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Research Article

Parental Control and Career Decision-making Among Arab Women in the United Arab Emirates

الرقابة الأبوية واتخاذ القرارات المهنية بين النساء العربيات في الإمارات العربية المتحدة

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Abstract

This article draws on an analysis of interviews with a group of young women from diverse Arab backgrounds in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to examine the roles their parents played in their higher education and career decision-making (CDM). A constructivist grounded theory (CGT) methodology guided the study and enabled the examination of the career decision-making experiences of these women within their wider sociocultural context. Parents were found to play significant roles in co-constructing career decisions with their daughters. These decisions were joint and interactive where career goals and the means of attaining them were shared and negotiated, however, generally under the control and direction of parents. This article aims to demonstrate the implicit and explicit ways in which parents controlled their daughters' CDM, and how this occurred within the parameters of gendered and cultural conformity. The article concludes with recommendations for education policymakers in the UAE, particularly in regard to involving parents in career guidance programs in order to help young women actualize their career goals.

الملخص

يعتمد هذا المقال على تحليل مع مجموعة من الشابات من خلفيات عربية متنوعة في الإمارات العربية المتحدة لفحص الأدوار التي لعبها آباؤهم في مجال دراسة التعليم العالي واتخاذ القرارات المهنية. عملت منهجية نظرية الأساس البنائية على الدراسة ومكنت من فحص خبرات صنع القرار المهني لهؤلاء الشابات ضمن سياقهن الاجتماعي والثقافي الأوسع. ولقد وجدنا أن الآباء يلعبون أدوارًا مهمة في مشاركة اتخاذ القرارات المهنية مع بناتهم. وكانت هذه القرارات مشتركة وتفاعلية حيث تم تبادل الأهداف المهنية ووسائل تحقيقها والتفاوض بشأنها، ولكن بشكل عام تحت سيطرة وتوجيه الآباء. تهدف هذه المقالة إلى توضيح الطرق الضمنية والصريحة التي يتحكم بها الآباء في اتخاذ قرار المسار المهني لبناتهم، وكيف حدث ذلك ضمن معايير التوافق والثقافة بين الجنسين. ويختم المقال بتوصيات لواضعي سياسات التعليم في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة، لا سيما فيما يتعلق بإشراك أولياء الأمور في برامج التوجيه المهني لمساعدة الفتيات على تحقيق أهدافهن المهنية.

Keywords: *Parental control, Arab women, Career decision-making, UAE*

الكلمات المفتاحية: الرقابة الأبوية، المرأة العربية، اتخاذ القرار المهني، الإمارات العربية المتحدة

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1. Introduction

A wealth of extant literature exists on the various patterns of parental influence on the career development and decision-making of youth (Creamer & Laughlin, 2005; Fouad et al., 2008; Otto, 2000; Paa & McWhirter, 2000; Phillips et al., 2001; Whiston & Keller, 2004). Yet, this extensive research has been largely conducted on racially homogeneous (and mostly Caucasian) youth samples living in Western societies that operate within their own distinctive values and cultural frameworks.

Arab societies operate within patriarchal social structures (Mostafa, 2005), that are characterized by a unique system of cultural values and traditions, including traditional gender role perceptions of men as primary breadwinners and women as nurturers of children (El Safty, 2004; Elamin & Omair, 2010; Moghadam, 2004; Ridge et al., 2018; World Bank, 2013). As such, theories originating from extant Western literature cannot be extended to Arab youth. However, the study of influencing factors, parental or otherwise, on Arab youth's career decision-making (CDM) in the Arab world or in diasporic Arab communities has, thus far, received insufficient attention in the literature.

Very few research studies specifically examine parental influences on Arab women's CDM (e.g., Rutledge et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2013). The limited research on Arab women's CDM, however, does show that while Arab women across the world are becoming more educated than ever before (Ridge, 2014; Schvaneveldt et al., 2005), they continue to face sociocultural barriers that impede their participation in the workplace or confine them to gender-appropriate careers (Gallant & Pounder, 2008; Hamdan, 2005; Metcalfe, 2008). To appropriately help Arab women actualize their education and career goals, an in-depth understanding of the factors that influence their CDM is required.

This article draws on recent research that investigated the roles played by parents in the higher education and CDM of a group of young women from diverse Arab backgrounds in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The research further examined the relationship between the socioculturally constructed perceptions of Arab women's roles and the parental influences on the CDM of this group of women. Parents were found to play significant roles in co-constructing the CDM processes with their daughters. These processes were joint and interactive in which career goals and the means of attaining them were shared and negotiated in a limited context under the control and direction of parents. This article aims to demonstrate the complex, varied approaches in which parents co-constructed these CDM processes with their daughters, and the way this occurred through a consideration of gender, culture, and social class values of Arab families living in the UAE. In this way, this article contributes to a growing body of literature that seeks to understand Arab women's higher education and CDM, in particular by highlighting the influence of parents on young women's career choices.

The article is structured in the following manner. First, extant theories related to parental influences on the CDM of youth are presented. Next, an examination of literature describing the modern-day Arab context with a focus on the UAE follows, in order to describe the relationships between parental roles regarding women's CDM and the surrounding sociocultural context. These sections, together with the social constructivist epistemological view underpinning the research create a framework for analyzing and

understanding Arab women's higher education and CDM presented and discussed in the subsequent section. Finally, a number of recommendations are suggested for UAE policymakers on how the article's evidence of parental involvement in Arab women's CDM can impact career guidance and counseling for female students at the secondary and tertiary levels.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1. Parental influences on the CDM of youth

An ample body of research has acknowledged parents as the principal influence on the CDM of youth. The process of CDM for youth typically occurs within a relational context (Phillips et al., 2001; Schultheiss et al., 2001). CDM is not a process that is undertaken individually, rather, it is socially constructed through the joint and goal-directed actions and plans of parents and adolescents. In these interactive decision-making processes, parents and adolescents share and negotiate ideas, establish connectedness, and debate over future goals in an attempt to reach a consensus (Young et al., 2001, 2006). Young et al. (2001) termed this co-constructed process of CDM a *career project* and described it as a complex process carried out by the family toward the development of a career goal. The study identified five properties of the parent–adolescent career project: (1) *joint goals* based on the sharing of goals which ultimately determine the success of the career project; (2) *communication* that occur between both parties and being critical for the realization of goals; (3) *degree of congruence* refers to the extent to which parents' and adolescents' goals and the means to attain them are in congruence; (4) *parental agenda* describes the nature and extent to which parents control and direct the project; and (5) *individuation* describes how the adolescent's individuation within the family is addressed. Each of these properties contributed to the career goal being realized and became a factor when the goal was not realized, changed, or rejected.

Co-constructed parent–adolescent career projects, however, cannot be apprehended solely on the basis of the five properties described by Young et al. (2001). Whiston and Keller's (2004) meta-analysis of 77 studies, examining family influences on the phenomenon of CDM, found these processes to be largely mediated by contextual factors, such as culture, gender, and socioeconomic background. Similarly, Fouad et al. (2008) found that sociocultural factors, such as gender perceptions, traditional gender roles, and cultural values and expectations intervened with CDM processes, and greatly limited career options for females in particular.

Furthermore, Whiston and Keller's (2004) review classified family influence variables into two major categories: family structural variables and family process variables. Family structural variables included factors such as parents' occupation levels, employment status, socioeconomic status, gender, and race; family process variables referred to parents' relational styles and attitudes including warmth, support, openness, expectations, attachment, independence, and autonomy. Of these various family influence variables, process variables proved to be especially powerful in determining the success of the co-constructed parent–adolescent career project. A comprehensive understanding of

co-constructed CDM, therefore, involves examining the nature of the parent–adolescent relationship. Indeed, numerous studies have acknowledged the nature of the parent–adolescent relationship as key in determining the success or failure of attaining career goals. Parent–adolescent relationships that were perceived more positively by adolescents created a climate that promoted CDM and were associated with parental influence factors such as support, attachment, encouragement, availability, and guidance (Blustein et al., 2001; Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Keller & Whiston, 2008; Schultheiss et al., 2001; Young et al., 2006). Shared positive emotional states between parents and adolescents helped in the co-construction of youth's career goals (Schultheiss et al., 2001), and led to higher levels of youth career development and maturity and lower levels of career indecision (Keller & Whiston, 2008).

Conversely, parent–adolescent relationships that were perceived negatively by adolescents created a climate that inhibited CDM, and often led to career indecision or even the failure of realizing career goals. Such relationships were characterized by the absence of parental guidance (Jung, 2013), support (Blustein et al., 2001), and engagement (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009), as well as parental rejection of adolescents' values and opinions (Keller & Whiston, 2008). Furthermore, high levels of disagreement and conflict over career aspirations between parents and adolescents led to adolescent demotivation, struggle, and failure of attaining education and career goals (Schultheiss et al., 2001).

2.2. Modern-day Arab families and women's CDM

An in-depth examination of the complex, non-linear nature of co-constructed parent–adolescent CDM needs to consider the wider sociocultural context in which these processes occur. For Arab women, this would involve an understanding of the sociocultural norms of their culture and ways of life. Family plays an integral role in the Arab society, and as Barakat (1993) eloquently states, "Arab society … is the family generalized or enlarged, and the family is society in miniature. Both act on and react to one another" (p. 118). Arabs are collectivists,[1] who seek societal validation from family, community, and society; every family member's success or failure is reflected on the family as a whole. Responsibility in families is shared among its members and decisions are not made individually, but in consultation with elders, parents, and extended family members whose approval is sought (Dwairy et al., 2006). Hence, major life decisions such as women's higher education and career choices inevitably impact the whole family's reputation, prestige, and social status. Moreover, in Arab culture, commitment to the family is key, and it is through family that religious and cultural notions of connection, obedience, and respect for elders are emphasized and ingrained (Oweis et al., 2012). Arab adolescents generally have a high degree of connectedness to their families; female adolescents, in particular, are known to be generally more connected to their families than males (Dwairy at al., 2006; Ridge et al., 2018).

The contemporary Arab culture incorporates elements of both modernity and tradition. Historically, Arabs lived in family-based patriarchal societies that assumed traditional gender roles, such as the notion of the father as head of the family and principal

breadwinner and the mother as housewife and primary nurturer of children (El Safty, 2004; Moghadam, 2004). However, over the past couple of decades, globalization and modernization enabled a shift in traditional gender role attitudes amongst Arabs (Mostafa, 2003). Arab women have become increasingly educated (Hamdan, 2006; Mazawi, 1999; Metcalfe, 2008; Ridge, 2014; World Bank, 2013), and have occupied more positions in the public sphere than ever before (Elamin & Omair, 2010). Yet, despite sociocultural reforms and modernization, the contemporary Arab world continues to retain some of its conservative traditions, values, and patriarchal social structures (Jabeen, 2010; Metle, 2002; Sidani, 2005), including the emphasis on stereotypical gender roles in many families (Ridge et al., 2018).

For many Arab women, prevailing family-based patriarchal values and traditional gender role expectations (Elamin & Omair, 2010; World Bank, 2013) significantly impact their CDM, often causing them to steer away from their aspired careers (Omair, 2010). Modern-day Arab women aspire to higher levels of educational achievements, employment, and political participation than do their male counterparts (Ridge, 2014). Yet, in many parts of the Arab world, they still require consent from authoritative male family figures to work outside the home (World Bank, 2010). Arab women who are encouraged by their families to participate in the workforce are usually advised to choose occupations that are considered gender-appropriate and acceptable by society (Gallant & Pounder, 2008). Several studies have found that Arab women who pursue work outside the home tend to choose careers that enable balance between work and family (Jabeen, 2010), usually prioritizing their roles as mothers and housewives (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). This is especially true in oil-rich Gulf countries, where women's work for the purpose of raising a family's financial status or for economic reasons is often perceived as unnecessary (Elamin & Omair, 2010).

In the UAE, family approval and conformity to societal traditions were found to be key influences on Emirati women's tertiary education choices (Aswad et al., 2011). Jobs that require long working hours, physical labor, and/or substantial interaction with men were perceived as culturally inappropriate for women and typically discouraged (Al Marzouqi & Forster, 2011; Elamin & Omair, 2010). Several studies conducted in the UAE have found that parental interference acted as a key determinant of women's CDM. According to Rutledge et al. (2014), women's preference for careers in the public sector, a highly desirable sector for women primarily due to provisions of feminized workplaces, increased with higher parental interference. The same study found that in general, parental involvement acted as a de-motivating factor for women to enter the work force. Omair's (2010) in-depth interviews with Emirati women revealed that they consulted their male family members during their CDM; male family members who did support women's work, did so by providing career advice or employment opportunities. These included work in their families' businesses, which were considered *safe* work environments, free from unwelcome male attention, interaction, and competition. Similarly, Williams et al. (2013) found that Emirati fathers actively encouraged and supported their daughters' pursuit of careers, albeit in certain work environments that aligned with their patriarchal model of life. Such workplaces also included the desirable feminized public sector with its shorter working hours and longer leaves, thus enabling them to adhere to cultural

norms of modesty. These parental influence patterns show that women in the UAE are mostly being restricted to occupations in workplaces that are feminized or sheltered, thereby limiting their range of career choices and possibilities.

3. Methodology

This study examines the role of parents in the higher education and CDM of young Arab women in the UAE. The research was part of a larger, comparative study designed to explore the higher education and CDM experiences of women of Arab background in the UAE and Australia, in light of their parental influences and sociocultural contexts. The study utilized a CGT approach (Charmaz, 2014), rooted in social constructivist epistemology (Creswell, 2013). This qualitative methodology allowed for in-depth explorations of Arab women's CDM within their wider sociocultural contexts, recognizing that perspectives and meaning-making are historically, spatially, and socially bound. The CGT methodology assumes an interpretivist stance whereby researchers co-construct knowledge with participants, taking into account their own positionalities, perspectives, and interactions (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Moreover, the CGT methodology refers to both the research product and the analytic process. It uses inductive strategies for data collection and analysis for the purpose of creating a theory. In doing so, extant theories from the literature are not treated as imported truths. Rather, such theories are sources of comparative analysis in order to remain open to all theoretical possibilities.

Semi-structured, individual interviews were conducted in 2016 with a total of 22 participants living in Dubai, UAE, which provided multiple perspectives and insights into their co-constructed CDM experiences. This sample group of participants consisted of Muslim women of diverse Arab nationalities; 11 identified as being Emirati nationals, of whom one identified as having mixed Arab parents who held Emirati citizenship. The other 11 participants consisted of three Egyptians, two Syrians, three Palestinians with Jordanian citizenship, one Lebanese, and two who identified as mixed Arab. Participants who were non-Emirati nationals were residents who either had student visas or were residing with their parents who had working visas in the UAE. The majority of participants had been born or raised in the UAE from a young age. It is important to note here that Emirati nationals have their own distinct cultural traditions that differ from those of other Arab participants. The participants were aged between 18 and 25 years and were either enrolled at a university or had recently graduated at the time of the interview. The majority of participants were single, with the exception of two: one had been recently married and was pregnant, and another was engaged to be married soon after her graduation. All participants were assigned pseudonyms, however, an effort was made to assign pseudonyms that represented the country/nationality of the Arab participant, to reflect their identities.

Table 1 outlines the participants' pseudonyms, nationality, choice of university course, and university. Participants are arranged in the table in the order in which they were interviewed.

Each of the semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim, and copies of the transcripts were sent to the participants for validation and feedback prior to data

Table 1

Demographics of participants in Dubai, UAE

Participant	Pseudonym	Nationality	University course	University
1.	Areej	Mixed Arab (Emirati citizen)	International Studies/International Relations	American University in Dubai (AUD)
2.	Dina	Egyptian	Architectural Engineering	American University in Sharjah (AUS)
3.	Suad	Emirati	Environmental Sciences	AUS
4.	Rola	Syrian	Media/Journalism	AUD
5.	Lina	Palestinian–Jordanian	Journalism	AUD
6.	Hafsa	Emirati	Graphic Design	Zayed University (ZU)
7.	Ayah	Mixed Arab	Mass Communication/Journa	AUS
8.	Jana	Palestinian–Jordanian	Clinical Nutrition and Dietetics	University of Sharjah (UOS)
9.	Suha	Syrian	Sustainable and Renewable Engineering	UOS
10.	Rania	Egyptian	Media/Journalism	AUD
11.	Yousra	Egyptian	Major International Relations/Minor Economics	AUD
12.	Hayat	Mixed Arab	Journalism/Minor Middle Eastern Studies & Politics	AUD
13.	Maitha	Emirati	International Studies	AUD
14.	Maryam	Emirati	Dentistry	ZU
15.	Hanaa	Lebanese	Chemical Engineering	AUS
16.	Hadeel	Palestinian–Jordanian	Chemical Engineering	AUS
17.	Salamah	Emirati	Electrical Engineering	AUS
18.	Afra	Emirati	Finance	ZU
19.	Sheikha	Emirati	Biotechnology	UOS
20.	Lubna	Emirati	Graphic Design	ZU
21.	Shamma	Emirati	Public Health and Nutrition	ZU
22.	Asmaa	Emirati	Law	UOS

analysis (Maxwell, 2005). No changes were needed. The data were analyzed using the N-Vivo software program and followed a grounded theory approach to coding, which comprised three main stages: initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2014).

As a former high school teacher in Dubai, my professional networks in the UAE aided in participant recruitment. This recruitment approach proved very helpful in eliminating or reducing trust issues in gaining access to Arab female participants; previous studies have reported the lack of trust as a hindrance (Al Marzouqi & Forster, 2011; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). Moreover, my insider positionality of being an Arab Muslim woman encouraged openness in participants' responses and facilitated deeper understanding of expressed phenomena related to Arab cultural norms and values.

Nevertheless, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all Arab women in the UAE or Arab world. Participants in this study belonged to a relatively high socioeconomic status. Furthermore, this study does not claim that there is one definitive Arab culture; instead, it acknowledges the diversity of Arab participants, despite their shared language and patriarchal social norms (Mostafa, 2005). In addition, this constructivist study aims to provide in-depth insights into the parental and sociocultural influences that impact the higher education and career choices of Arab women in the UAE and provides a basis for further studies in the Arabian Gulf region and Arab world as a whole. The following sections discuss the emergent themes from the analysis of the interview data.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Parental control and co-constructed CDM

The higher education and CDM of all women in this study proved to be a co-constructed process between themselves and their parents. The data showed that deciding on a university course was not an individually made decision by any of the participants. Rather, the choice of university course was considered by families a major life decision and required numerous deliberations between these women and their parents in order to reach a consensus and gain their approval. Through these jointly constructed processes, parents played a significant role in guiding their daughters toward higher education and careers that fell within boundaries of what they deemed to be culturally acceptable careers. Parents equally steered their daughters away from careers that they considered culturally unacceptable. The co-constructed nature of these CDM processes is clearly articulated in Rania's statement:

> … that back and forth that I had with choosing my major was largely because of my parents, but then eventually we settled on something that satisfied us all, journalism. It's not literature, which is also something I really love but then again, it's not political science, so finding each other's middle ground, you know.

In essence, parents' involvement in their daughters' CDM can be understood as a form of *parental control*. The act of parental control allowed parents to shape and guide their daughters' career aspirations and goals in accordance with their sociocultural values and gendered traditions. Moreover, participants seemingly expected their parents to be significantly involved, at the very least as guides, in their CDM. The majority of

participants perceived this act of parental control or involvement as a parental right and indeed a testament of *good* parenting. They also perceived this involvement as the norm because they trusted that their parents had their best interests at heart, and largely expected them to pay their university tuition fees in full. This latter expectation, as indicated by Rania, further legitimated their parents' say in their choices, "I always knew that they will always have an influence on what I choose. I mean, I guess they have the right… they pay my tuition, you know, I mean they want to see me in a good position."

Similar to Rania's aforementioned comments, all participants' narratives were laden with evidence of their parents' involvement in their CDM, acknowledging that the process for Arab women is an interactive one that is jointly constructed through goal-directed plans and actions of both parents and adolescents (Young et al., 2001, 2006). This evident parental involvement or control was demonstrated in the narratives of all 22 participants, in either implicit or explicit ways, depending on whether the choices made by these women aligned with their parents' perceptions of culturally acceptable careers.

Parental control falls under the category of family process variables (Whiston & Keller, 2004) as it incorporates relational elements of parental communication, expectations, and guidance. The two emergent forms of parental control, implicit and explicit, despite their common relational attributes, played out differently for participants. These forms of control were largely contingent on the nature of the goals in parent–daughter career projects and their degree of congruence (Young et al., 2001). The following sections further unpack the two forms of parental control and explicate their underlying cultural and gendered influences.

4.2. Explicit control

Explicit control is the first of the two types of parental control that emerged in this study, and was evident in the experiences of a minority of the women – 4 of the total 22 participants. These four women experienced explicit parental control during their CDM because their parents disagreed with their initial choices and deemed them as culturally unacceptable. The four women's accounts were generally characterized by negative parental influence, conflict, and lack of autonomy and support. The degree, however, of perceived negative parental influence varied amongst these women, as were the resulting effects on their CDM experiences, with some being milder than others. Each of these women reported experiencing explicit parental control in one or more of the following forms: imposition, opposition, steering in certain directions, and the need to reach a consensus.

Hafsa's choice of graphic design was a case of solid opposition by both her parents who disapproved of it as a study choice and career field. Her parents perceived the field as too *open-minded* due to its dominance by private Western-occupied advertising agencies, thereby requiring a woman to conduct herself at work in non-traditional and culturally unacceptable ways. This included freely travelling, being overly exposed to

men, and frequently interacting with them within and beyond her workplace. Occupations of this nature conflicted with Arab parents' cultural values and were rejected out of fear of tainting the daughter and her family's reputation, and potentially hindering her future marriage prospects. Hafsa was adamant on enrolling in her degree of choice, yet she experienced a prolonged period of lack of support and opposition to her decision by her parents, noting, "They tried to stop me. They tried to stop me for 3 years, constantly... I would say they were trying to push their opinion."

Hafsa was given time to prove to her parents that her choice was worthwhile, and that she could indeed be successful while simultaneously abiding by her culture's traditional gender norms. Such norms included women's preservation of modesty in dress and behavior when interacting with male colleagues; this is a strongly gendered notion that is necessary for Arab families to maintain their honor and reputation in their communities and avoid being shamed or disrespected (Metcalfe, 2008; World Bank, 2013).

These codes of modesty, in addition to the need to obtain consent for work outside the home from authoritative male family figures, have a direct impact on women's economic participation in the Arab region (World Bank, 2010). For example, in Aswad et al.'s (2011) study, Emirati female students who had initially aspired to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) programs in universities outside of their hometowns were not granted permission by their families to pursue their educational aspirations due to restrictions on women's travel. Restrictions on travel for women are specifically associated with cultural reasons of protection and preservation of modesty (Metcalfe, 2008; World Bank, 2013). In Hafsa's case, although her parents eventually succumbed to her choice, their acceptance was short-lived when she started working after her graduation. They continued to view the field as a threat to her future conjugal life, particularly in regard to finding a partner who would be accepting of the nature of her work.

Other parents, such as Hadeel's, similarly believed that females did not belong in male-dominated fields; they therefore rejected her initial choices of mechanical and civil engineering. These "sexist traditions" (Hamdan, 2006, p. 60) and attitudes stem from the same gendered and cultural notions of modesty and protection of women, reducing unnecessary interaction with the opposite sex.

By opposing these professions, families ensure that their daughters safely abide by their norms and are safe from potential harassment and illegitimate behaviors, resulting from interactions with male colleagues. Iraqi mothers in Jamal Al-deen's (2018) study validated such gendered notions of women's protection by choosing single-sex schools for their daughters to reduce the risk of their potential engagement in illegitimate actions with male peers, which in turn would shame or dishonor their families. Hadeel's account of her CDM indicated several forms of explicit control by her parents, including opposition and imposition, to ensure her protection:

> I think that was at the beginning of getting into AUS [American University in Sharjah]. Like I shouldn't choose a major that would end me up working in a m[ale] environment, like construction, so they [parents] eliminated civil engineering by themselves. They completely eliminated mechanical engineering although I love it.

Hadeel's mother further attempted to control her choice by steering her in the direction of another field, computer science, in the belief that it was relatively less male-dominated and thus safer and more sheltered. Hadeel, however, eventually settled on chemical engineering despite her mother's initial disapproval of the field. This occurred after several visits to the university and discussions with academics of relative departments, where the gender ratio of enrollments luckily managed to convince her mother of her choice. Hadeel notes,

> The reason she accepted is that when she went with me to AUS [American University in Sharjah] during those two weeks and asked the chemical engineering department about the percentage of females and males, they told her we have 50% males and 50% females, and they told her that this major has the most females involved. So she was like, "Wow; yes this is the major!"

The challenges, stress, and lack of autonomy in CDM experiences such as those of Hafsa, Hadeel, and others, who experienced explicit parental control supports research that found that lack of parental support (Blustein et al., 2001) and parental dismissal of adolescents' opinions or conflict over career aspirations (Keller & Whiston, 2008; Schultheiss et al., 2001) led to struggle and difficulty in realizing or accomplishing career goals. In applying the concept of the career project and its five properties (Young et al., 2001), communication, albeit negatively perceived, was the only property present in all four explicit control cases. Parents and daughters in these cases did not share joint goals mainly due to disagreement over the career choice, and therefore a lack of congruence existed over the means of attaining it. Moreover, these women's retrospective accounts clearly depict their parents' controlling agenda, and emphasize their determination in ensuring their daughters' choices conformed to cultural and gendered norms.

In light of the collectivist nature of Arab culture, explicit parental control is not an entirely surprising phenomenon. Indeed, the impact of parental influence on young people's career choices was found to be much more substantial in collectivist cultures where cultural and traditional values were strongly emphasized. For instance, Chinese parents were found to grant their daughters flexibility in their choice of career, however, only within a restricted pool of options that were culturally perceived as prestigious and gender-appropriate (Hou & Leung, 2011). Fouad et al. (2008) also found that cultural expectations, such as becoming a successful role model and maintaining the family's reputation, pressured Asian-American children to fulfil their parents' career aspirations.

Amongst Arab families, the prevalent patriarchal norms, such as gender role expectations and notions of obedience and modesty, dictate certain expectations for women's education and career pathways (Elamin & Omair, 2010). Results from several studies in the UAE showed that Arab women's career and employment decisions were made upon consultation with parents (mostly fathers), where they were typically guided toward occupations within sheltered family businesses and/or feminized workplaces that complied with patriarchal and cultural norms (e.g., short working hours) (Aswad et al., 2011; Rutledge et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2013). In this way, the varied acts of explicit parental control shown in this study are akin to research which established that Arab parents' involvement in their daughters' CDM often occurred within bounds of gendered and cultural conformity. More importantly, this and previous research suggest that such

practices of explicit parental control toward women's CDM are normalized within Arab culture.

4.3. Implicit control

Parental control emerged in an implicit form with the majority of participants in this study, that is, in 18 out of the total 22 women. In this category, parental control was implicit because it manifested in a more subtle form, characterized by perceived positive parental influence and the absence of disagreement or conflict. Parents of these women were described as being supportive, encouraging, guiding, and at times dissuading, while granting them autonomy to make their own choices. However, this perceived autonomy described by participants was not absolute and was only restricted to careers perceived by parents as culturally acceptable. Similar to explicit control, implicit parental control in the positive varied forms it was practiced ensured that these women's choices fitted within the accepted framework of gender-appropriate and highly regarded or prestigious careers in Arab culture.

The career choices or aspirations of women in this category happened to (originally or eventually) neatly align with their parents' notions of culturally acceptable careers, hence leaving no likelihood for conflict and disagreement. Thus, women in this category could be described as either lucky to have desired careers that aligned with their parents' views or simply have been socialized toward those pathways and therefore consciously or subconsciously made those agreeable decisions. This was clearly articulated by Lubna who was seemingly fortunate to have avoided conflict by choosing a field that was perceived as having little interaction with men:

> Yeah, actually my mother does have that I think. She does have that thinking. I don't think she would have liked something that I would interact much with men. Even my father. But they have not made it explicit … I mean they expected that I would have dealings with men and stuff, but I'm pretty sure that there are a lot of fields that actually have more interaction with men than graphic [design], does that make sense?

Women in this category received strong support and encouragement from their parents when their career choices conformed to Arab cultural and gender norms. Jana's choice of clinical nutrition and dietetics, for instance, was approved and strongly supported by her parents. They perceived it to be a well-suited profession for a woman, and believed that her knowledge of nutrition and dietetics would be beneficial for her future family even if she were to decide not to pursue it as a career:

> But then when I told them about clinical nutrition and dietetics, my mum was very supporting. My dad too. They loved it, and they were like, "Yeah, go for it, it's nice for a girl. It will benefit you even if you don't have a career or something."

Similarly, professions that were perceived by parents as prestigious and highly regarded in Arab culture (Al-Bitar et al., 2008; Ausman et al., 2013) were greatly

supported and encouraged. These included medicine, law, and journalism among others. Maryam's choice of dentistry belonged to this category of reputable professions amongst Arabs. Maryam exclaimed, "Of course, they encouraged me when I chose dentistry!"

Other cases of parental support toward specific fields were seen when parents had the social capital or network of people that they could leverage to secure their daughters' future employment. This form of parental support was perceived positively by women, such as Hayat who was provided with immense support from her father to pursue media as a profession because he also worked in the same field thus granting her almost guaranteed job prospects. Hayat stated, "Yeah, my dad influenced [me] in a way that he made it look like I am going to help you get internships easier than other jobs."

In the same vein, parents under this category implicitly dissuaded their daughters from careers that were perceived as culturally unacceptable. This implicit dissuasion from certain professions was a parental act of influence that always was done covertly. None of the participants acknowledged it as an explicit parental influence. In other words, this form of parental influence did not carry any negative sentiments when described in participants' narratives. Instead, women in this category perceived the act of dissuasion positively, as a form of guidance. In sum, their narratives did not allude to negative relationships with their parents. Salamah's statement depicts this influence as the norm for the Arab girls, who were seemingly seeking, expecting, and accepting of this form of parental involvement in their choices:

> First, I wanted to study journalism, they told me it doesn't have the best reputation here being in journalism, being in media. It doesn't have a really good reputation so I excluded it as an option from early days in school, from like tenth grade, I decided: Okay, this will not be for me, my parents do not accept it.

The reasons behind parents' discouragement or dissuasion from certain career pathways for their daughters fell under three main categories: (1) gender norms and role expectations; (2) cultural values (e.g., honor and reputation); and (3) culturally valued professions. First, gender norms and role expectations largely accounted for why some careers were discouraged for girls. Ayah, for example, spoke of her parents' implicit discouragement of her initial choice of electrical engineering, while acknowledging that they were not imposing their wishes:

> At first, I was very interested in electrical engineering, but my parents were a little bit discouraging … It was never brought up directly, like this is not a girl thing or a guy thing, but they always gave the feeling or the impression that Engineering is not for you, for a girl, like eventually 'What are you going to do with it?' and things like that, "It's very tough, it's very hard, and do you really want to go there?" I always felt that they gave this impression, but they always tried never to say it out loud. They never wanted to or make me do a certain choice because of their opinions. Even my mother was very afraid,

"What if I told you do this, and then you came in the future and told me, why did you make me take that choice?"

The second reason that caused parents to dissuade their daughters away from certain careers was the impact of the career on the woman's reputation or image, which would also affect her family's. Hayat's father, whom she described as supportive and open-minded, disapproved of her aspiration to pursue a career as a singer out of fear that its ill reputation for women would negatively impact or shame his daughter. Hayat noted, "My dad was like, 'I would never want you to become a singer,' because at some point it was getting bigger and bigger for me; and I just stopped at some point because of being an Arab girl." Hayat further explained that, as an Arab girl, her father expected her to abide by certain norms and traditions that are established by society:

Yeah, like at my graduation he was like, "This is the last time I want you to be singing out there in public, in a big event or something." Yeah, he never said that it is haram,[2] or because you know a woman's voice is you know awra,[3] as they say in Arabic, no. He was like because it is culturally not accepted, I guess. To admit, my parents do care about what the other people think or what the society thinks.

The third reason for parents' implicit dissuasion from certain career pathways was how valued the career is in Arab society. Dina explained that animation was not perceived as a professional career amongst her community; therefore, it was not recommended by her parents:

They don't see it important, they don't see it hard, they just see it as something very, like something for kids, you draw and you color and then you make a stupid story and whatever, and that's how they see it. They, like, belittle it or something ... that's what causes how we think of it not as a major, [and] as a hobby only ... I believe all those cultural ideas towards such a major would [make] someone [think] that this is just a hobby, but for me it is absolutely not a hobby.

Implicit parental control, in all the various forms in which it was demonstrated in participants' narratives – support, encouragement, guidance, or dissuasion from certain careers – was perceived and recounted in a positive manner. The absence of negative sentiments from these women's narratives clearly shows that their career perceptions and aspirations more or less aligned with their parents' sociocultural and gendered perceptions. Moreover, their perceived positive parental influence further indicate that they generally valued and welcomed these forms of implicit parental control in their career projects.

These findings concur with studies that establish parental support, guidance, and encouragement as key positive parental influence variables on youth's career development, and choices (Blustein et al., 2001; Ceja, 2006; Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Schultheiss et al., 2001; Whiston & Keller, 2004; Young et al., 2006). Previous studies found that parental support during CDM can be provided in two forms: emotional and instrumental such as assistance with career- and education-related tasks (Blustein et al., 2001;

Keller & Whiston, 2008). Similarly, data from several participants indicated that parental support was provided both emotionally, for example, through encouragement as seen with Maryam's choice of dentistry, and instrumentally as with Hayat's choice of media, where support was associated with her father's social capital in the field.

Nevertheless, despite the perceived positive parental influence under this category, the CDM processes of these 18 participants were based upon joint discussions and ultimately required parental approval. Parental support, guidance, encouragement, and perceived autonomy-granting evident in this category of women was carried out by parents within specific boundaries of what they deemed as "appropriate" or "acceptable" careers for their daughters. Hence, the autonomy perceived by these women was not absolute; parental agendas (Young et al., 2001) mandating consent from authoritative male family figures as well as conformity to Arab sociocultural and patriarchal norms (Gallant & Pounder, 2008; Williams et al., 2013) while implicit, were evident.

Participant interviews also suggested that implicit control, perceived as positive parental involvement during their CDM, was the norm and an expectation of good responsible parenting. It was clear that these women were socialized to view implicit control as a parental enactment of their duty of care toward the women, which in turn, they were somewhat obligated to accept. This was evident in Ayah's positive acknowledgement of her parent's advice to take up journalism and steer away from the male-dominated engineering profession: "At the beginning I didn't like it [parents' advice]. I never expected, though, to think that they are right, but right now I don't imagine how I would have continued in that [Engineering] field."

The aforementioned comments by Ayah and Salamah highlight these women's eagerness to appease their parents, accept their judgements, and gain their approval. These findings correspond with the Arab patriarchal and cultural notions of expected obedience, particularly by women (Oweis et al., 2012). Similar to explicit control, the underlying reasons for parents' implicit support and guidance toward specific careers over others were associated with gendered and cultural attitudes that conform to Arab societal traditions (Aswad et al., 2011). Parental messages such as Jana's statement, "it's nice for a girl," reinforce Arab stereotypical gender roles established in previous studies where women should not seek male-dominated or demanding professions (Al Marzouqi & Forster, 2011), and instead should pursue female-suited careers (Gallant & Pounder, 2008) that enable work and family balance (Omair, 2010; Rutledge et al., 2014).

Contrary to studies on Arab women where parents steered their daughters away from male-dominated professions (Al Marzouqi & Forster, 2011), this study revealed some cases of parental support and guidance toward male-dominated professions, or ones that would require interactions with males. This parental influence was seen particularly with fathers, and usually when they had the power to enable their daughters' employment in workplaces where they either worked themselves or had social connections (e.g., Hayat). By utilizing their social capital, fathers have a direct control over their daughters' protection in the workplace, concerning job security, but more importantly concerning the preservation of family honor and reputation by sheltering them from places that do not conform to their norms (e.g., open-minded Western agencies in the case of Hafsa). This finding corroborates results from Omair's (2010)

study, which revealed that male family members supported Emirati women managers by providing them with employment opportunities in their families' businesses. Further supporting this notion, Williams et al. (2013) found that Emirati fathers engaged in active encouragement and support of their daughter's career choices, yet, solely within culturally appropriate workplaces that have feminized environments, shorter hours, and longer leaves, such as in the public sector. In essence, through these forms of implicit control, fathers ensure their daughters' career choices conform to their traditional norms and patriarchal model of life.

Thus, findings from this study show that both forms of parental control, implicit and explicit, are rooted in the sociocultural and gendered notions of appropriate careers for Arab women. However, unlike explicitly controlled women, those who were implicitly controlled during their CDM were largely in agreement with their parents' guidance. It is difficult to surmise whether this agreement stemmed from utter conviction, passive acceptance, or the desire for appeasement. Yet, notwithstanding the root cause of this harmony, the finding still suggests that these women had the agency and autonomy to construct their career aspirations and choices in alignment with their parents' values and beliefs.

5. Conclusion

This paper has endeavored to understand the roles played by parents in the higher education and CDM of young Arab women in the UAE. Participants' narratives strongly indicated that CDM was an interactive process that was jointly constructed through goal-directed plans and deliberations between parents and their daughters. This evident parental involvement and, indeed, influence, termed as *parental control* could be understood as the parents' right and duty to assist and guide their daughters during a key life decision. Parental control further indicates the nature and extent to which Arab parents direct and govern their daughters' career navigation and exploration activities as well as how they shape and influence their career perceptions and aspirations.

Parental control occurred in two main forms, explicit and implicit, in the CDM narratives of women in this study. The first form, explicit parental control, was evident in four participants and occurred when women's initial career choices were rejected or disapproved by their parents because they were deemed culturally unacceptable. Women under this theme reported negative CDM experiences that involved conflict and lack of parental support and autonomy to pursue their desired careers. The second form, implicit parental control, occurred with the majority of participants and was described positively through parental support, encouragement, guidance, and autonomy-granting. In both its manifested forms, parental control proved to be a complex process and not a linear determinant of participants' CDM. Both forms further demonstrated that they are underpinned by the same sociocultural and gendered perceptions and norms, both traditional and contemporary, of women's roles in Arab culture and society. In sum, parental control acted as a powerful influence that directed and ensured that Arab women's higher education and career choices fell within bounds of cultural conformity.

The results of this study contribute to the growing literature on Arab women's CDM and depict the larger set of discourses that influence and determine their career aspirations and choices. The study also introduces new Arab gendered and cultural dimensions to existing youth career development and decision-making theories. In practical terms, findings from this research provide a number of recommendations for educational leadership and policymakers in the UAE to consider, particularly with regard to career guidance and counseling for female students at the secondary and tertiary levels.

First, given parents' significant involvement and influence on their daughters' CDM, career guidance programs should consider involving parents and work with them in order to collectively support and guide women in the UAE toward their aspired careers. Second, development of career guidance programs and secondary school curricula should consider providing tailor-made gender-responsive initiatives in order to help young women actualize their education and career goals. Of note, the nationals and residents belong to different social categories in UAE society and have different statuses and rights. Therefore, it is imperative that these programs and curricula are designed bearing in mind those differences as well as taking into consideration the contexts and cultures of the schools in which they would be implemented.

6. Author's note

This study has received ethics clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the author's university. Informed consent was obtained from all participants included in this study. The author was also granted permission to conduct interviews on the grounds of a renowned university in Dubai by its Chief Academic Officer and Director of External Relations prior to the commencement of the research.

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Competing Interests

There was no conflict of interest between the author and any participant recruited in this study.

Biography

Nada Labib is a researcher and academic at the Sydney School of Education and Social Work, The University of Sydney. Nada's research interests lie in the fields of Higher Education, Sociology of Education, and Comparative and International Education. Nada is particularly interested in gender equity regarding choice, access to and participation in higher education and non-traditional careers.

Her most recent paper in UNESCO's 2020 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Gender Report on *Gender-responsive school counselling for participation in non-traditional fields in higher education in the United Arab Emirates*, can be accessed here: https: //unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374508

Notes

[1]People in collectivist cultures are interdependent within their in-groups (e.g., family, clan, society); they have strong bonds with others in their in-groups and act primarily on the basis of their norms. They behave in communal interest, and permanent loyalty to their in-group is expected (Hofstede, 1984; Hui & Triandis, 1986; Triandis, 2001)

[2]In Arabic, haram means "prohibited" (in Islam)

[3]Awra refers to behavioral conduct or areas of the body (including voice) that cannot be revealed to the opposite sex

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