacy in the domestic sphere. The constrained economic environment that confronts young Egyptians, coupled with the discrimination faced by young women in the labour market, means that the traditional gender compact that exists in Egypt is unlikely to be seriously challenged for some time.

The same was supported by Mostafa (2003), who investigated Egyptian society's attitudes towards women who work by studying a sample of 217 participants. The results of the study reveal that Egyptian students have very similar attitudes to those held by the older generations about women who work. The fact that no generation gap existed might be due to the increasing rise of religious movements in Egypt.

Abd El-Latif (1988) studied Egyptian societal attitudes towards women managers. The study found a negative attitude towards women in top managerial and leadership positions. The study also found that women occupy only 11 per cent of the top managerial positions in Egyptian organizations. Contrary results were reported by Askar and Ahmad (2003) who studied factors determining attitudes towards women occupying supervisory positions in various organizations in Kuwait as perceived by a sample of 278 participants. The results of the study indicated a relatively positive attitude towards women managers. The sex of the participant was found to be statistically significant in determining attitudes towards women managers with females being more supportive of women in supervisory positions.

Similarly, Mostafa (2005) investigated societal attitudes in the UAE towards women managers on the basis of a sample of 186 participants. The research findings indicated a moderate shift from the expected restrictive traditional attitudes towards women managers in the UAE to a more liberal view. However, a considerable gender gap in attitudes towards women managers persists with females consistently more supportive than males.

In general, studies on attitudes towards women who work showed that in the Arab world the traditional view of women's primary role being in private spheres is evident, but the traditional views are showing some moderate changes towards more liberal views.

Driving forces for success. In interviews with the top ten women managers in the UAE and Bahrain about their work, Wilkinson (1996) concluded that women who have successfully reached top management positions stated that the driving force behind their success included family support, educational opportunities, academic success, job opportunities, determination, inner drive for success, qualities and attributes conducive to successful management, the ability to handle multiple tasks and self-confidence.

In Oman, Al-Lamki (1999) reported the following factors as being behind women manager's success: first and foremost family support from their parents and spouse, determination and inner drive for success, opportunities for access to all levels of education and academic achievement, self-confidence, diligence and perseverance, job opportunities and the potential for professional growth and development.

A study from Oman by McElwee and Al-Riyami (2003) noted that, as women are regarded with great respect in Arab societies, women entrepreneurs may find several advantages. Women get faster services and more assistance from administrative institutions and have to spend less time queuing for government services. Because Oman is a patriarchal society, it is very important for a woman to get family support from a male member or husband in her business. Many of the women who have support from their family or husband agree on the important role of the family in their businesses. Husbands can play an important role in the public arena for these women. McElwee and Al-Riyami (2003) report, that most women consult their families when making business decisions. In addition, some women suggested that relationships and knowing the right people in the right places can help women overcome some of the hurdles in business and facilitate the processes involved, obtaining fairer deals and gaining business opportunities. Oman is a high-context culture, meaning that Omanis have extensive informal networks among families, friends and colleagues and close personal relationships with clients and suppliers to rely on information (McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003).

Results from Saudi Arabia by Alajmi (2001) showed that, the resource that was identified as the most crucial for the leadership development of women was educational opportunities. The second most important factor was family support. Male/female equality at work did not appear to be of much concern to these women because it is already there – equal pay for work. As a resource, mentoring programs was not high among their priorities as it is still a relatively new phenomenon in Saudi Arabia. The highest ranked personal traits identified by respondents as impacting women in leadership positions in Saudi Arabia were energy, self-confidence and independence. They did not rank initiative, taking risks or relationships very highly.

An interesting finding from the analysis was to see how Arab women managers define success. McElwee and Al-Riyami (2003) mentioned that most women entrepreneurs in Oman define success in terms of the reputation of their business and satisfying others, followed by self-satisfaction and finally business growth. A study conducted by Alajmi (2001) found that Saudi women defined success in terms of their children's happiness, self-fulfilment and having the respect of others, and not in terms of wealth or power.

In summary, the studies show that the driving forces for success for Arab women in management are education and the support of their husband and families and that success for Arab women is not defined in terms of financial gains but rather satisfaction, happiness and growth.

Work-life balance. Shah and Al-Qudsi (1990) reported how Kuwaiti women have at least two servants, who relieve them from practically all housework, including the care of their children. Although Arab women get domestic help either in the form of paid servants or relatives, housework and child-care remain their most important responsibilities. For most Kuwaiti women, a combination of family and career is possible only insofar as it does not interfere with one's role as a mother and wife. Similarly, Metcalfe (2006) suggested that organizational policy did not provide for childcare, and a maternity policy was not even considered, as it was expected that women would naturally look after their children.

Different results were reported by Jamali *et al.* (2005), where in the Lebanese context, alternative work arrangements were conspicuously absent. Job sharing, flexitime and childcare support are, to a great extent, virtually non-existent. From Oman, Al-Lamki (1999) reported that Omani women enjoy a wide range of child-care support services. These range from family support to professional services such as affordable housemaids/nannies and child-care centres.

The results of studies on this topic highlighted that the Arab woman's primary role and responsibility was seen as being a good mother and housekeeper. However, abundant wealth has enabled women to use help in their domestic spheres, which allows them to concentrate better in their public lives. Shah and Al-Qudsi (1990) reported that due to more women advancing in career, value orientations concerning age at marriage, fertility control, family size and inter-spouse role relationships may undergo significant modifications.

Reasons for working and role models. McElwee and Al-Riyami (2003) found that for Omani women entrepreneurs, the main reason for starting a business was not economic gain but rather enjoyment, a hobby and to occupy oneself or to utilize one's knowledge and skills. The first reasons for starting a business venture were enjoyment, finance, job dissatisfaction/corporate culture and perceived presence of business, following with to occupy oneself/to utilize knowledge and skills, to make others happy, self-recognition, economic necessity, challenge. The least important were corporate downsizing, family encouragement, ambition and independence. The responsibility that men must support women minimizes women's need to work for wages. It is culturally acceptable and even desirable for a woman to get an education, but still, paid employment for women represents a stigma for her whole family that suggests her husband is unable to support her properly (Metle, 2002).

Similar results were reported by Alajmi (2001) in Saudi Arabia, where the majority of women worked for personal development, and economic gain was the least mentioned reason. This reluctance to admit working primarily for economic gain may suggest an attempt to save face and avoid embarrassing the male head of the household (Alajmi, 2001).

Regarding the topic of role models, a study by Metle (2002) showed that, the Kuwaiti women are severely limited in their circle of friends, especially at work where their relationships are mostly confined to other women with similarly limited work experience. Also at home, the traditional Arab wife does not attempt to impose her work problems or tensions on her family members, especially her spouse, and tends to suffer in silence and solitude. Hence, social support for women is likely to come only from family members and female friends at work (Metle, 2002). Women's role models were therefore family members – male and female – the majority of whom were

involved in the business. However, women acknowledged a lack of female role models in Oman (McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003).

Cultural factors affecting women's working lives. Hammoud (1993) wrote that, 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. The conservatism and the invoking of tradition and religion in the Arab countries affect the view women have of themselves. The traditional role of Muslim women is a source of conflict for the more aware, educated women, trying to balance the modern world and a traditionally conservative social background (Metle, 2002). Modernization has assisted development in economic and social spheres all over the Arab world. However, these countries only accepted changes consistent with their Arab and Islamic traditions and rejected most if not all that contradicted them (Abdalla, 1996). Family in the Muslim countries permeates society upward and outward, personalizing different societal institutions in a way not found in the west (Alajmi, 2001). For Arabs, the family lies at the core of society playing a major role in political, economic, social and religious spheres. People are conscious of each other's family memberships, identities and status. Family links facilitate access to institutions, jobs and government services (McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003).

Arab societies seem to be reluctant to abandon their traditional viewpoint of women primarily committed to the house and children (Al-Dhafiri, 1987; Neal *et al.*, 2005; Al-Lamki, 1999; Mostafa, 2005) and most Arab families educate their sons rather than their daughters on the assumption that boys are a greater economic asset than girls (El-Ghannam, 2001, 2002). Gender socialization is extremely patriarchal and strongly supportive of traditional family values (Mensch *et al.*, 2003) and girls are socialized from their early years to acquire a domestic role that fits their expected gender roles (Alajmi, 2001). The men's traditional stance and the many rules and regulations surrounding women, may lead to fewer opportunities for utilizing a potential native female workforce. Arabic traditions and values date back to the pre-oil era, when Bedouin values considered family honour to be dependent on female chastity (Abdalla, 1996).

The cultures and customs of these countries, such as the tribal honour system prevailing on the Arabian Peninsula prior to Islam, have contributed to the conservative orientation towards women in Islam (Alajmi, 2001). However, Islam is also a social order and a way of life that aims at producing a unique personality and a distinct culture for society (Metle, 2002). No Arab country has introduced secular laws of personal status to replace the laws based on Islam. Where secular laws have been formally established, they cannot be enforced when they come against deeply rooted customs and traditions (Alajmi, 2001).

Smith (1980) argued that, in many cases one must recognize that Islam is not to be understood as a religion *per se*, but rather as the dominant identifying factor in a complex cultural milieu. Therefore, Islam cannot be separated from the culture of the people of the Middle East. Al-Hibri (1982) suggested distinguishing between Islam, Islamic tradition and culture. The purpose of this distinction is not to ease the confusion in the conceptualization of Islam, but rather to facilitate an understanding of the line between patriarchy and Islam. Several writers seem to agree that, the existing gender inequality is not due to Islam, but to a patriarchal interpretation of Islam (Metle, 2002; Kausar, 1995; Khattab, 1996). Moreover, it is important to note that it is not so much the religion, but the interpretation of Islamic doctrines that has the most

significant effect on its followers. Consequently, women are ill informed regarding their rights under Islamic Shari'a and other laws of the state (McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003). In many circumstances, Islamic materials, like all religious texts and teachings, contain some ambiguities and lend themselves to widely different interpretations and judgments (Roded, 1999).

Compared to the pre-Islamic era, Islam gave women equal rights with men to participate in social and religious activities. However, because most Arab cultures are patriarchal, a substantial segment of the various Arab societies have, in fact, subjugated women, placing them in a subservient role at work and in the family (Alajmi, 2001). In reality, local traditions and social trends were responsible for the various interpretations of Islamic law, and in most cases those patriarchal interpretations were to the detriment of women (Shaaban, 1988). Other scholars have stated that Islamic interpretations serve the patriarchal tribal ideals, which hold that the honour of the men and their family rest on the sexual purity of their women (Shaarawi, 1986). Therefore, researchers believe that it is not Islam as such that places women in subservient roles, but rather how the patriarchal societies interpret Islam to support their positions regarding what is and what is not acceptable behaviour for women (Alajmi, 2001). However, one must bear in mind that all Islamic laws pertaining to the subjugation of women were male interpretations of Islamic texts (Shaaban, 1988).

Islam does not forbid women from seeking an education or from pursuing work. On the contrary, Islam encourages women to be educated, work, own property and engage in business (Al-Lamki, 1999). If, however, the women are capable of contributing positively to society or at work while remaining within Islamic boundaries, Islam does not discourage nor does it forbid women from seeking employment even in positions of authority (Kausar, 1995). In fact, some have suggested that women who can make a difference in society must work, as making the society better off is regarded as an obligation for all Muslims (Kausar, 1995; Khattab, 1996).

However, there are many indications that the situation may change in favour of women in the near future, particularly in terms of educational and employment opportunities. One of the main factors that might enhance opportunities for women is the scarcity of a local male labour force in the region (Abdalla, 1996). Evidence that Arab culture is submitting to modernization is substantiated in a number of studies (Mostafa, 2003). With the passing of time and especially through the effects of equal education, it is likely that tradition will have diminishing weight against the forces of modernization, and the quantitative as well as qualitative input of women in the economy will rise (Al-Dhafiri, 1987).

In most studies, there have been only a few women that have not accepted these pre assigned roles and have fought hard to change their status. However, the majority of women have accepted their assigned roles, and have managed to carve out their own place of power and influence. Many of these women believe that Arab feminism is a subtle but powerful movement geared to operate within specific cultural boundaries that have been influenced by the history and socioeconomic circumstances of each nation (Alajmi, 2001).

Conclusions and discussion
The labour market in the Arab region has witnessed major changes during the last few decades, with women taking more responsibility in public spheres and occupying

higher positions in organizations. There is thus a growing need to research Arab women in management. This paper set out to provide an overview of the research that has studied women in management in Arab countries.

The quantitative and descriptive content analysis on the studies in this paper showed that, the majority of the research on women managers in the Arab world tended to concentrate on a few very broad topics, without much diversity or depth. What was particularly interesting was that the studies did not attempt to equalize women with men, but rather explained the societal norms that are responsible for women's position in public or private spheres. The studies analysed only very modestly proposed alternative thinking or cultural discourses that support women's advancement in management. Moreover, the research tended to provide overall pictures or statistical analysis without really providing any kind of voice to women managers themselves, neither were the topics of female advantage or women's approach to managing discussed.

To conclude, the research results analysed in this paper seem to have adopted a primarily traditional gender reform feminism perspective, viewing gender as a variable and considering women as a research category (Calàs and Smircich, 1996). Although this kind of research makes an important contribution to the literature, its crucial limitation is that it involves a rather simplistic idea of gender (Alvesson and Billing, 1997; Kark, 2004). The author suggests, due to the scarcity of studies about the topic in general, that there is an urgent need for more research on women and management in the Arab world. However, there is an even more urgent need for studies dealing with topics by applying a more complex understanding of gender. Studies that bring forth the experiences of women managers themselves would be especially fruitful. For example, it would be interesting and necessary to investigate how women themselves in the Arab world socially construct their managerial careers and topics in relation to career.

The analysis showed that, the majority of research has been published from 2000 onwards and methodologically quantitative research methods were preferred. The themes covered in the research are mostly limited to attitudes, career barriers and supporting factors. What all the papers agree upon is the influence of Arab cultural and societal norms on women's career advancement. The Arab societies are still regarded as highly patriarchal with clear gender-role differences. It is interesting to note that while women's education from primary to tertiary level is highly appreciated, the women's primary role in the society is still expected to be limited to domestic activities in the private sphere. Several researched articles indicate that there may be changes in favour of women in the future due to modernization, yet others argue that the return of fundamental views in Arab societies currently prevails. The author suggests that, it is crucial to study the family-work relationship in Arab culture in much more detail to clarify this topic.

Future research on women in management in Arab societies should include the impact of culture and tradition. However, it would also be worth doing cross-cultural studies within the Arab region to identify similarities or differences in the experience of women in order to avoid viewing the region as a homogenous unit. Future researchers may also study the relationship between masculinity and hostile sexism in the Arab region and whether there is evidence of acculturation and accommodation of new cultural patterns in Arab societies. Also, the author suggests that it is worth studying the importance of Islam in women's careers and whether religion might not be a good

proxy for the negative attitudes towards women's advancement. It would also be interesting to study the dynamics of the rising fundamentalism in some of the Arab societies together with growing female empowerment and advancement.

Note

1. The Arab region comprises 22 countries and territories, namely: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Comoros, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, UAE and Yemen.

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Further reading

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Appendix. List of analyzed articles

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ARTICLE

II

TYPOLOGY OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT FOR ARAB WOMEN MANAGERS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

by

Omair, Katlin 2010

Typology of career development for Arab women managers in the United Arab Emirates

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to explore how women managers in the United Arab Emirates account for and construct their career development.

Design/methodology/approach – A narrative approach is adopted for analyzing in-depth interviews with 15 women managers in the United Arab Emirates.

Findings – The study produced a typology distinguishing four types of career development among women managers in the United Arab Emirates: progressive, moderate, facilitated and idealistic. The results suggest that social status and family connections can play a significant role in women's career development.

Originality/value – The value of this paper is two-fold. First, it contributes to the previously under-researched topic of the careers of Arab women managers. Second, it emphasizes the importance of societal context when studying women's careers in the Middle East.

Keywords Women, Managers, Career development, Middle East, United Arab Emirates

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The centrality of work and careers to our lives is a well-established and widely accepted theme in the contemporary careers literature. Within this literature, career has been variously defined as a life-long process of work-related activities (Hall, 2002) evolving within the context of one or two organizations and progressing in series of linear stages (Super, 1957). However, this traditional concept of career has triggered several points of criticism primarily for its overly narrow focus where early career studies were based on the careers of white, middle class men (e.g. Levinson *et al.*, 1978; Super, 1957; Schein, 1978). Furthermore, there is no doubt that careers in organizations have undergone a profound transformation in recent decades as organizations have reformed and reshaped, culling layers of the management hierarchy, rethinking employment contracts and revising what they are prepared to offer their staff in terms of career management and development (Sturges, 1999). From the viewpoint of an individual, alterations in the employment relationship have paved the way for careers that emphasize dynamism, multi-directionality and flexibility as well as life-long employability and marketability. From an organizational point of view this means moving from providing careers consisting of secure employment for all, to providing opportunities for competence development (Baruch, 2004).

An increasing number of careers researchers are using metaphors to describe contemporary career patterns. Indeed, some researchers have suggested that

metaphorical analysis helps to provide special vividness, reinforcing meanings and clarifying trajectories of development (Inkson, 2006). Handy (1989), for example, proposed that future careers would be portfolio adventures where, rather than pursuing a single full-time job, individuals would cultivate ever-changing portfolios of different opportunities. Arthur and Rousseau (1996) used the idea of the boundaryless career, broadly described as being the opposite of the organizational career, and characterized by mobility across organizations and employers, having transferable skills and being sustained by external networks. In this career form the boundaries of traditional organizational careers become more blurred and patterns of paid work may be interrupted for family or personal reasons. While the boundaryless career refers to physical and/or psychological mobility, the protean career as espoused by Hall (1996, 2002) suggests a more holistic approach to careers: looking at work in the context of a person's life as a whole. The primary focus here is on the notion of value driven and self-directed career management based on individually defined goals and driven by psychological success rather than objective success such as pay, rank, or power.

While boundaryless and protean careers are seen as a welcome alternative to traditional career theories, Briscoe and Hall (2006) state that both of these career metaphors play out very differently in non-Western and non-Anglo cultures, as each of these metaphors speaks to agency, individualism, and opportunity, which are as much cultural values as they are objective possibilities. This view is supported by Pringle and Mallon (2003), who argue that social structures such as national context, gender and ethnicity are not given sufficient credence in much of the contemporary careers literature.

Traditional career theory, with its focus on organizational careers, has also been criticized for viewing careers almost exclusively from a gender-neutral position. Bearing in mind women's increasing economic participation and their contribution to national economies worldwide, this is highly problematic not only from a societal perspective, but also from the perspective of the individual. Indeed, it seems entirely problematic that women's values, attitudes, contexts and life experiences are not incorporated into our understanding of careers (see, e.g. Lämsä and Hiillos, 2008). While there is a growing body of research on women's careers, it has focused largely on either the barriers women are facing in career advancement (e.g. Kottke and Agars, 2005; Gregory, 2001) or how they balance their work and non-work responsibilities (e.g. Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005; Greenhaus and Foley, 2007). These theoretical and empirical advances notwithstanding, although there appears to be widespread agreement that women's careers are complex and multi-dimensional, (O'Neil *et al.*, 2008), the traditional male career model remains the normative standard for judging career progress in organizations (Mavin, 2001).

Yet, the traditional male career model does not capture the wide diversity of career forms and experiences, nor does it capture the innumerable approaches and outcomes that different women may value in different contexts (Duberley *et al.*, 2006). Consequently, there have been calls for the adoption of a wider range of approaches to allow for more dynamic, process-based and critical analyses that take into account the temporality and context of women's careers (Collin, 1998; Young and Collin, 2004). Therefore, in order to better understand women's careers, we should incorporate not only person-centered variables such as women's developmental psychology, family

responsibilities and broader life events, but also the external, social and cultural factors that influence women's careers.

This paper seeks to contribute to the existing literature on women's careers by examining the career experiences of Arab women managers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). As Emirati women have increasingly taken greater responsibilities in the public sphere and reached higher positions in organizations, there is a growing need to study their career development. The paper begins with an overview of the literature on women's career development, and then explores the contextual factors that have influenced women's careers in the Arab region. Next, a typology of Emirati women managers' career development is presented followed by a summary of the results of the study and their implications for future research.

Women's career development

Career development is typically defined as an on-going series of stages characterized by unique concerns, themes and tasks (Greenhaus *et al.*, 2000). A common underlying assumption behind these stage models of career development is that there is a series of predictable tasks that happen at more or less predictable times during the course of a career (O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005). However, the surge of women into the workforce during the last decades of the twentieth century and their rising to higher positions in organizations, suggest a need for a career development theory that explicitly addresses the lives and experiences of women. This need is supported by contemporary arguments that women's careers progress differently to men's as a result of the developmental differences in men and women (Gallos, 1989) as well as organizational and societal factors (Betz, 1993; Ragins *et al.*, 1998). For example, in the United Arab Emirates, the context of this study, women's economic participation has increased from a mere 5.4 per cent in 1995 to 27.9 per cent in 2008 (UAE, 2008). Their late entry into the labor market in the UAE is attributable to the specific socio-cultural context of that country, which continues to influence women's career development throughout their working lives.

Differential expectations about the roles of men and women are a common feature of most, if not all, societies. In the UAE, for example, there are widespread assumptions that a woman's primary role is her commitment to the house and children, whereas a man's primary role is to be the breadwinner for the family (Neal *et al.*, 2005; Mostafa, 2005). According to social role theory, the differential social roles inhabited by women and men will contribute to the division of labor (Eagly *et al.*, 2000). Women's worlds are thought to include a particular type of labor, namely care for others and maintenance of relationships, whereas men's worlds are characterized by individual thought, independent achievement and success based on competition and hierarchy (Maier, 1997). These expectations produce gendered stereotypes which are, in turn, used to support the traditional sex roles. Put another way, they reflect cognitive beliefs about differences between masculinity and femininity that the members of a particular culture share (Best, 2004).

In the UAE women face more constraints in the workplace than their male colleagues, primarily because of the use of gender stereotypes in decisions to do with hiring, promotion and in performance-evaluations (Rhode and Kellerman, 2007). Assumptions about men having superior capabilities for leadership (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Schein, 2001) may also have a significant effect on women's

opportunities for career development. Conceptions of a "glass ceiling" for women suggest that compared to men, women are less likely to reach the top levels of organizations (Lyness and Thompson, 2000). Furthermore, it is worth mentioning here that women managers regularly earn lower incomes than their male counterparts (Kirchmeyer, 2002; Stroh *et al.*, 1992). While male managers define success in terms of objective measures, such as salary or position, women managers have appeared to define success in terms of factors such as personal and professional satisfaction and a sense of growth and development (Powell and Mainiero, 1992). A large proportion of the contemporary literature on women's careers also suggests that women encounter conflict between their work and family roles (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005; White, 1995), and that they are often forced to choose between upward career mobility or family stability, or even having a family at all (Mavin, 2001). Therefore, it is fair to say that, compared to men; women's career development may proceed in a very different manner as a result of their broader life contexts.

A number of women's career development theories focus specifically on the experiences of women and accommodating broader life contexts. Lepine (1992), for example, identified seven career patterns for women managers – fast track, linear, lateral plus, lateral, downward, transitory and static. Richardson (1996) used the metaphor of snake-like careers for describing the more fluid career paths of women in her sample compared to the linear ladder-like career paths of their male colleagues. Gersick and Kram (2002) found that women in their sample followed zigzag careers paths that followed opportunities as they arose. Eagly and Carli (2007) described women's careers as a complex labyrinth of issues and challenges that women need to navigate on their way to leadership positions. They cite both the obscure and obvious challenges women face such as gender discrimination, stereotypes, balancing family responsibilities with career, building social capital and professional relationships through networking as well as organizational structures rooted in traditional ideas about the division of labor. Several other studies have also explored the influence of family responsibilities and societal, organizational and personal factors on women's career outcomes (e.g. Powell and Mainiero, 1992; White, 1995). In general, therefore, we observe that research on women's careers suggests that their career development tends to be non-linear, multidirectional, and inclusive of a diverse range of experiences from a broad range of life contexts.

Given the external, social, cultural and ever-changing contextual factors that influence women's career development, some authors have questioned whether it is possible to describe women's career development through a single model. Echoing arguments presented by several authors (Budhwar and Baruch, 2003; Tu *et al.*, 2006; Pringle and Mallon, 2003) this study addresses the importance of the societal context in the study of careers and women's careers more specifically. In doing so it incorporates a social constructionist framework, which underlines the socially and culturally embedded nature of careers. More specifically, it suggests that certain contexts can implicitly or explicitly restrict women's efforts to seek out career alternatives that are less traditional (Stead, 2004).

Arab women in management
The United Arab Emirates is one of several oil-rich Gulf countries that have undergone profound economic and social change during recent decades. Yet, despite the boom

provided by an oil dominated economy, the supply and demand for female labor has remained limited and strongly reinforced by a "patriarchal contract" (Moghadam, 2005). Indeed, in 2003 it was reported that a very modest 29 per cent of Arab women were participating in the national economies of the Arab region (UNDP, 2003), although the change in the percentage of female labor participation overall for the Middle East and North Africa regions between 1960 and 2000 was 47 per cent (World Bank, 2003). Some authors see the role of culture and religion in the area – Islam and patriarchal interpretations of Islam – as a reason for women's limited participation in the labour market (El-Saadawi, 1997; Mernissi, 1991). Others refer to traditional beliefs that the family should provide for their daughters and wives, and that women entering the labor market brings shame on families because it infers that they are unable to provide for their female family members.

Within Islam, men and women are understood to be equal, but not the same. Moreover, they are seen as complementary with important roles defined to each based on their perceived strengths and weaknesses (Hashim, 1999). The culturally assigned roles for women as caregivers and homemakers and for men as leaders and breadwinners can also be seen in organizational hierarchies, where women are excluded from top managerial positions. Mernissi (1991), for example, has suggested that the reason for women's exclusion from leadership and management roles may lie in the *Hadith* (teaching of the Prophet Mohammad), which suggests that "Those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity". There is, however, a lack of consensus among Islamic scholars as to whether the *Hadith* provides enough evidence for barring women from leadership positions. Nevertheless, as Metle (2002) suggests, there is a tacit official understanding that men should be given priority for promotion to leadership positions and that women should be discouraged from working if a man is available to fill the respective position.

Abdalla (1996) studied attitudes towards women in the Gulf Arab region and found that while Arab women are willing to accept more responsibilities in the political, occupational, educational and social sphere, Arab men are not willing to share these responsibilities with them. In a study of public sector employees, Metle (2002) found that although women's position in the employment market has improved, they are still far from achieving equitable opportunities for career advancement. In their study of women managers in Lebanon, Jamali *et al.* (2005) also found that the strongest barriers for career advancement derive from cultural expectations and patriarchal attitudes, which emphasize the role of women as mothers and homemakers. Furthermore, they suggested that while women may aspire to and have the potential to reach the highest management positions, their primary concerns and roles should revolve around the family. The same study also suggests that in recruitment and promotion decisions, preference is given to men, as women are perceived as a higher employment risk due to their familial responsibilities, which are seen as being their primary concern.

According to Al-Lamki's (1999) research on Omani women, the main obstacles for women managers are male resistance to women in management, absence of policies and legislation to ensure participation of women in management positions and a lack of professional networking and female role models. Wilkinson (1996), in a study of Emirati, Omani and Bahraini women in top management positions, found that women faced challenges from overt discrimination at work, cultural taboos and lack of confidence and trust in their ability to manage. Furthermore, gender segregation also

requires sex-segregated workplaces. Thus, while segregation policies are not "official", they do place restrictions on the deployment and ultimately on training and promotion opportunities for women (Metcalfe, 2006).

Despite the discrimination, cultural and organizational barriers women managers face in the some parts of the Arab region, there are several driving forces behind women's success in obtaining top management positions. Family and especially spousal support and influence can play an important role in the public arena for some women (Al-Lamki, 1999; Wilkinson, 1996). In their study of women entrepreneurs in Oman, for example, McElwee and Al-Riyami (2003) reported that most women consult their families when making business decisions. In addition, some women suggested that relationships and knowing the right people in the right place can help to overcome some of the hurdles that they might otherwise encounter in developing their careers. Such networks were also understood to facilitate getting fairer deals and gaining business opportunities.

A further study conducted by Alajmi (2001) found that Saudi Arabian women define success in terms of their children's happiness, self-fulfillment and having the respect of others, rather than in terms of wealth or power. Similarly, McElwee and Al-Riyami (2003) suggested that most women entrepreneurs in Oman define success in terms of the reputation of their business and satisfying others, followed by self-satisfaction and finally business growth. The results from both of these studies echo the findings of studies on women's success criteria in the Western context (see, e.g. Powell and Mainiero, 1992) where women are more concerned with how they feel about their careers (defined subjectively in terms of an individuals' own interpretation of their careers, thus reflecting the internal or subjective career) than what their careers actually look like to external observers (measured objectively by promotions, salary etc).

In the Gulf Arab region, women's increasing participation in the labor market and rise to higher positions in organizations has also been attributed to politically led nationalization strategies designed to encourage and support the employment of nationals in preference to expatriates. Rees *et al.* (2007) have reported that in the UAE employers may be asked to make a choice between investing in the recruitment and development of a UAE national employee and paying a levy for employing a fully trained and experienced expatriate. For national women, nationalization of the labour market provides privilege in recruitment and selection, education and training, career development and remuneration. However, Harry (2007) points out that the bias against women in the labor markets may continue to hamper women's participation and it can be expected that such bias will become even stronger when they must compete with male citizens seeking to enter the labor market.

Despite arguments that Arab societies can be treated as one entity (e.g. Muna, 1980), in this paper, the author acknowledges that the religious and socio-cultural background of Emirati women is unique and different from other Arab countries. Emiratis are relatively uniform in terms of ethnicity and predominantly practice the austere Wahabi interpretation of Islam (Masoud, 1999). Wahabis tend to take the strongest and most conservative stand when interpreting religious texts about the role of women. Despite the conservative religious doctrine that exists in the UAE, however, the government has been promoting education and work for women for the past decade. Nationalization policies are a good example of this initiative. Furthermore,

Emirati women are exposed to the different cultures that expatriates bring to the country, as well as interacting in a business environment that is increasingly multi-cultural. Therefore, the work milieu for Emirati women can be fairly accurately understood as taking a traditional religious stand within a modern multi-cultural business environment.

Methodology

As a starting point, this study follows Cohen *et al.* (2004) in arguing that social constructionism is a welcome alternative approach to the study of careers due to its incorporation of themes relating to the social context within which careers evolve. Social constructionism sees the social world not as a fixed entity, but as constructed by individuals and groups through their social practices. In career studies, social constructionism encourages us to acknowledge the relationship between career and social order and how context and social order influence the construction of career. From the constructionist perspective, career development is not conceptualized as a form or structure that an individual temporarily inhabits, rather it is constituted by the actor her or himself, in interaction with others, as she/he moves in time and space (Cohen *et al.*, 2004).

In the quest to see how women managers in the UAE understand and account for their career development, a narrative approach is adopted in this study (Bruner, 1985, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1995) because it allows for a more holistic view of the socially and culturally embedded nature of careers. Despite growing interest in the narrative approach in organizational studies, however, only a few narrative-based studies have been published in the career field (e.g. Cohen, 2006; Cohen *et al.*, 2004; Cohen and Mallon, 2001; Mallon and Cohen, 2001; Marshall, 1995). A narrative approach in career studies is less concerned with the facts about careers as with individual career actors' interpretation and meaning making, framed by cultural norms and understandings. The narrative perspective adopted in this study provides us with an understanding of how women managers perceive and account for their career development in their particular societal context.

Research context

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), the context of this study, is an oil-producing state and a member of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), along with Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. From the 1970s onwards, it has seen phenomenal political, economic and social changes due to the substantial investments in a number of economic activities made through the production and export of oil products (Rees *et al.*, 2007). It has an open economy with an annual GDP growth rate of 13.2 per cent making it one of the fastest growing economies in the world (UAE, 2007). While the population of the UAE is estimated at five million people, the percentage of expatriates has been estimated to be as high as 90 per cent (Harry, 2007). Most UAE nationals, known as Emiratis, seek employment opportunities in the public sector due to the higher salaries, greater benefits, shorter working hours and job security. However, the official UAE, 2005 Yearbook (UAE, 2005) states that the employment of nationals in the public sector has reached "saturation point". It also highlights the fact that Emirati nationals represent only 2 per cent of the total workforce in the private sector at a time when private sector employment accounts for 52 per cent of all jobs. In

order to increase the employment of Emirati nationals and reduce the dependence on expatriates, the Emirati government has established nationalization (Emiratization) policies. Yet, compulsory hiring of nationals has been limited to sectors such as banking (which has a 4 per cent quota), insurance (5 per cent and trade (2 per cent for companies employing 50 workers or more). In 2006, the government added Emiratization requirements that all secretaries and PR officers must also be Emirati nationals (Business Monitor International, 2008).

The contribution of Emirati women to economic activity has increased from a mere 5.4 per cent in 1995 to 27.9 per cent in 2008. The unemployment rate among women nationals has most recently reached a high of 19.7 per cent, compared to 8.2 per cent for males, despite the fact that women graduates greatly outnumber male graduates (UAE, 2007). Females constitute 66 per cent of the workforce in the government sector, of which 30 per cent are in decision-making leadership positions. In particular, Emirati women comprise over 40 per cent of all employees in education, at least 35 per cent work in the health sector and approximately 20 per cent in social affairs (UAE, 2007).

Sample
The study was initiated to explore how Emirati women managers construct a narrative of their career development. For this purpose, an interview-based qualitative approach was adopted, which offers the opportunity for interviewees to express their thoughts and experiences in their own words. In-depth interviews with 15 Emirati women in managerial positions in various industries were conducted in January 2007.

A mixed sampling strategy was used, incorporating both purposive and snowball approaches (Bryman, 2004). The specific aim was to generate a heterogeneous sample of Emirati women managers representing different groups in the social hierarchy. The position of the family and the family tribe form the basis for social stratification among Emiratis. A high social status is, therefore, acquired by birth rather than through individual achievement (Hurreiz, 2002). Emiratis belong to four main classes: the ruling sheikh families, who have immense wealth and political and social power; the business class families, who own groups of companies in the main industries; middle class families, including state-educated professionals with moderate income; and lower-income families including former oasis farmers or seamen who either continue to carry on their family's traditional occupation or seek lower level employment with government institutions, the police or army. The ruling families are the families of the monarchies of the seven emirates that form the federation of the UAE. Ruling family members and their extended family hold the title Sheikh (for a man) and Sheikha (for a woman). Although the general population is considered the wealthiest in the world, there are wide gaps both in earnings, life-style, career opportunities and influence/connections between different family-groups. Influence/connections or *wasta*, as discussed by several authors (e.g. Neal *et al.*, 2005, Harry, 2007) is central to business activities in the UAE. *Wasta*, as Metcalfe (2007) explains, relates to the recognition that power in society is related to tribal and familial structures, and that working relations in the Arab world are facilitated by recognizing how to move within relevant power networks. Furthermore, the upper class and business class families tend to be more supportive of women's economic participation and careers than middle or lower class families who support more traditional gender roles.

All of the 15 women participating in the study held professional positions in their organizations: seven women held middle managerial and eight held top managerial positions. Out of 15 women managers, four worked for government institutions, three in banking and finance, three in education and the rest in various, mostly Arab-owned, private organizations. All interview participants had higher education qualifications with five holding master degrees and ten had bachelor degrees either from their home country or abroad. Interviewees ranged between 24 and 45 years of age, with a mean age of 33 years, 12 were married and three were either single or engaged. All married women had 2-5 children born in the early years of their marriage. The average age of their children was 12 years.

Data collection and analysis
The interviews were conducted face to face in settings comfortable for the participants, either in their offices, private homes or local cafes. As all interviewees were assured of anonymity, all quoted excerpts given later in this paper are marked with a pseudonym. With the participants' permission, the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. First the purpose of the study was explained to the participants and they were encouraged to speak about their career development from their own perspective. An agenda of open-ended questions explored career choice, changes and turning points in their careers as well as factors that they felt had facilitated or hindered their overall career development.

Data analysis was conducted using the MAXQDA computer software. First, the data was read several times in order to gain familiarity with it, allowing an overall picture of the data to be built up. The career stories that emerged in each interview were then constructed based on a structural narrative analysis as presented by Labov and Waletzky (1967). With the help of MAXQDA, the career development stories were further analyzed using the codes "barriers" and "family help". The analysis produced a typology of four categories of career development: "progressive career", "moderate career", "facilitated career" and "idealistic career".

Empirical findings and analysis
Progressive career
Five women managers were located in this group – four worked for private businesses and one for a public educational institute. All five typically belonged to middle class families with moderate income and connections. The occupational background of the male members of their families was employment in the military, police or government owned businesses or government offices.

These women described their careers as comprising steady progress from lower positions to higher positions, reaching either middle or top managerial levels. This type of career development reflects the linear career development common in the mainstream career development literature (e.g. Levinson *et al.*, 1978; Super, 1957). However, while the linear career development typically takes place within one or two organizations, the women in this group reported that their progress to higher positions had not developed through promotions within one company, but through deliberately moving between organizations. Therefore, this type of career reflects characteristics of the boundaryless career concept, as these women have engaged in mobility between employers in order to advance their careers. More specifically, they also suggested that

if they had stayed within one organization career advancement would have been more difficult if not altogether impossible. For example, Noora, a top manager in the private sector, explained:

> I have reached higher positions when I have changed company. There is no point in staying in your company when you realize that the opportunities for growth are limited.

All five women said they consulted or informed their families about their career choice and progress, but admitted that family connections or influence had played little or no role in providing them with employment opportunities that would advance their careers. The family's role here was seen as providing moral and emotional support to inspire confidence and encouragement to the women in their professional work. For example, Noora explained:

> I often discuss my work with my family especially with my father. He always tells me to make my dreams come true. He gives me a lot of confidence.

Discussions about the barriers to women's advancement suggested that these women encountered male prejudice, which hindered their career advancement. The lack of *wasta* and family connections, however, was understood as an impediment to employment opportunities and/or career advancement. Therefore, these women had to devise other strategies to support their careers. One of the most common strategies was engaging in interorganizational mobility. Thus, for example, Hanan, a middle manager in the private sector spoke of the advantages of moving between organizations:

> It seems that it's typical that people change company if they want to get a promotion. Especially for women, it is very difficult to get promoted, but it is easier to apply for higher positions and get them.

These women also indicated that the nationalization programs had worked to benefit their careers because they encouraged businesses to fill their quotas with Emirati women, who were also seen as less demanding with regard to salaries than Emirati men, as suggested by Hanan, below:

> Everybody needs to hire locals, and local men want a much higher salary than women, so they take women. There are plenty of jobs available for us but the question is whether they are also good and respectable places to work.

One of the strategies these women said they used was to seek employment in organizations that would provide challenging opportunities and where women's leadership would be appreciated. Rola, a top manager in an IT-company, was particularly sensitive to the need to find an organization which was supportive of women's participation in the labour market:

> I only apply for jobs in organizations that I know have a culture that supports women. It is really one of the most important things when you want to make a career.

Some participants in this group also found that barriers to advancement can be overcome by persistence and hard work. Fatimah, a top manager in the education sector described her strategy as "excelling" to encourage dependence from her male colleagues:

> One way to beat the barriers is to excel in one's work and gradually make the male colleagues
> depend on you. Then they will notice you, need you and eventually they have to promote you.

The themes reported by this group suggest that the lack of *wasta* or family connections
that would otherwise provide them with career opportunities encourages them to take
charge of their career development by changing employers, often with the help of the
nationalization program, or by seeking work in organizations which are supportive of
women's careers and offer dynamic opportunities to pursue a career; or by persistence
and hard work which eventually leads to visibility and promotion.

The moderate career
Five of the women who took part in the study reflected the "moderate" type of career –
three worked for government institutions, one for a government-funded bank and one
for a private bank. Most of these women belonged to middle class families; however,
their families were more traditional or religious than those in the "progressive" group.
In this group the career development for women managers was described as long-term
progress that had begun from administrative or assistant levels in organizations and
gradually progressed to middle managerial positions. However, a common theme here
was that progress to top managerial positions was either not experienced at all or
undesirable. To that extent it is the lack of progress which distinguishes it from the
"progressive career" type described above.

Some of the women managers in this group explained that they had applied for
promotion after working hard for it, but male candidates had always been favored and
they had given up applying for top managerial positions. There was widespread belief
that they could not overcome the attitudinal and cultural barriers that had thus far
hindered their advancement. Therefore, they had given up on the idea of career
advancement to more senior levels. Some also suggested that they did not find top
managerial positions desirable because "top management" was occupied by men and
therefore it was not a suitable place for a woman. Mariam, a middle manager in the
public sector provides a good example of this view:

> This is a patriarchal culture and here it is men who lead women, not the other way around.

The results presented here support Mernissi's (1991) contention that patriarchal norms
inhibit women's advancement to leadership positions. Here the patriarchal norms
inhibit women's advancement in two ways: first, by blocking career advancement and
second by creating feelings of discomfort or intimidation in women, which result in a
lack of desire to reach leadership positions. Three women in this category worked in
segregated offices, whereas all other participants in this study worked in "mixed" work
places. In the context of the UAE, this meant that some departments (e.g. human
resources) or branches (often in government offices or banks) in an organization had
only female employees even though the headquarters of the organization was "mixed".
Women in this group said that they did not want to reach leadership positions as it
would mean that they would have to interact with male colleagues. They also noted
that their families might not approve of their having increased interaction with male
colleagues. Rowda, a middle manager in banking, was clearly uncomfortable with the
idea of interacting with men as part of her daily work life:

> I wouldn't feel comfortable to be almost the only woman working with men; this is not what I
> want, and my family wouldn't want it either.

One of the most important factors for women managers in this group when choosing a job was that the job was "proper" for a woman and in accordance with their religious teachings which stipulate that a woman should retain her chastity in a safe environment. These accounts also suggested that it is important that their job allows them sufficient time and energy for their family responsibilities. They also described how jobs in government institutions or the banking sector were particularly appealing for them as the working hours were short and the workload relatively low. Mouza, a middle manager in the banking sector, was particularly appreciative of shorter workers hours in order to cater to the needs of her family:

> I love my job as the working hours are short and I have enough time for my kids and family, which is most important.

A similar idea was expressed by Mona, a middle manager in the public sector:

> Government jobs are good jobs for women. There is not so much work and we can go home at one o'clock.

Women managers in this group described how they had had several shorter or longer breaks in their careers due to family responsibilities; however, the majority had returned to the same organizations – only a few had changed organizations, but without rising to a higher position. Basma, a middle manager in a government office, explained:

> I have three children and with my two older children I stayed at home for three years and with my younger child for a year. I was always able to get my job back when I returned. My work place has been really good to me.

When asked about opportunities to progress in her career, Basma replied:

> To me it is more important to have good relationships with colleagues and enjoy my work than to struggle hard for promotions.

Accounts reflecting the influence of the family on women's careers showed that as in the "progressive career" type, women managers in this category have not received any concrete opportunities from their families that would help them progress in their careers. However, they did consult their families and discuss their work with them, especially with regard to finding employment which would allow them to combine work and family responsibilities.

Unlike the "progressive career" type, women in this group have not been able to advance to higher positions in organizations, either as a result of failed attempts, lack of interest, or lack of family connections. The careers of the women in this group evolved in the same organization. These women also reported taking long or short breaks to balance work and family responsibilities. This type of career development reflects the traditional idea of women's careers evolving within one or two organizations. However, for the women in this group, their careers had advanced only as far as middle-managerial positions at which point they reached a "glass-ceiling", beyond which they felt no further advancement was possible or in some cases desirable. Religion and the traditional family group as contextual influences may have brought about the acceptance of a moderate career for the women in this group. The key themes that emerged from this group then, are that because their families supported more traditional gender roles, they wanted jobs that would cater to their

family roles and responsibilities as well as to their religious beliefs regarding
interaction with men.

Facilitated career

Each of the three women in this group worked for businesses belonging to their family
– their father, brother or uncle, and their career development had been bound to this
one family business. Career development for the women in this group comprised direct
progression from middle or top managerial positions immediately after graduating
from university. Narrations on the choice of work place showed that these women
preferred working for the family business as it was a "safe" choice both for the woman
and for their respective families. Their use of the term "safe" suggested an idea of
safety from what they described as "inappropriate attention" from male colleagues
such as sexual innuendo or harassment. They also referred to safety from bullying
from top management. For example, Aisha, a middle manager in the private sector,
explained what she felt were the positive dimensions of working in her uncle's
company:

> It's good to have family behind you to support you, I don't have to worry about being
> mistreated or bullied by colleagues or the top management and most of all I don't have to
> worry about men in the office behaving inappropriately with me.

The need to keep women's chastity and the integrity of the family has been discussed
by Shah and Al-Qudsi (1990), where the extent to which a woman's family will allow
her to seek employment in a particular organization is directly influenced by whether it
is perceived as "safe" in terms of preserving her chastity. Women in this group saw a
family business as a safe environment for retaining their chastity. Marwa, a top
manager in an IT-company provides a good example of this view:

> Men in our society are not used to women working next to them. They get over excited; they
> see this as an opportunity to have fun, often at the expense of women. In family businesses
> you are safe because your brother or father is also there. I am not sure if my family would be
> as supportive of my career if I had worked for some other company than our family business.

Furthermore, women managers in this group also said they were accorded respect in
their organizations as they were the daughter or relative of the owner. Respect, as
women in this study explained, also included acknowledging the need for modesty and
protecting women's sexuality.

Women managers in this category were aware that their rapid career progress was
closely connected to the opportunities provided by working in a family business
context. The general tone of this narration was that women can advance to desirable
positions, even while it might not be directly a result of their own achievement and
contributions. These women acknowledged the barriers that Emirati women face in
their career advancement and felt that if they had not worked for their family business,
their career progress would have been limited. Hamda, a top manager in a private
business, was clearly aware of the difficulties that she would encounter working
outside of her family's business:

> It is difficult for women here. The traditional ideas of what a woman should be, do not even
> give us a chance to prove ourselves professionally. So we need the help of our male family
> members to speak for us and give us credibility and opportunities.

However Aisha, another woman in this group, reported feeling intimidated by the responsibilities of having a senior managerial position. Yet, she also commented on the importance of having family members, specifically her brothers, to provide support:

> I was in a high position at a very early age, and I thank my family for trusting me. I was often quite scared that I would manage to be up to the position, would I know what to do? But luckily there were always people to help, the assistants, other staff, even my brothers have helped me.

Continuing the theme of family support further, it is notable that all three women in this group felt that receiving help from family was a key component of their career development. Indeed, their family connections had provided them with career opportunities that allowed them to rise to high levels in the organization in the early stages of their careers. Besides providing opportunities, the family also provided significant help in fulfilling daily work responsibilities and gaining "respect" – a much-valued concept in the cultural context of the UAE.

Idealistic career
The term "idealistic career" was chosen to describe the careers of the two women in this category because it reflects the motives and sense of responsibility behind their career choices and experiences. Conceptions of "motive" and "responsibility" are particularly important here because these women belonged to one of the ruling families which bestowed on them the highest social status in the country.

One of the woman was working for a government institution while the other was working for a private business. Both women explained that they had dedicated their lives and careers to a good cause in order to serve their nation. For example, their accounts of how they had chosen their current positions revealed that they had been directly influenced by themes relating to social and philanthropic outcomes. They also described how they had spent a considerable part of their careers in social or not-for-profit activities and believed that their careers were a vehicle through which they could serve their nation.

The "idealistic career" described here is constructed as a career path that is similar to the "facilitated career" type in that it reflects a situation where women progress to senior managerial positions immediately after graduation. However, the facilitating force behind the rapid progress in this group is their social status. Their social status is bestowed by their family, which, as with the "facilitated career" type, would provide connections and influence that would advance their careers. Yet, unlike the "facilitated career", their careers did not progress in one organization, but followed several twists and turns evolving across different fields and sectors. These careers reflected elements typical of the boundaryless career concept, where both physical and psychological mobility had taken place.

Although both of these women reported that they had not faced any significant barriers to career advancement, they also suggested that because they were under constant public scrutiny, the sense of being consistently "observed" and the responsibilities of preserving their family name presented significant challenges. Haleema, a top manager in the public sector, explained some of the pressures women under such public attention face:

> There is a tremendous pressure to always do well. You just cannot afford to make any
> mistakes as not only do I represent my family, I also represent the women of my nation.

The pressure to succeed and not make any mistakes derives not only come from the fact that they publicly represent their families, but also because they represent Emirati women leaders in general. Haleema was particularly sensitive to this responsibility as suggested below:

> Women leaders have a great responsibility. If they make a fool of themselves in the public
> arena, it will influence our daughters' chances of making a difference professionally. So we
> need to show what we are capable of and we need to show our commitment, seriousness and
> trustworthiness.

Both women in this group not only felt the need to promote women's leadership publicly, but they were also well aware that they as public figures had the means to do it. Khawla, the other woman in this group who was a top manager in a private business, was also very sensitive to her "public" role:

> As I am always under public attention, I have become like a public figure in promoting
> women's leadership. The problem is that both men and women need to understand that
> women can be as good leaders as men. So my mission is to publicly lead as an example of the
> first generation of women leaders.

The family, and particularly the status of the family, clearly has a strong influence on the careers of both women in this group. Both women explained how they often consulted their families on their career choices and how their families were fully aware of the roles and responsibilities of their professional lives. This finding suggests that while social status and family connections can create career opportunities because they also attract public attention they may create additional pressure to perform. In this respect there seems to be a constant pressure to perform which these women felt may have limited their career choices.

Summary and conclusion

This exploratory study has focused on how Emirati women managers construct a narrative of their career development taking into consideration the socio-cultural context of the United Arab Emirates. The analysis produced a typology, which is summarized in Table I.

The findings reported in this paper echo the findings of other studies (e.g. Eagly and Carli, 2007; Gersick and Kram, 2002; Powell and Mainiero, 1992; Richardson, 1996; White, 1995) which suggest that due to societal, organizational and personal influences, women's career development is best understood as reflecting several different types. In this study four different types of career development were identified for women managers: the "progressive career", the "moderate career", the "facilitated career" and the "idealistic career".

The paper supports prior research (e.g. Betz, 1993; Kirchmeyer, 2002; O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005; Ragins *et al.*, 1998; Rhode and Kellerman, 2007) which suggests that women encounter gender-based barriers in their career development. In this study, barriers were experienced either personally in the woman's own career development or were perceived to occur in UAE society in general. Thus, the women in this study were clearly aware of gender-based problems concerning women's managerial careers.

Type of career	Family group in society	Description of key characteristics	Mobility	Important factors when choosing a job	Family support on woman manager's career	Career barriers
Progressive career	Middle class family with occupational background in military, police or government institutions	Steady career from lower positions to top managerial positions. Development possible	Boundaryless	Appreciation of women's leadership, career opportunities	Emotional help, encouragement	Male prejudice felt; but barriers can be overcome with hard work and persistence
Moderate career	Middle class family with strong traditional and religious values	Moderate career from lower to mid-managerial positions. Development not possible or desired	Bounded	Religiously proper for a woman. Enables work/family balance	Advice on career choice	Male prejudice/attitudinal barriers limit progress. Barriers cannot be overcome
Facilitated career	Upper class – family of business-owners	Rise to top managerial position after graduation. Development possible within family business	Bounded	Family business	Employment opportunities, advice and help in work tasks	Barriers not encountered working for family business. Aware of barriers faced by other Emirati women
Idealistic career	Upper class – ruling family	Rise to top managerial position after graduation. Further development possible	Boundaryless	Social and philanthropic mission	Employment opportunities, Advice on career development	Barriers to career advancement not felt due to a social status. Barriers in career choices encountered. Aware of barrier faced by other Emirati women

Barriers were most significantly expressed by women in the "moderate career" group, whose progress to positions above middle management was either impossible or undesirable due to social expectations and norms. One reason for this could be that these women belong to conservative middle class families that support traditional gender roles. Moreover, since influential family connections or "*wasta*" are crucial in the Emirati societal and business context (e.g. Neal *et al.*, 2005; Metcalfe, 2006; Harry, 2007), these women's middle class families cannot easily facilitate career development within relevant and powerful social networks due to their lack of social connections.

Women in the "progressive career" group also reported having personally encountered career barriers. However, despite belonging to middle class families with only a few powerful social networks, like those in the "moderate career" group, they had managed to overcome these barriers. Their strategies were hard work and persistence. In addition, they had adopted a boundaryless career orientation (Hall, 1996, 2002), where their careers evolved across several organizations. Changing organization when necessary to progress in their career as well as finding a workplace with a woman-friendly organizational culture was perceived as an important influence on career advancement. These women also benefited from UAE nationalization (Emiratization) policies. Since the middle-class family group of the "progressive career" type is more liberal in relation to women's role in working life compared to that of the "moderate career" type, the family played an important role in supporting these women in their careers by providing moral encouragement and emotional support.

The careers of the women in the "facilitated career" group were located in organizations that belonged to male members of their family – either a father, brother or uncle. Women in this group acknowledged the barriers other women experienced because they did not work within the circle of a family business. These women were members of Emirati business class families who owned groups of companies in the main industries. It is notable here that the "facilitated career" evolves in the "safe" environment of a family business and that lower professional levels are passed over such that careers begin at the higher levels of the organization immediately after graduation. Thus, due to family connections, career advancement for this group of women was reported to progress smoothly and easily. In addition, working in the family business environment guaranteed safety from what was seen as "inappropriate" attention from males in the workplace.

Women in the "idealistic career" group reported fewer barriers than any of the other groups. Indeed, other than social pressure to "perform" and the concomitant influence on career choices, they reported no barriers to career advancement. This finding can be explained by the fact that these women belong to the ruling family-group in the UAE with the highest social status in society and very powerful social connections or "*wasta*". Their high social status earned significant public attention in UAE society and resulted in pressure to choose a career in social and philanthropic domains. However, both of the women in this group were aware that other women who were not members of royal families were likely to encounter significant barriers in their careers.

This paper has sought to add to our understanding of the careers of Arab women managers. It has suggested that within the UAE context the family, particularly the social status of the family, plays a central role in women managers' career development. Social status is directly linked to "*wasta*" or social connections and networks, which in the business environment can provide important career

opportunities for a woman. Thus, the paper suggests that while family connections can act as a significant boost for some women's careers, a lack of connections can severely inhibit the careers of other women. Moreover, despite the substantial volume of research on women's careers and the work-family relationship (Byron, 2005; Eby *et al.*, 2005), this study suggests that it overlooks the complexity of family influence in some societies such as the UAE. Indeed, this paper suggests that in the context of the UAE there are clear social differences between families and different families play different roles in women's career development.

Despite the differences in the influence of the family on women's careers in the UAE, in general, families were perceived as being generally supportive of women pursuing careers. There was no evidence of conflict between family and women's career aspirations. Yet the majority of research on women's work-family issues tends to argue the existence of conflict (Blair-Loy, 2003; Byron, 2005), and only a few studies in the field of management have proposed positive interdependencies between work and family (Rothbard, 2001; Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). In this study, familiar support of women's careers might be the result of the consultative nature of decision making in Emirati society, where women consult male family members about their career aspirations. Yet it is, nonetheless, notable that women must first gain the permission of their family to pursue a career. Once they have gained that permission however, the male family members see the need to look after or protect the women by supporting their careers in any way they can, either directly by providing opportunities or by giving advice and encouragement. This finding echoes the findings of other studies in Arab countries which have reported that women consult their family members on professional matters (see McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003).

Reflecting on the practical implications of the study reported here, while the nationalization or Emiratization policies in the UAE might provide Emirati women with opportunities for career development, only a few women had benefited directly from these policies. The nationalization policies could place greater emphasis on on-going career counseling, which would be particularly beneficial in managing the feelings of intimidation and discomfort that women might experience in leadership positions.

Although the findings of this study may not be generalisable to the experiences of other women in the UAE nor to women in other Arab countries, they are useful for stimulating further research on the career development of women in the region. Indeed, given the societal, organizational and broader contextual differences, we should be cautious in our attempts to generalize. Moreover, given the impact of social class on women's career opportunities reported here, further studies might pay more attention to the societal background of the family and its impact on career opportunities and experiences. It might also be fruitful to explore the impact of women's increasing participation in the labour market on spousal and familial relationships in Arab countries.

Finally, the findings signal to practitioners in the Middle East the need to incorporate the centrality of family and family relationships in their management practices and policies for female employees. The impact of perceived organizational culture as being "safe" for women has also been shown to be an important point for consideration as have perceived opportunities to advancement beyond the "glass ceiling" and the attitudes of male employees and managers towards women in the work place.

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ARTICLE

III

**ARAB WOMEN MANAGERS AND IDENTITY FORMATION
THROUGH CLOTHING**

by

Omair, Katlin 2009

Gender in Management: An International Journal 24(6), 412-431

Arab women managers and identity formation through clothing

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore how Arab women managers construct their social identities through the meanings they ascribe to their clothing while pursuing managerial careers.

Design/methodology/approach – An interview-based qualitative approach is adopted for describing the meanings that the United Arab Emirates national women managers give to their clothing.

Findings – This paper identifies multiple coexisting identities in Arab women pursuing managerial careers. While the contradiction is found in the identity as a woman and as a manager, the normative dimensions of identity formation such as being a Muslim and an Emirati serve as enhancing for women's gendered managerial identity.

Originality/value – The value of this paper is twofold: first, contributes to the knowledge of the topic of Arab women in management which is understudied in academia; second, it particularly sheds light how women managers meaningfully use symbols, such as dress, to construct and perform gender realities in a career context.

Keywords Women executives, Gender, Clothing, Middle East

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Professional attire, the clothes that people choose to wear at their work place, acts as a symbol that communicates their social identities. Goffman (1959) suggests that people use dress to purposefully convey information about themselves to others, enabling them to engage in social interactions and place themselves in social systems. Scholars studying women in organizations have argued that dress and appearance are more sensitive issues for women than men (Kanter, 1977), as women in male-oriented organizations have a greater need for credibility, acceptance and legitimacy. Feminist literature has stressed that the construction of women workers, in contrast to men, centres on visual appearance. Wolf (1991) describes how women in their pursuit to gain visibility in a male-dominated business culture, often face the dilemma of appearing either too feminine or too masculine. The danger of appearing too feminine means possible loss of credibility and women may be perceived as sexual objects instead of as professionals. As Wajcman (1998) puts it, a woman's clothing must avoid drawing attention to her body, but must not ape the male business suit either. The focus is on how to create an appearance of wealth and status which conveys authority and power, while de-emphasizing sexuality.

Beliefs exist in every society concerning the roles that are appropriate for each gender. While in the western context the roles of men and women may vary and change more, in the Arab context, which we will focus on here, women's primary role is their commitment to the house and children, and men's main role is to be the

breadwinners for the family (Al-Dhafiri, 1987; Neal *et al.*, 2005; Al-Lamki, 1999; Mostafa, 2005). The traditional role of Muslim women is a source of conflict for the more aware, educated women, trying to balance the modern world and a traditionally conservative social background (Metle, 2002). Non-conformity to traditional ideas has lead many Arab women to seek higher education both in their home countries and abroad and has resulted in a higher number of women rising to high professional positions. As women have led the way in such changes, they often need to confront stereotypical attitudes. While Arab women are willing to accept more responsibilities in the political, occupational, educational and social spheres, Arab men are not willing to share these responsibilities with them (Abdallah, 1996).

According to Basow (1980), gender-role stereotypes demarcate the behaviours and appearance to which each gender is expected to conform. Expectations of appearance can influence social interaction because they serve as standards to conform to, to rebel against, or by which to evaluate others (Workman and Johnson, 1994). The dominant western understanding sees the Arab women's dress (the *hijab*) as oppressive and restricting. Wearing the *hijab* is seen as a powerful signifier of Muslim women's oppression, and the majority of articles in printed in the west about the *hijab* suggest that this practice is a sign of Muslim women's subjugation, and therefore should be condemned (Ruby, 2006).

Much of the literature on the *hijab* tends to focus on regions other than the Middle East, where wearing the *hijab* is a mode of clothing for the majority of women. For example, articles concentrate on the banning of the *hijab* in education institutions in France (Hamel, 2002) and in Turkey (Marshall, 2006; Humphreys and Brown, 2002), or on immigrant women's integration in Britain (Bigger, 2006) or in Canada (Ruby, 2006). The existing scholarly writings on the *hijab* in the Middle East can be criticized for taking a narrow focus, mainly via the debate between traditionalist and feminist views on how or whether at all the *hijab* should be worn, and without researching women's experiences of wearing the *hijab* or considering the different aspects of a woman's life, for example, her professional life. This study attempts to contribute to enriching existing literature with a wider, more varied picture of the topic by looking how dress can be linked to social identity. Dress as an object symbol is key to understanding how people constitute and represent themselves both as individuals and as group members (Rafaeli and Pratt, 1993) and would therefore convey fruitful information on Arab women's identity and their position in today's Middle Eastern societies.

The purpose of this study is to explore how Arab women managers construct their social identities through the meanings that they themselves give to their clothing while pursuing managerial careers. For this purpose, we conducted an empirical study and investigated what Arab women managers themselves say about what their clothing means to them. As the authors acknowledge the societal, cultural as well as developmental differences among Arab countries, we will narrow our research to a sample of female nationals in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Our specific focus is on dress at the individual level of analysis, therefore, on dress as a symbol that individuals use to convey messages about themselves and to associate with diverse meanings. In this study, we acknowledge the relationship between larger influences, such as religion, economic development and socio-cultural influences, which all influence the mode of clothing for female managers in their working lives. The contribution of this study is twofold: first, it contributes to the knowledge of the

topic of Arab women in management which is understudied in academia; second, it particularly sheds light how Arab women managers meaningfully use symbols, such as dress, to construct and perform gender identities in a career context.

Dress and identity formation

In the field of organizational studies, there is an ever-increasing interest towards organizational, occupational and professional identities (Alvesson *et al.*, 2008; Watson, 2007; Pullen, 2006). Literature on identity formation emphasizes that dress as an object symbol is a useful medium to understand how people constitute and represent themselves both as individuals and as group members. Social identities, broadly defined, help individuals answer the question, Who I am? By delineating the social group in which they are members. Identity has two components: a personal component derived from idiosyncratic characteristics, such as personality and physical and intellectual traits, and a social component derived from salient group memberships, such as sex, race, class, and nationality (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). In this study, we see identity as socially constructed and formed by cultural and historical contexts. Berger and Luckmann (1966, p. 194) write that "identity is formed by social processes. Once crystallized, it is maintained, modified, or even reshaped by social relations". In constructing self through interaction with others, the individual is also constructing society (Collin, 1996). Kerfoot and Knights (1998) argue:

> [. . .] identity is always inescapably social and consequently a product of complex social interactions. Attitudes of approval and disapproval, support and criticism, and confirmation and disconfirmation are fundamental to its formation and development.

How favourably a group member perceives his or her group in relation to other relevant groups determines the adequacy of the individual's social identity in a given setting. Social identity theory predicts that as identity group memberships become salient, there will be a tendency to polarize and exaggerate psychological and behavioural differences between individuals who fall into distinct identity categories, producing stereotypic perceptions of identity groups (Turner, 1982). Women's gender identity is one aspect of their social identity. The emotional significance to women of their gender may be shaped at least in part by the extent to which power differentials are constructed along sex lines in organizational settings (Ely, 1995). Discrimination, segregation are examples that affect women's group- and self-attributions, including stereotypical attributions. These processes of comparison and attribution help to shape the women's gender identity at work.

An individual may have numerous different selves, identities that become evident in different contexts. Coexisting identities are constructed from such aspects as age, occupation, gender, nationality, language, politics or clothing, just to mention only a few. Identity work is also concerned with how the images and representations (physical, symbolic, verbal, textual and behavioural) become imbued with meaning and are taken as being part of one's identity (Beech, 2008). Our particular interest is in dress and its association with social identities and we argue that dress is a convenient medium to represent multiple and contradictory, even conflicting identities in organizational settings. The choice and wearing of dress is a performance, i.e. purposeful behaviour designed to convey information regarding themselves to others and which facilitates their engagement in social interactions and social systems

(Hunt and Miller, 1997). Furthermore, dress provides information regarding, for example, professional and gender identities (Pratt and Rahaeli, 1997) and political, economic or religious status (El Guindi, 2005). Dress is also one means by which power and control are exercised in organizations (Humphreys and Brown, 2002). Trice and Beyer (1993) emphasize that the meaning of symbols is context specific, therefore, depends on time and place where it appears and is subject to continuous redefinition.

Tradition of Islamic dress

Islamic dress generally refers to a style of clothing that may cover the woman's entire body, and usually excludes the hands and face. The word *hijab* in Arabic refers to "veil" or "head scarf". The use of the *hijab* among Muslim women is based on religious doctrine, although the *Qur'an* does not mandate it (Kandiyoti, 1991). A range of opinions exists among Muslims regarding the times and places that women are expected to be veiled – ranging from at prayer only to all the time (Zwick and Chelariu, 2006). The women in the Arab Gulf region wear the black *abaya*, a full-length cloak with matching head cover. Some wear the *niqab*, which covers most of the face, leaving only the eyes uncovered, or the *burqa*, which covers the face completely. Muslim women in other parts of the Arab world are freer to vary the colours or designs of their outfits. It must be mentioned here also that the terms that describe Islamic clothes for women might vary among Muslim women worldwide; however, this study uses the terms commonly used in Gulf Arab countries.

The practice of veiling was also common before the rise of Islam in the sixth century and the extent varied greatly between countries due to social and economic contexts. In Assyrian society for example, the veil served to mark the upper classes, and also to differentiate between women who were considered "respectable" and those who were perceived as publicly available (Lerner, 1986). Thus, the veil was understood as a sign of a woman's social status.

According to Mernissi (1991), the veil was already known to earlier civilizations, and was only introduced to Muslim women in the first years of Islam. The first women to be advised to wear a veil were the women in the family of the Prophet Mohammad in order to distinguish them from other women, for in those days, women, especially slaves, were sexually harassed and abused by men in the streets. However, evidence pointed out by Mernissi (1991) demonstrates that historically the *hijab* has been a symbol of status, and that the Prophet's wives and many women at the earlier stages of Islam, though they followed the *hijab*, actively participated in public life. In Medieval Islam and until the first decades of the twentieth century, the veil continued to be worn mainly by urban upper and middle class women whereas rural and lower class women wore the veil, but not in any strict fashion (Golley, 2004).

The word *hijab* however, does not only refer to clothing, but has other two important meanings – segregation and modest behaviour. Hatem (1986) argues that sexual segregation was practiced in pre-Islamic Egypt and that it was difficult to maintain or enforce in older and more mobile tribal settings. Because of the nomadic nature of their lives, women needed freedom of movement and interaction with men.

With the rise of Islam, modesty from both men and women was emphasized and interaction between men and women not related by blood or marriage became permissible only in carefully controlled circumstances (Maumoon, 1999). However, Nelson (1974) argues that among nomads there is no equivalent Arabic term for the

concept of a "public" arena and that the tent and the camp are not synonyms for public and private. Even when women lived in female quarters of the house, however, they were never completely secluded from public life. Nelson (1974) contends that women did approach public affairs, but they did so from private positions. Women, in general, were a necessary part of the network of communication that provided information for their men-folk, and at the head of the social hierarchy there were some women who formed a focus for the smaller groupings of women and a bridge between their concerns and the public concerns of men. On a basic level, women, through marriage for example, have always played an important role in creating societal bonds and marriage alliances that can provide vital access to loans, contacts and resources.

Traditional, modernist and feminist discourses on *hijab*

Differences exist in the discourses and interpretations of the religious texts with regard to the details of women's dress, gender segregation and female participation in public life. The three main discourses as presented by Sidani (2005) are traditional, modernist and feminist discourses.

The traditional discourse is dominant in the Arabian Peninsula and represents the Wahabi school of thought, which adheres to early Muslim orthodoxy. It takes the early years of Islam as an exemplary model and follows the traditions of those days, rejecting all the innovations of later times. The traditionalist interpretation on woman's clothing says that the woman should cover all of her body, including the face and hands. The interaction of men and women not related by blood or marriage is not permissible without the presence of the male from the woman's family. Traditionalists also stress the importance of modesty from both men and women and the notion of lowering their gaze (El Guindi, 2005). From the viewpoint of women managers in contemporary working life, this suggests that women can only leave the private spheres when completely covered and accompanied by a male guardian and women's managerial careers are only possible in segregated work places, where the interaction of men and women is excluded.

Modernist discourses, presented mostly by Egyptian scholars, criticize the traditions that exist in Arab societies that cut women off from the affairs in their community and keep them restricted to domestic services. The modernist views state that Islam provides a significant sense of equality between the two genders and that certain traditions and customs restrict women's mobility and development. Al-Ghazali (1989), the prominent modernist scholar, indicated that the face cover, prevalent in many Muslim societies, is related to tribal and traditional norms and not to injunctions of Islam. He asserted that the headscarf that covers the woman's hair should not pose an impediment to her economic and political participation. According to modernists, reform needs to take place at several levels in society, most important of which are the cultural and educational reforms. From the viewpoint of women managers, modernist discourse on the *hijab* is suggesting that women have equal rights with men in pursuing their careers, and there should be reform to emphasize women's role in society and their choice when it comes to modes of clothing, so they could be free to reject the face veil.

Feminist discourses differ from the previous discourses as they see the need for legal reforms and new interpretations of religious texts. Sidani (2005) states that some feminists see the male elite as a common enemy, others perceive that both men and

women suffer from the same underdevelopment and injustice in their societies. Some blame the all-encompassing power of religion or the conventional understanding of religious texts; others look at religion as the way to improvement and recovery. Some blame the existing internal power structures for the derailment of women's development; others see problems more as a result of unremitting imperialist political interference that divert attention from the real issues.

Feminists provide a more liberal view on segregation and state that women's work outside the home involving mixed gender activities is acceptable, providing the woman is suitably attired (Maumoon, 1999). The exact mode of clothing is under debate among scholars. For instance, Smith (1999) writes that the *Qur'an*, despite what some Muslim women seem to think, does not actually specify how much of the body has to be covered. Many Muslim women therefore say that because veiling is not mentioned in the *Qur'an*, it is a custom and not scripturally sanctioned (Ali, 2005). More radical feminist discourses emphasize the reinterpretation of religious texts regarding women's rights, including women's work as not being un-Islamic. After all, with the exception of a few feminists, most women's rights activists in the Arab world do not have an anti-Islam stand (Sidani, 2005).

Method
Research context
The research context, the UAE, was chosen for a number of reasons. First, women's professional advancement is highly encouraged by the political elite in this country. Second, its demographics are multi-cultural with expatriates comprising more than 90 per cent of the working population (Shihab, 2001). For local women managers, this means that they are not only exposed to the different cultures that expatriates bring to the country, but the business environment where they work is also highly multi-cultural. Third, the UAE is considered to be the most modernized Arab Gulf country. In terms of clothing, women have plenty of options, and can choose their clothing from a variety of world-class designers. For those reasons it is valuable to see how the women nationals in management construct their social identities through the meaning given to their traditional dress in a modern multi-cultural business environment. A short description of the UAE is given next.

The UAE is an oil producing state and is a member of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), along with Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Like most of the GCC members, the UAE relies heavily on the production of oil and on expatriate workers. Emiratis (nationals of the UAE) are relatively uniform in terms of ethnicity, with ancient regional tribal roots and predominantly practice the austere Wahabi interpretation of Islam (as practiced in Saudi Arabia; Masoud, 1999). Wahabi theology treats the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* (the words and deeds of the Prophet Mohammad) as fundamental texts, interpreted upon the understanding of the first three generations of Islam, and rejecting any newer interpretations. Regarding women's issues, the Wahabis tend to take the strongest and most conservative stand when interpreting religious texts.

Despite the conservative religious doctrine predominant in the UAE, the government has been promoting education and work for women for the past decade. According to the *Yearbook of the United Arab Emirates* (2009), women constitute 27.9 per cent of the national labour force. Women occupy 66 per cent of public sector job, 30 per cent of which are leadership and decision-making posts. The unemployment

rate among women nationals is at a high of 19.7 per cent, compared to 8.2 per cent for males, despite the fact that women graduates greatly outnumber male graduates (UAE Ministry of Information and Culture, 2006). One of the agendas for the UAE political leadership is to decrease the country's dependence on oil revenues as well their dependence on a foreign labour force. The increase of female nationals in the labour force is greatly attributed to the "feminization of government employment" (Moghadam, 2005) and the "nationalization", the state-led labour market policies, which promote or even oblige organizations to hire national labour force.

Sample

The study was initiated to explore how Arab women managers construct their social identities through the meanings they ascribe to their clothing while pursuing managerial careers. For this purpose, an interview-based qualitative approach was adopted, which gives the possibility for women managers to express their thoughts and experiences widely and more thoroughly. In-depth interviews with 15 women nationals from the UAE in managerial careers from various industries were conducted in January 2007.

All of the 15 women participating in the study held high professional positions in their organizations: seven women held middle managerial and eight women top managerial positions. Out of 15 women managers, four worked for government institutions, three in banking and finance, three in education and the rest in various, mostly Arab-owned private organizations. All interview participants had a higher education with five holding Master degrees and ten Bachelor degrees either from home country or foreign universities. The age of the interviewed women ranged between 24 and 45 years, with a mean age of 33 years, 12 out of 15 were married and three were either single or engaged. All married women had children.

All 15 interviewees wear the traditional Arab black *abaya*, a full-length cloak, and matching black colour scarf as their professional clothing. Three interviewees also wear the *niqab*, a face-veil, which leaves just the eyes open. One interviewee wears *niqab* indoors and a *burqa*, complete face cover, outdoors.

Data collection and analysis

The interviews were conducted face to face in settings comfortable for the respondents, either in their offices, private homes or local cafes. The topic of clothing was part of a larger research project, which dealt with Arab women's careers. Therefore, the questions on clothing were only one part of the interviews. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. As all interviewees requested anonymity, all quoted excerpts given later in this study are marked with a pseudonym along with the position and industry where the woman worked. First the interviewees were familiarized with the topic of our discussion and the questions we would ask. Our goal at the beginning of the study was to acquire a broad understanding of individual dress behaviour. We asked how they made decisions about their clothing and what they thought were the reasons for their clothing choices. Next, we asked the participants to describe when and why they felt comfortable or uncomfortable about their dress at work and what they thought their dress communicated about them. As the participants answered these questions, we probed for elaboration and clarification of the answers.

This study uses a grounded theory (GT) approach in analyzing the interview data. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), GT is especially useable when a situation or a context is new, when a field still remains without an existing theory or when aiming to add a new perspective to a particular field. The topic of Arab women in management is generally under studied and so is the topic of clothing for Arab women in their managerial work.

One of the main principles of GT analysis is coding, which must result in categories to be expanded upon. Coding in the GT approach means fracturing the data by isolating significant incidents such as events, issues, processes or relationships and labelling them using either respondent or researcher expressions. In analyzing the data, we used the technique of sentence-to-sentence coding, where we split the whole data into small pieces, which we marked with numbers. As a result, numerous small fractions of data were discovered and after several re-readings were grouped under 21 descriptive codes (Table I). Next, according to GT, the descriptive codes need to be grouped together to form a concept, which later form a category. A category is defined here as a classification of concepts. The classification is discovered when concepts are compared one against another and appear to pertain to a similar phenomenon.

Expression of religion Religious duty Moral duties To be perceived as a Muslim	Religious norms		
Societal pressure Family pressure Peer pressure	Societal norms	Normative dimension of identity formation through clothing	

Preserving culture/ heritage
Protect traditions from expatriation/ globalization
Bringing traditions to today
	Cultural norms		Combination of multiple identities through clothing:
			  Muslim
			  Emirati

Under-evaluation Discrimination Does not represent modernity	Gendered "Other"		Woman Manager
Gives respect Represents honesty/ trustworthiness Represents seriousness/ professionalism	Enhanced personal characteristics	Professional dimension of identity formation through clothing	
Way to public life Allows free mixing Expression of attitude about mixing with men Sexual neutrality Hiding sex	Strategies in mixed environments		

Table I.
Data categorization

Thus, the concepts are grouped together under a higher order, and more abstract concepts are called a category (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). In our study, upon comparing and further re-reading, the descriptive codes were grouped under six sub-categories (concepts). At this stage, separate concepts were identified but further classification was needed. The sub-categories were further searched for similar phenomenon and grouped under two categories: the normative and professional dimension of identity formation through clothing. The final stage of the analysis is to capture all of the categories under one core category, which systematically relates all of the subcategories and reflects the essence of the data. The core category in our study is identity formation as a combination of multiple identities through clothing.

Empirical findings

As a result of the data analysis, followed by the GT logic, the data were divided into two main categories – normative and professional dimensions of identity formation through clothing. The normative dimensions category further held three sub-categories – societal, religious and cultural norms, and the professional dimensions category also three sub-categories – gendered "other", enhanced personal characteristics and strategies in a mixed environment. The core category in this study, which according to Glaser (1978) forms the central idea of the data, is the identity that the respondents associate themselves with in relation to their clothing – identity as a Muslim, identity as an Emirati, identity as a woman and identity as a manager.

Normative dimension of identity formation through clothing

The normative dimension of clothing refers to the normative structures, which according to Korsgaard (1996) are supplied by the individual's social identity – the normative codes that result from social roles and social contexts. The normative structures link the individual to a certain group that shares similar morals, traditions, values and cultural patterns, which in the case of this study are represented through clothing.

Religious norms

All interviewees associated wearing the *hijab* with Islam and stated that covering one's body is a religious commandment and the expression of their religion. Rowda, middle-manager in the banking sector explained: "I dress the way I do because this is required by my religion. In Islam, both men and women have to dress modestly. A black *abaya* serves this purpose the best." Modest dressing, therefore, is not only subjected to women's clothing, but a requirement for men as well. Modest clothing, on the other hand, also requires modest behaviour, which according to the respondents, many younger women were lacking:

> I see a lot of Emirati women who wear our dress as a religious sign, but their behaviour is not proper at all. They flirt and play with men and think they are on the right side just by wearing the *abaya*. To be a good Muslim is not just dressing correctly, you have to behave correctly too (Haifa, top manager in the education sector).

In terms of clothing, it is equally important to be perceived as a Muslim. "It is an expression of my religion and so everybody knows that I am a Muslim woman", explained Hanan, a middle manager in the private sector. Perception by others forms crucial part of one's identity, an identity as a Muslim here. Artur (1999) argues that

while a person's level of religiousness cannot be objectively perceived, symbols, such as clothing, are used as evidence that s/he is on the "right and true path". The importance of being perceived as a Muslim has not changed since the early years of Islam in the sixth century, where according to Lerner (1986) upper-class women wanted to be distinguished as Muslims by wearing the *hijab*.

The extent to which a woman needs to be covered brought up controversial opinions, especially about covering one's face. Mouza, a middle-manager in banking, who covers her face stated: "Covering one's face is not compulsory in Islam; however, it is encouraged and it is a matter of choice for each woman."

However, there were more critical opinions against wearing the face veil. Rola, a top manager in an IT-company stated:

> These women [who cover their face] should understand that it has nothing to do with our religion, it is merely the local tradition and male pressure to use women to their advantage.

Similarly, Fatimah, a top manager in education, who gave up wearing the face veil when she started working, stated:

> Covering the face is not obligatory, it is mostly fundamentalists who enforce face covers, and I don't think anybody would take a *niqab* by choice. It is heavy, makes it difficult to breath, and you cannot work with it all day long.

Some of the respondents stated that the morality in society depends on how women dress. Khawla, an elderly top manager in the private sector stated:

> I think it is women who stand for the morality of society to a great extent. Yes, men have a part to play also, but what we can control is how our women behave. If women behave and dress modestly, it keeps society pure.

A similar idea was given by Mona, a middle manager in the public sector who covers her face: "It is important to wear the *niqab* today because of the immorality in society."

The view of the state of the women's body covering as a possible threat that could corrupt societies is similarly stated in the study by Yuval-Davis (1994), where she explains that the status of women's bodies is seen as a sign of the moral status of the nation, because women are perceived as the carriers of cultural in their societies.

Social norms
The majority of the women responded that they were proud to wear the *hijab*, and it was their own choice and there was not anybody or anything forcing them to dress in a certain way. This is in stark contrast to the ideas in the western media, which sees women's dress in Muslim countries as oppressive and emphasize that there is an urgent need to "free" Muslim women from their garments.

However, only two of the respondents offered opposing ideas, stating that it was not their own choice, but that they were obliged to wear it either because of familial, societal or peer pressure. "It is not my choice to wear the *abaya*, neither is it my husband's. We, women, are not free to chose our clothes, neither are our husbands", said Marwa, a top manager in an IT-company. Aisha, a middle manager in banking argued: "My family, my colleagues, and my friends and relatives all wear it [the *hijab*]. So I cannot think of myself only [when choosing my attire]."

Gendered behaviour, including the dressing, is determined by social practices that dictate boundaries between the "right" and "wrong" behaviour. As Ahl (2006)

succinctly puts it "We are not free to perform gender in any way we like, but our culture's norms restrain the 'proper' gender behaviour, which has its' own social effects". Interestingly, men, as the decision makers in the Arab family, cannot allow their women to go against the social norms either. Changes in modes of clothing can take place just as long as they conform to socially accepted views about the *hijab*.

Cultural norms
Apart from religious and social connotations, wearing the *hijab* was linked with local traditions and customs in the UAE and the need to preserve them:

> The *abaya* reflects our rich cultural heritage and it's our duty and responsibility to carry it on. Many Emirati women are giving up their traditional outfits. I am totally against the idea. We live in a conservative society and we cannot ignore our customs (Haleema, top manager, public sector).

Similar ideas were offered by Mariam, a middle manager in the public sector:

> We have given up so many things under the name of "globalization", we have invited the "world" to live with us, we cannot give up our culture, as now more than ever we need to protect it.

As the country is greatly exposed to modernization and globalization, which can also be seen due to the huge growth in expatriates moving to the country, the local women seem to be well aware of the threat of globalization to their traditions, and therefore, see the need to preserve these traditions. "Modernizing with time is good in the sense of our outlook and understanding. Knocking off our tradition is not modernizing, it will instead make us baseless" (Noora, top manager, private sector).

Shaffir (1978) states that people usually become more loyal to their traditions and customs, if their identities are threatened by the larger society. As the identities are socially and culturally constituted, their contents are constantly negotiated and re-defined, depending on the social and cultural changes. In the context of this study, there is not only a need to preserve the Emirati identity to hold cultural connotations but also to re-define the Emirati identity to find its place in new modern contexts, such as work environments. Aisha states:

> We are known by our traditions and culture. It's simply who we are. They say our traditional outfit does not suit today's modern look and appearance. I am very proud of it and it suits me the best.

Similarly, Hamda, a top manager in the education sector, explained: "Working does not affect traditions or values in our society, and traditions do not affect our working."

The professional dimension of clothing
The professional dimension of clothing refers to dress as a symbol that individuals actively use to facilitate their performance of organizational roles (Rafaeli and Pratt, 1993). Professional clothing refers both to the woman's professional identity as a manager and gender identity at work.

Gendered "other"
All interviewees reported women being in disadvantaged position in their organizations compared to their male colleagues. Women managers of this study

reported being under-valued and left out of discussions and decision-making and having much fewer chances for career advancement compared to their male colleagues. Rola brings out the possible reasons for women's disadvantaged position:

> I don't think it is easy for men to have us around, so they challenge us constantly. They try to downplay us and make fun of us. So there is a competition as I know they feel threatened, as we, the "fragile" women, traditionally dressed, can work much better than they can.

Work is a central source of identity (Baruch, 2004) and individual identities are substantially shaped by occupational linkages (Prasad, 1997). Kerfoot and Knights (1998) argue that attitudes of approval and disapproval, support and criticism, and confirmation and disconfirmation are fundamental to the formation and development of women's managerial identities. Ridgeway and Correll (2004) state that gender beliefs and social relation contexts help maintain the gender system by biasing men's and women's behaviour and evaluations in ways that re-enact and confirm beliefs about men's greater status and competence. As argued by Gherardi (1996), men and women stand in a hierarchical and dichotomous relation; the "one" (men) bears positive connotations while the "other" (women) is different, the non-one. The "one" is more powerful, more acceptable, more appropriate, more mainstream, more knowable than the "other", and only the "other" is problematized. The dominant feature of organizations is their patriarchalism (Hearn and Parkin, 1992) and organizations are often defined through masculine metaphors (Acker, 1992). According to Prasad (2005), this affects women in two ways: first, by essentializing certain qualities as male and second, by erecting entry barriers for women into occupations supposedly suited for men.

Although all interviewees reported of women's disadvantaged position in their organizations, it was women wearing the *niqab* (the face veil) that had faced discrimination directly based on their clothing. Although being religious is admired and encouraged, there lies a limit to the extent that religiousness is accepted at the work place:

> You have to be strong to decide to wear a *niqab* at the office. I know that my colleagues think I am traditional and therefore uneducated and incapable, but as we don't judge women who do not cover themselves, so they should not judge us (Basma, a middle manager in the public sector).

Similarly, Mouza explained how the *niqab* was not acceptable for the top management in her company, which is composed of Muslim men:

> I have been pressured to not to wear niqab at work. They [top management] even said they cannot promote me because it doesn't fit with the modern image of the company.

Although it is often stated that the face veil is man's way to subjugate women, in this study, women reported of men objecting to the face veil more than women:

> Men in our office are much more against women covering their face than the women are; they give such nasty comments, calling them backwards, incapable or just puppets and not people on their own (Mona).

This indicates that perhaps men are becoming more liberal in terms of women's clothing and object more to the traditional face covering.

Enhanced personal characteristics
Gendered stereotypes in organizational settings tend not to favour women as women are equipped with certain characteristics that men lack of, and vice versa. The stereotypical views on women managers are that women are suitable for certain functions and sectors, but not for the ones that are prestigious and powerful. Furthermore, gendered stereotypes are often used to support the traditional sex roles (Best, 2004). However, belonging to a certain group does not self-evidently mean that the member of the group accepts those stereotypical values and attitudes associated with that group. Interviewees in this study reported that by wearing the traditional clothes, women are able to change some of the stereotypes. Rowda reported:

> The *abaya* is a great item of clothing to enforce ones seriousness and professionalism. I see that when I come in contact with men. They respect me more and behave more modestly.

Similar ideas were given by Hanan:

> Most of our women do not work in segregated offices, we are next to male colleagues all day long. By wearing Islamic clothes such as the *abaya*, we are seen as honest, trust-worthy and serious.

Bartkowski and Read (2003) have explained in their study that men are forced to respect women in a *hijab* because it is a sign of their unwavering religious devotion. Moghadam (1994) writes that wearing the *hijab* indicates commitment to religion and to self-discipline. Self-discipline in turn indicates seriousness towards professional matters, a much needed attribute for women managers in patriarchal environments.

Strategies in mixed environments
Arab women's work has traditionally been carried out in exclusively female circumstances (Guthrie, 2001). Women entering mixed working environments is a recent trend in the Arab region, and is subject to the women bargaining with their family or husband to allow her to work. Wearing the *hijab* and being properly covered is a condition for entering the public sphere. Hanan states:

> Being covered allows us to go out, work and even mingle with male colleagues. So my father and my family will be at ease if they know I am properly dressed and nobody can assault me.

Therefore, wearing the *hijab* becomes a moral way for women to communicate and work next to their male colleagues, which in earlier times was not possible. "The wearer of the *abaya* can easily interact with men without being dubbed immoral", explains Marwa.

The *hijab* also conveys a message about the wearer's chastity and becomes a boundary for interaction between men and women. Mariam explains that men often see the office as a place to interact with women and states: "The *hijab* shows that I am a professional and here to work, not to enjoy myself and have a good time with my colleagues." Furthermore, the *hijab* also helps to avoid sexual tensions and pre-marital relationships, which are not allowed in Islam. Mouza argues: "I don't want strange men to behave in an inappropriate way with me, to be over-friendly or over familiar. If I wear the *abaya*, it is a physical barrier between me and them."

In addition, the *hijab* is used as a tool for gaining sexual neutrality and hiding sex for women in visible positions in a mixed environment. Visibility seems to heighten the perception of women as sexual (Sheppard, 1989), and appearing too feminine results in loss of credibility. Therefore, de-sexualization is generally perceived as a necessary

protective strategy for women to gain acceptance. "The *abaya* gives safety from potential male viewers. So they see me as a person, not as a woman and in my profession this is what I need" (Noora).

Identity formation through clothing
The core category of this study, which relates meaningfully with all sub-categories, is identity formation as a combination of multiple identities through clothing. Tseëlon (1995) argues that women's identity is realized through the presentation of many selves, and clothes are a vital expression of this self-realization. This study shows that women managers constructed four different co-existing identities: identity as a Muslim, as an Emirati, as a woman and as a manager.

This study shows that the *hijab* is a very powerful symbol of women's identity as a Muslim. Being covered is associated with being a good Muslim, while being un-covered is identified with non-Muslims. Therefore, there is a growing feeling on the part of the Muslims to distinguish themselves from non-Muslims and the Muslim identity is enforced through the visible sign that the adoption of traditional clothes implies. "I like to dress the same way that my mother or grandmother did. Yes, we work and have a different kind of life but it is our identity, it is who we are" (Fatimah).

In addition to Muslim identity, the *hijab* represents one's identity as an Emirati, or an Arab, both in the home country or when travelling abroad. "The *abaya* gives me an identity as a local, so everybody immediately knows that I am an Emarati" (Haleema). The UAE is demographically very diverse and the population of locals, the Emiratis, has diminished to 10 per cent (Shihab, 2001). The traditional Emirati *abaya* represents that local population and often works as a status symbol, representing wealth and position, and is a strong mark that separates them from the expatriates in the country. A similar signal of identity is received when travelling abroad:

> I often have to travel abroad on business and I wear my abaya even there. You wouldn't believe how strong a signal it sends to people about my identity as an Arab (Khawla).

The *hijab* or the black *abaya* that the women in this study wear also marks a strong female gender identity. Marwa states: "I love wearing the *abaya* as it is beautiful and comfortable and although it coves our bodies completely, it is very feminine." The black *abaya* is highly contrasting to the white *kandooras* (long loose garments) that Arab men wear. Hearn (2002, p. 40) writes that identity stands at the intersection of self-perception and the perceptions of others. While, western women can vary their attire to look more masculine or feminine and alter the styles, the Arab women do not have that freedom. Arab women need to be perceived feminine as it is one of their religious duties. It is stated in the *Al-Hadiths* (Bukhari, 1997), the deeds and sayings of the Prophet Mohammad that: "Allah has cursed the men who make themselves look like women and the women who make themselves look like men." In addition, it is written in the *Hadith* that among the signs of Doom's Day, men will begin to look like women and women will begin to look like men. Any resemblance to the opposite sex is forbidden, either in the way they move, speak, cut their hair or the kind of clothes they wear. The black *abaya* is therefore a visible mark of one's femininity.

The women in this study use the *hijab* as their professional clothing, which is involved in the identity work as a manager. Aisha explained: "It is nice how our local women wear the national dress in the office where the rest of the people wear Western

clothes, it never goes unnoticed." As a result of the women's late entry into the labour market in the UAE, women's presence in organizational life gains considerable visibility. According to Sheppard (1989), on the one hand, women who have reached top management experience positive feelings of success and accomplishment. On the other hand, their high-profile position creates feelings of discomfort and caution. Women in this study are aware that they are the first generation of women in visible leadership positions and their actions are followed closely. Haleema states:

> Women leaders have a great responsibility. They are being watched carefully. If they make a fool of themselves on the public arena, it will influence our daughters' chance to make a difference professionally. So we need to show what we are capable of and we need to show our commitment, seriousness and trustworthiness.

Kanter (1997) uses the term "tokens" to describe women managers reaching high positions in male-dominated organizations. "Tokens are, ironically, both highly visible as people who are different and yet not permitted the individuality of their own unique, non-stereotypical characteristics." The smaller the number of tokens, the more visibility they gain. Although the token's presence is noticed, their achievements may not. There is often the tendency to exaggerate the differences between tokens and dominant group members.

Mona describes:

> Although I am far better qualified than many of my male colleagues, I often feel uncomfortable when dealing with men. There is always seems to be this tension that I am a woman and they are men.

According to Symons (1986) managing gender identity will continue to be a challenge for women, as long as they are a minority in the corporate world. One of the strategies for "tokens" to succeed in male-dominated organizations is to subsume their gender identities.

According to Alvesson and Billing (1997), identities are formed in continuing struggles as experiences and social interactions change from moment to moment. In organizations, people are required to take on various corporate personas, which are likely to differ from the ones that they adopt in other parts of their lives and, indeed, may come into tension with them (Watson, 2007). The literature on western women managers shows that often women borrow masculine traits or modes of appearance in order appear more powerful. The padded suit shoulders, the understated colours, conservative styling all mimic male dress. Arab women do not have the option to gain more power and authority by mimicking male dress as it is forbidden in Islam. On the contrary, their dress emphasizes femininity.

In order to improve women's position in organizations, women managers in this study adopt the strategy to change the general idea that Arab women's dress gives them the image of being fragile, domestic and incapable. By leading by example, they want to associate the *hijab* with positive meanings, such as capability, strong-mindedness and all other professional traits important for leadership. Haifa explains:

> We have fought a long way to be in the position we are now. We have seen discrimination, attitudes and prejudice. Now that we have made it to the top, we need to show both men and women that a woman dressed in a traditional *abaya* can be as good a leader as any man.

Conclusion and discussion

The rise in female labour force participation in the Arab region has resulted in a greater number of women rising to managerial positions and taking leadership roles in organizations. Women managers moving to traditionally male positions often see the need to balance the conflicting statuses of "female" and "manager", due to stereotypical attitudes and their marginal position in organizations. This study offers an insight into women managers' identity formation in male-dominated work environments and how they use symbols, such as their dress, to manage the tension between their gender and their organizational roles. Our particular interest in dress is associated with social identities and we argue that dress is a convenient medium to represent multiple and contradictory, even conflicting identities in organizational settings.

The results of this exploratory study show that Arab women are fully aware of the reasons for wearing their traditional clothes and what their dress communicates about them. Although Arab women are proud to wear their traditional dress there is little diversity to be found in clothing choices. Women's clothing choices are neither done by women themselves nor by their men but it is the deeply rooted societal and cultural norms that dictate the "proper" clothing.

As stated by several authors (Tseëlon, 1995; Beech, 2008), this study argues for the existence of multiple identities within the same individual. This study identified four coexisting identities: being a Muslim in contrast to non-Muslims, being an Emirati in a highly multi-cultural society, and lastly, being a woman and pursuing a managerial career in a patriarchal society. Women's identities are not stable and in constant re-construction in reaction to the changes in the context. The results of this study show that women's identity as a Muslim and as an Emirati is subject to conformity and preservation and neither is these identities provides discomfort for women in this study. The contradiction that was identities in this study was between the identity as a woman and identity as a manager. While pursuing their managerial careers, women have faced discrimination by being under-valued and as a result, have had fewer chances for career advancement compared to their male colleagues. The idea of a woman as a manager is still loaded with traditional ideas that women are inferior to men and therefore less capable in leadership positions. Furthermore, as Arab women's dress is visually feminine and contrasts with men's dress, Arab women have few options to mimic man's dress or hide their femininity. As the idea of a woman dressed in traditional clothes emphasizes her religiousness and being on the "right side", women have gained, among other things, respect and the image of being serious and professional. In addition, the "right clothing" opens a door to the public sphere to pursue a professional career and guarantees easy interaction with males without being dubbed immoral. The traditional dress also becomes a tool to avoid sexual harassment and to gain sexual neutrality in managerial work.

This research contributes to the prior literature on Arab women in management. For researchers, the results of this study provide a solid base for understanding the position of Arab women in organizational settings and factors influencing Arab women managers' careers. For public policy making, the results of this study show that public discourse in support of women's economic participation and career advancement is needed in order to change the patriarchal traditional attitudes towards women in management. For practitioners, the results of this study provide useful information on struggles and barriers women face in their managerial careers and the identity conflict of being a woman and a manager.

As study has concentrated on individual identity construction of Arab women in management, the future researchers could look into the organizational identity in the Arab region. Considering the demographic diversity in the UAE and the continuous influx of foreign labour force, it would be worth studying how the organizational identities are formed through the numerous different nationalities present in one organization.

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1   LAINE, JUHANI, Toimialareseptin ja yrityspara-
     digman muutos sekä sen vaikutus strategiseen
     muutokseen. Laadullinen ja historiallinen
     case-tutkimus perheyrityksen siirtymisestä
     monialayhtymän osaksi. - Change in industry
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