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# Mothers as Managers: Work-Family Balance and Identity at the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education

**Mai GH H S Al-Suwaileh**

**Submitted to Swansea University in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Management**

**Swansea University**

**2015**

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# Abstract

As a consequence of the discovery of oil in Kuwait in 1940, Kuwaiti culture has undergone major changes. From the 1950s onwards women actively entered the workplace alongside men and this has had a noticeable impact on women's lives. Despite some progress, however, women's struggle for greater equality continues to be influenced by Kuwaiti social and cultural beliefs. This thesis is the first in-depth qualitative analysis of the barriers facing mothers working in management in Kuwait. Specifically, the complex interrelationship between culture, gender and management is explored. It argues that work-family imbalance in Kuwait is a consequence of social and cultural beliefs concerning the status of women in that society.

The study classifies the main cultural and gender-related issues affecting the roles of mothers working in management in Kuwait, with a view to helping such women succeed in their working and family lives. The circumstances facing working women in modern, affluent Kuwait while they attempt to raise large families is analysed by reviewing women's status and issues of cultural inequality in modern Kuwaiti society and how this affects their employment. The study adopted a qualitative research methodology to explore factors affecting women's working lives, female identity in the workplace, and work-family balance and conflict. In the first of its two phases, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 27 mothers in management positions at the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education. A life history approach was then taken with another four women to fully investigate how cultural beliefs impact women's rights over their lives and bodies in Kuwaiti society.

The main findings indicate that the participants perceived themselves to be affected by work-life imbalance, based on patriarchal ideals being imposed on gender roles, thus creating conflict and destabilising women's self-perceptions in ways which are quite specific to Kuwait. Most importantly, it was found that women in managerial roles tended to reject certain inherent female qualities in themselves and other women, while simultaneously preserving an outward display of traditional femininity. In other words, there was evidence of an unresolved identity crisis.

This thesis concludes that women at higher levels of management find it difficult to juggle work and family life because of cultural identity issues in the Kuwaiti context. This problem is significant, as Kuwaiti women would appear to experience more difficulty in this regard than women in many other parts of the world, where the key issues of work-family imbalance are found to be time management, family-friendly policies and the age and number of children. The Kuwaiti Ministry of Education is particularly problematic for women in management roles and it is important to address the issues of work-family balance in Kuwait structurally and institutionally in relation to the family, in order to support women at work.

# Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed ............ *Mai Al-Suwaileh* ................................ (candidate)

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## This thesis is dedicated to my mothers' soul


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# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| FKWA | Federation of Kuwaiti Women's Associations |
| KD | Kuwaiti Dinar |
| PBUH | Peace be upon him |
| UAE | United Arab Emirates |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| USA | United States of America |
| WCSS | Women's Cultural and Social Society |

# Chapter One:
# Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

> You may feel pity and sympathy when you hear that someone is in prison. Prison is not only a jail built by the government, but is everything that restricts one's freedom, either in prison or in the house… Kuwaiti women are condemned to a life sentence in a house watched over by a male guardian and lived behind the bars of tradition and values… (Alsuwailan, 2006, p. 62).

> Females are socialized to be communal, to attend to their domestic responsibilities, to meet their socially ascribed gender roles that are limited to being good mothers and wives… on the contrary, males are socialized to pursue education and careers and to be financially successful… these cultural values create specific social expectations of the genders and stereotypes about what a man and a women can and should do or not do (Tlaiss, 2013, p. 758).

> Although an increasing number of women receive education and work outside the home, the majority are still secluded and segregated... women's role in public life is limited, and women are [marginalized] in all social, economic and political organizations (Karmi, 1993, p. 151).

Continued gender inequality in Kuwaiti society and workplaces, specifically in management, lies at the heart of this study. The problems of gender discrimination, stereotypes, occupational segregation and the double burden that women carry—in terms of home care and work career—are well documented in Western societies (McRae, 2003; Wajcman, 1998). However, no research has been conducted into how gender norms in Kuwaiti culture affect women's circumstances and status in society as a whole and the workplace in particular (Tetreault, 1994). Likewise, there are very few studies examining the barriers facing employed women in the Arab context (Mostafa, 2005), and no studies in the whole of the Arab region that analyse the reality of women's bodily experiences of pregnancy and childbirth, agency, working conditions and career trajectories.

My thesis explores the circumstances of employed Kuwaiti mothers in managerial roles in the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education. Particularly, the thesis investigates the complexity of the interrelationships between culture, gender and management in the Kuwaiti context. My research is the first of its kind to be conducted in Kuwait and contributes new theoretical, empirical and methodological knowledge regarding the

everyday life experiences of Kuwaiti mothers employed in management roles in education. This is also the first thesis to critique Western literature on female managers, motherhood and work-life balance from a Kuwaiti cultural perspective. Its focus on women in the education sector means that it deals with a large proportion of Kuwait's female workforce.

My study is novel since it is the first empirical research project to explore women's bodies, childbirth and pregnancy in relation to the self and the specific gender of that self-conducted in the Middle East, particularly in Kuwait. In Arab and Muslim countries, women's bodies are seen private and not to be spoken about (Vidyasagar and Rea, 2004). My study challenges this taboo and I am the first researcher in the Middle East and Kuwait to explore herself in conjunction with similar identities, investigating women's choice and agency over their bodies: whether to marry or not, whether to have children or not and whether to veil or not. Exploring these areas of body and agency helps me to extend my knowledge of women in the Middle East and Kuwait and also reflect on my own role in society.

Additionally, I am the first Kuwaiti female researcher to investigate the effects of marginalisation on Kuwaiti women. As Harding (1993) notes, the most insightful perspective on the circumstances of marginalised people comes from those people who are being marginalised and socially oppressed. Likewise, Freire (2002) rhetorically asks: "Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of the oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation?" (p.45). Freire also encourages the oppressed to reflect in order to engage in true praxis. This view is clearly illustrated in the development of women's roles and status in Kuwait, where women began examining their own situations and the society in which they lived before claiming their rights through action against patriarchal authority. My qualitative study allows Kuwaiti women who have been ignored, marginalised or silenced to be heard.

Since I have grown up in a culture that instilled in me certain worldviews, I find myself in the position of an insider (as a Kuwaiti citizen) as well as that of an outsider (as a woman studying for a PhD overseas). As such, I agree with Thayer-Bacon's (2003) declaration: "I do not think any of us, as knowers, can escape our

own social embeddedness completely" (p. 32). As a Kuwaiti, I grew up in a culture that places certain restrictions on women and, due to experiencing this culture as an insider, I never questioned its values or its traditions when I was young, but instead accepted them as common sense. It was only when I grew older that I came to realise and experience the impact of these values on women's lives, when I attempted to make myself visible in a society that believes that women's capabilities are limited.

As social beings, "we are greatly determined by our social settings [...] but we are also able to become aware of our embeddedness [...] Others shape our views, but others also help us become aware of how views differ" (Thayer-Bacon, 2003: 32). When I was introduced to a new culture through my studies in the UK, I became able to view my world through a different lens and began to examine the status of Kuwaiti women from an outsider perspective. Thus, I have the opportunity to closely observe Kuwaiti societal values as an insider while critiquing them as an outsider:

> At its best, outsider within status seems to offer its occupants a powerful balance between the strengths of their sociological training and the offerings of their personal and cultural experiences. Neither is subordinated to the other. Rather, experienced reality is used as a valid source of knowledge for critiquing sociological facts and theories, while sociological thought offers new ways of seeing that experienced reality (Collins, 1999: 173).

A comprehensive review of research regarding Kuwaiti women revealed that there were no previous studies of the issues faced by working mothers due to culture, gender and family. For instance, an anthropological study conducted by Freeth (1956), *Kuwait Was My Home,* sets out a series of observations of the general atmosphere of Kuwaiti society during that period. One chapter presents a portrait of women's lives and status in Kuwait by describing wedding customs and a selection of stories narrated by women. However, this study is limited because its purpose is to present a general, objective picture of Kuwaiti society without interpreting the nuances of its traditions and customs. Similarly, Daniels's (1971) anthropological study *Kuwait Journey* seeks to investigate how Kuwait's society, economy and infrastructure changed after the discovery of oil. Like Freeth, Daniels describes a Kuwaiti wedding to reflect the fundamental social values of that period. Daniels also reports on the nature of pre-oil life in Kuwait (customs, roads, transportation, etc.). In other words, Daniels focuses more on his travels in Kuwait than on analysing or exploring how modernisation and increased wealth affect its societal values.

A later study by Ismael (1982) also takes a general approach to the history of Kuwait. The author details the founding of Kuwait and the social changes that occurred due to the British colonial presence in the country and the discovery of oil. Equally important as Ismael's study is in understanding the structure of Kuwaiti society, women play only a minor role in what is essentially a male history. Likewise, Al-Sabah's *Kuwait Tradition: Creative Expressions of a Culture* (2001) presents a general view of Kuwait's past culture and traditions. It briefly describes the roles allotted to women and men in the past and outlines the structural changes that have occurred in Kuwait over time. Al-Sabah does not offer an in-depth portrayal of the changing social status of Kuwaiti women or focus on women's lives specifically; however, her study does contribute to our comprehension of the family as the basic social unit of Kuwaiti society and a defining factor in women's lives.

Crystal (1992) gives an account of the history of Kuwait before and after the discovery of oil. She touches on Kuwaiti women's inferior social status and the control that men exercise over their education and work, highlighting the traditional view that women are by nature suited only to domestic work. Yet this discussion of women's roles is limited to one short section of the book and does not include the influence of Kuwaiti values in shaping these roles or women's responses to them. Nevertheless, Crystal's otherwise clear description of historical Kuwaiti society can help to establish a general sense of how the culture affects women's lives. A qualitative study by Al-Zaben (1989) of Kuwaiti attitudes towards women's work examines the work of women in Kuwait before and after the discovery of oil, with the aim of foregrounding the social importance of women's work. However, Al-Zaben does not shed light on the obstacles that Kuwaiti women encountered during their early efforts to work outside the confines of the home.

Several scholars in the Kuwaiti context pay more attention to women's rights and movements in Kuwait, rather than the history of women's lives. For example, Al-Mughni (2001a) discusses the first women's movements in Kuwait and the opposition they encountered from Islamists and tribal forces of Kuwait, with a focus on how gender inequality became the focal concern of the women's political movement. Despite this development, I argue that the book fails to provide satisfactory answers to key questions: How were women able to establish

organisations in a society that restricted women to the private sphere of the family and home? How did those women who led early political movements contend with societal values forbidding women from entering the public realm? Why did their families allow them to leave their secluded lives? Although these questions are not the author's main concern, they are crucial to understanding the struggle of Kuwaiti women's political movements. Furthermore, the construction and social context of gender inequality in Kuwait, which is necessary to any investigation of the history of Kuwaiti women, is not analysed in al-Mughni's study. On the same topic, Tetreault's (1994) article about the women's political movement in Kuwait discusses the political subordination of Kuwaiti women and the patriarchal authority asserted by men; it also briefly explains Kuwait's cultural values, but it does not extend to examining the effects of these values on women, since its primary focus is the political participation of Kuwaiti women pre- and post-invasion.

The studies in this brief review focus more on general social changes in Kuwaiti society and not on how such changes affect women in Kuwait. Social values are also discussed in general terms – such as the customs that govern cuisine and dress – rather than with gender-specific frame of reference. Those studies address Kuwaiti women's circumstances are more general in their approach and do not examine specific examples in any depth and; as a result, they do not provide a clear image of how Kuwaiti values and beliefs affect the lives of women, particularly those in employment. Moreover, as these studies were conducted many years ago, whether Kuwaiti women are experiencing changes is to be seen. My research differs from the previous studies because its primary aims are to explore the reality and experiences of women combing work and large families in Kuwait's male-dominated society, and to examine the values and institutions underlying the development of gender roles in Kuwait. Whereas studies such as those of Tetreault and Al-Mughni deal with changes in Kuwaiti women's political status, I intend to focus extensively on the sources and effects of cultural values on the roles of women at home and work.

My research does not view the past through the lens of the present, but instead examines past values and beliefs to contextualise present practices. To this end, I start with a historical overview of women in Kuwait in order to provide a more in-depth picture of the present situation. I am looking at the past from its larger

perspective and raising questions about the history of women's status in Kuwait in order to investigate past societal values and its impact women working and family lives in the present live. Rusen (2005) asserts,

> History is a meaningful nexus between past, present and future—not merely a perspective on what has been. It is a translation of past into present, an interpretation of past actuality via a conception of temporal change which encompasses past, present, and the expectation of future events (p. 25).

The next two sections offer an outline of the history of Kuwait, describe the background to the roles of women in Kuwait in the pre-oil era, and present the research problem and objectives.

## 1.2 Women in Kuwait: a historical overview

Before the 1940s, Kuwait was a poor country where men primarily worked in the pearl diving, fishing and ship-building industries, while women lived under the physical and social constraints often associated with orthodox Muslim societies: veiled, isolated and very poorly educated. Most Kuwaiti women received a basic religious education before being married at a young age to male relatives, and their social scope was limited to their immediate neighbourhoods (Longva, 1993). Women from rich households were confined to their courtyards and to sections of the house without windows so that their voices could not be heard outside, whereas women from lower-income households were more likely to have the opportunity to work outside their homes as marriage brokers, midwives and dressmakers. Outside the house, women typically covered themselves in black robes called *abbayat* and veiled their faces with a thick black material called *boshiat* (Al-Mughni, 2001). The heads of households were always men, with absolute authority over women. Fathers raised their sons to succeed them as heads of the family and gave them power and authority over their sisters' lives, regardless of whether they were older or younger than their sisters (Tetreault, 2001). Household responsibilities were divided along gender lines: men kept the family fed and financially secure, while women were responsible for housework and child-rearing.

Girls were raised to serve and to protect their mothers and families against the harmful effects of a bad reputation. Female reputation is considered an essential part of men's honour: "[P]remarital chastity of sisters and daughters, marital fidelity on

the part of the wife... are the principles on which the reputation and status of family depend" (Minces, 1982, p. 17). For this reason, girls were veiled at an early age with their heads and faces covered and were forced to lead secluded lives inside the *harem* in order to learn the accomplishments customary to their environment (al-Sabah, 2001). Freeth (1956) describes the system of veiling as a means of protecting women's reputations:

> Nothing is considered more unseemly than for a woman's actions or behaviour to be the subject of town gossip, even in a comparatively innocent way, and the veil has allowed women to preserve their anonymity when they leave their houses. If rumour or gossip should seriously cast reflections upon the virtue of a woman of good family, the woman is ruined (p. 84).

In addition to leading secluded lives, Kuwaiti women had decisions made for them by their male guardians and as a result grew to be submissive. When a girl reached the age of fourteen or fifteen, her parents arranged her marriage; they might even choose for her a husband whom she had never seen (Freeth, 1956).

In 1945, oil was discovered in Kuwait (Salih, 1991), causing national and household incomes to rise and precipitating considerable political and social change. Consequently, women's access to education and participation in the workforce increased. In the 1960s and 1970s, many men emigrated from Kuwait to work in other oil-rich countries, leaving women to replace them in the workforce. However, the family roles and social status of women remained the same, which led to a crisis of identity regarding their positions in Kuwait's modern society. The nature and history of this society as a whole is outlined in Chapter Two.

## 1.3 Background to the research

Since the Second World War, Kuwait has undergone significant changes and made tremendous economic and political advances, thanks to the discovery of oil and to globalisation (Al-Qudsi and Shah, 1990). However, despite its wealth and relative modernity, the position and status of women in Kuwaiti society continues to contrast with the situation in Western countries. Although significant progress in the education and employment of Kuwaiti women has been made in recent years, Kuwaiti culture remains male-dominated and retains a strong attachment to its Arab and Islamic identity. Many Western studies evaluate this exclusively in terms of

religious and cultural norms. For instance, Longva (1993) states that the Arab woman is not considered part of society and that her circumstances and family life are prescribed by cultural and religious values. As Kuwaiti society changes and as women's roles expand, the government, organisations, society and religion compete to define these roles, as does the Kuwaiti intellectual community (Katlin, 2008). The role of the working mother is ideologically misrepresented, as the conflict that can impede advances in women's rights is not included in the Arabic discourse. As a result, two perspectives on the roles of women exist in contemporary Kuwaiti society: women as mothers and wives, and the association of women with their duties and responsibilities.

Certain aspects of Kuwaiti society and family structure have been substantially affected by modernisation. The traditional family model has been largely replaced by that of the modern nuclear family. Al-Thakeb (1985) reports that the traditional Kuwaiti family unit consists of the father as paid worker, the mother as homemaker and their children, whereas in the modern nuclear family both parents are employed. The nuclear family unit is now "not only in the majority but also preferred" (p. 579) to the traditional extended family unit. This social change has positively affected the Kuwait workforce and has helped women to reduce their duties within the extended family.

Despite these advances, Kuwaiti working mothers still face various challenges as they work and raise their families. According to Sidani and Al Hakim (2012), the primary obstacle facing Arab women, regardless of marital status, is that

> ...in traditional Arab society few roles are available to women outside their homes. Girls carry with them the need to be protected, and are socialized from early childhood to get ready for their 'natural' role, which is understood to mean getting married and establishing a family.

Sidani and Al Hakim also argue that a single Arab woman faces the same conflict as a married woman with regard to combining work and family roles because she 'is still expected to share in the housework, which is creating a double burden, a thing that is [also] found in Western societies among married women' (p. 1378). In this modern era, women are now expected to combine the roles of home carer and career worker.

Kuwaiti society places a burden on women to postpone education and employment in favour of childbirth. Children of working mothers are presumed to have disorders of social adjustment, health, cognition and achievement (Metle, 2003). It is presumed that mothers who work expose their children to emotional and cognitive deprivation which results in delayed development. Young children whose mothers enter the workforce are perceived as having poor health due to reduced immunity arising from early weaning. Additionally, as divorce is still stigmatised in Kuwait, if a mother is experiencing marital problems, she will typically remain with her husband to provide shelter and security for her children. This is a frequent experience among low-income women who have no access to state social security services due to their marital status. Furthermore, given that only male heads of families are eligible for loans in Kuwait further discourages women from seeking divorce (Longva, 1993).

The issues detailed here are not adequately explored in the existing literature. Therefore, this research examines obstacles of culture and gender facing Kuwaiti mothers employed as managers in Kuwait's Ministry of Education, and analyses the interactions between these obstacles and the experiences of Kuwaiti women.

### 1.3.1 Research objectives

This research has five specific objectives namely:

- To critically examine the complex relationships between modern Kuwaiti approaches to culture, gender and management for Kuwaiti mothers working as managers in the education sector.
- To investigate how Kuwaiti cultural values influence women's attitudes to work.
- To discover how Kuwaiti mothers employed in low-level, middle and higher-level management in the Ministry of Education are affected by their sense of identity.
- To identify the gender-related challenges facing mothers employed as low-level, middle and higher-level managers and to determine how these affect their working lives and the ways in which they raise their families.

- To critically explore work-life balance in the Kuwaiti context for mothers employed in low-level, middle and higher-level management in the education sector.

## 1.4 Rationale of the study

### 1.4.1 The Kuwaiti context

Management practices are considered to reflect social concepts unique to their respective cultures. Western and Eastern scholars of management present various perspectives on the influence of culture on gender and management (Loderstedt, 2005; Fernandes and Cardoso, 2003; Ng and Burke, 2004), both in general and in specific organisational or regional contexts, such as Sakalli-Ugurlu and Beydogan (2002) on Turkey. Discrepancies between the findings of different studies are attributed to many factors, including researchers' and subjects' gender and social class. For the present study, it is therefore essential to clearly establish the context in which the issues under study operate by investigating cultural values, gender roles and management practices in Kuwait.

In this regard, I subscribe to Campbell's (1991) approach of studying culture before moving on to gender and management. Studying cultural values and beliefs in depth enables the researcher to gain a clear understanding of the circumstances surrounding other factors. In Western culture, for example, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality and gender must all be studied to understand the issues facing employed women, whereas in the Middle East gender has a far greater effect on employed women than any other factor (Metcalfe and Rees, 2010). My research therefore seeks to establish detailed information about those aspects of Kuwaiti culture which influence the lives of working mothers, both before and after the changes brought about by the recent wealth of the country. Exploring the meaning of modernity and its relationship to the misconceptions that affect the status of women in Arab countries generally and Kuwait in particular will help to establish a sound basis for this study.

Many studies of the interactions between culture, gender and management have been carried out in Western contexts. For example, Ng and Burke (2004) studied culture, gender and management in Canada and Campbell's (1991) study was also set in North America, while Pines and Baruch (2008) conducted a comparative study of

gender and management in various Western countries. Conversely, there have been scant studies of culture, gender and management in the Arab context. These limited studies include Omair's (2008) review of the literature related to these issues in the Middle East as a whole, Kattara's (2005) study set in Egypt, Jamali et al. (2005) in the Lebanon, and of Mostafa (2005) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Almost no research has been conducted in Kuwait into culture, gender and management and how these factors affect the lives of Kuwaiti women. Al-Qudsi and Shah (1990) and Al-Dafery (1996) conducted studies of employed Kuwaiti women, but these were limited to simply reporting the numbers of Kuwaiti women employed in various sectors as a result of national modernisation and increased wealth, without in-depth consideration of the challenges faced by these women or issues related to combining employment and family life. These studies were also conducted decades ago, rendering their findings out of date and of little current relevance. Therefore, the present study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing extensive, up-to-date analysis of how the relationships between culture, gender and management affect Kuwaiti mothers employed in management in the education sector.

Many of the studies discussed above were limited by the male researchers' gender, which prevented them from using qualitative methods of data collection with female study subjects, due to the gender segregation imposed by Arab culture. I argue that any such study of issues of culture and gender surrounding Arab women should be conducted by a female researcher, in order to facilitate the collection of primary data and to help women participants to feel relaxed when discussing the issues under study. As a Kuwaiti woman with experience of working in the education sector, I contend that my gender has allowed me to adopt the qualitative methods necessary for providing in-depth information on the factors affecting female managers in the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education, both in the workplace and in their family lives.

The following final subsection justifies briefly the significance of exploring the issues of work-family balance in the Kuwaiti context. The structure of the thesis will then be summarised.

### 1.4.2 Work-family balance in the Kuwaiti context

Investigating the issue of work-family balance in Kuwait is a fundamental objective of this research for a number of reasons. The first is that this topic has been relatively under-explored in the context of Kuwait, where the effects of culture, religion and women's social identity are different from those in the West. Similarly, the structure and size of the family is different in Kuwait from many other places. For example, the number of children is very high compared, say, with China, where there is a one-child policy. It may seem surprising that Choi & Chen (2006) and Choi (2008) found that Chinese women faced conflict in balancing work and family. Kuwaiti mothers in managerial positions in my study might be expected to face much greater challenges, given that the average family has between six and eight members (Al-Thakeb, 1984; Al- Qudsi, 1998).

The second significant factor is that Western scholars who have examined the issue of work-life balance in both men and women (Bettany and Gatrell, 2008; Lippe et al., 2006; Singley and Hynes, 2005; Craig and Sawrikar, 2009; Vincent et al., 2004) largely report that Western women in employment have the right to access family-friendly policies. Kitterod and Ronsen (2012: 657), for example, state that

> ...in many Western European countries, work-family policies aim to promote an equal division of paid and unpaid work between women and men. An important goal is to facilitate and enhance women's labour market participation as well as to increase men's involvement at home.

However, Burnett et al. (2010) argue that policies aimed at work-life balance have not led to well-balanced or "gender-neutral" work and family practices, due to societal gender imbalances. Firstly, the take-up of life balance polices is gendered, with more mothers than fathers working flexibly. This is partly because organisational practices often fail to acknowledge social change around paternal parenting roles. Whereas many fathers, particularly in professional and managerial roles, are expected to commit to long working hours, mothers are typically deemed to be second-income earners and thus are more likely to take advantage of flexibility and part-time working initiatives in order to facilitate their family commitments (Gatrell and Cooper, 2008). Secondly, work-life balance policies focus mainly on the issues of paid work and childcare, and fail to take into account domestic labour, the main burden of which continues to be carried by mothers. As Lewis et al. (2007, p.

364) report, in work-life balance “women retain a much closer tie with family care and domestic responsibilities linked to current manifestations of the gender order”.

It must also be stated that these generic concepts of flexibility, and with them the intended result of a better balance between work and family life, are loaded with gendered assumptions. In the UK, for instance, many of the flexible working practices of the past 15 years were developed primarily for use by women and are associated with motherhood rather than fatherhood (Burnett et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2007). The government provides basic statutory provision for family leave through maternity leave and time off for dependents, and recently introduced paternity leave. However, a study by Hogarth et al. (2000, cited in Wise, 2003) found that 46 per cent of employers sampled already provided some form of paternity leave and over 90 per cent provided bereavement (compassionate) leave.

Whilst the UK seeks to claim such legislation and its benefits as successes, there are certain conceptual problems endemic to the work-life balance agenda. Examples include the “right to request” system being described as somewhat “soft”, as employees are offered virtually no remedy against an employer who refuses flexible working practices “for business reasons” (EHRC, 2009, cited in Burnett et al., 2010, p. 541). Likewise, the majority of fathers currently working flexibly are doing so because the conditions were already in place at the commencement of employment, rather than having been requested subsequently (Burnett et al., 2010). Finally, and perhaps most pressingly, the entire concept of flexibility is still “widely but incorrectly” perceived to be principally a work-family solution for women with young children, and although it is requested by both mothers and fathers, it is often more difficult for men to access (EHRC, 2009, cited in Burnett et al., 2010 p. 541; Lewis et al., 2007).

Furthermore, although the UK government encourages flexible working practices through the Work Life Balance Campaign and other initiatives, there are currently no mandated rights of access for employees to flexible working practices. A study by Wise (2003) in the Scottish context found that line managers were the real “gatekeepers” here, determining employees’ access to family-friendly policies, and that managerial attitudes were a significant barrier to the effective implementation of such policies. Comparable studies by Tremblay and Genin (2010) and Budd and

Mumford (2006) state that in Britain, there are disparities between the presence of work-life balance policy and employees' perceptions of its accessibility. Budd and Mumford also claim that statistics on the existence of family-friendly policies significantly overstate the extent to which such policies are accessible to employees, and indicate that the discrepancy between formal availability and actual usage should be the focus of future research.

By contrast, in the Kuwaiti context, there is no formal legislation enabling men to enjoy family-friendly policies; Kuwaiti culture still sees men as breadwinners and women as homemakers.

Women's increased participation in the workforce poses a number of challenges, chief among which is managing work and family responsibilities (Rehman and Roomi, 2012). Balancing work and family is often more difficult for women than for men, because of the disproportionate degree of family responsibilities undertaken by women (Bird, 2006; Knudsen, 2009); women are primarily responsible for childcare and other domestic duties, which becomes a major barrier to career advancement (Beatty, 1996). Various studies have shown that women continue to take responsibility for household tasks and child-rearing regardless of how many hours they work outside the home (Peus and Traut-Mattausch, 2008; Linehan and Walsh, 2000). Other studies show that the conflict between work and family roles often has negative cross-domain effects and correlates significantly with several dimensions of employee dissatisfaction and stress (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Allen et al., 2000). The resulting decreases in job satisfaction and increases in stress can be costly for individuals and their employers (Anderson et al., 2002). Women in management are especially likely to experience work-family imbalance, since the long work hours and high levels of job involvement characteristic of managerial roles are key factors in work-family conflicts (Ismail and Ibrahim, 2008; Lyness and Kropf, 2005; McIntosh et al., 2012; Peus and Traut-Mattausch, 2008). Since managerial culture was originally designed to suit men, it tends to ignore the time and energy required by women's family responsibilities; most men in managerial positions leave such responsibilities to their wives. Women's life cycle patterns of work and childbearing are also diametrically opposed to the classic managerial career trajectory (Peus and Traut-Mattausch, 2008), because the career stage when workload and the

commitment necessary for advancement are most intensive coincides with peak child-bearing and child-rearing years. Consequently women are often forced to choose between managerial careers and having children, in contrast to men, who have more opportunities to combine both.

The potential impact of work-family issues on employees, family members and organizations has raised interest among researchers in developed Western countries. For example, Bruck et al. (2002) found that spending more time at work correlates with higher levels of conflict between work and family, while Barnett (1998) argues that work-family issues are as important to the smooth functioning of organisations as they are to families. Much of the quantitative work on work-family imbalance examines causal relationships between work-family conflicts and employee health and wellbeing (Emslie and Hunt, 2009). For instance, in a study of work-family imbalance and the health of working women in the Canadian context, Beatty (1996) argues that women in male-dominated management are more vulnerable to stress than women who restrict themselves to traditionally 'female' jobs "because of the unique pressures, conflicts, prejudices and isolation they encounter" (p. 234). The study concludes that increased work-family imbalance negatively affects women's health and wellbeing, and highlights the significance of spousal and organisational support in helping employed mothers to combine these two social spheres.

In the US context, Anderson et al. (2002) examined the relationships of work-to-family and family-to-work conflicts with a broad set of job-related outcomes. They found that negative career consequences and lack of managerial support were significantly related to work-to-family conflict. Work-to-family conflict was in turn linked to job dissatisfaction, high turnover and increased stress, while family-to-work conflict was linked to stress and absenteeism. The study also stresses the importance of providing employees with flexibility and support, and notes that insensitive and inflexible managers raise tension and decrease productivity among employees. Additionally, employees need to know that taking advantage of alternative work arrangements will not jeopardise their career advancement opportunities. Mauno et al. (2006) suggest that a working environment that takes family responsibilities into account may be even more important than flexible policies, and that managers and

supervisors should receive training and consultation in order to develop more family-responsive attitudes and behaviours.

In summary, there is a large body of qualitative and quantitative Western research on the causes of work-family conflict and their relationship to gender roles across various levels of management (Cinamon and Rich, 2002). In stark contrast, there has been limited research exploring these issues in the Arab context, particularly in Kuwait. New research by Abdalla (2015) examines the challenges and opportunities faced by Kuwaiti, Emirati and Qatari women in management. Based on responses to questionnaires, this study concludes that female managers in these countries experience less difficulty with regard to work-life balance than their counterparts in the West. However, Abdalla's study uses a large sample from three different countries which share a religion and general cultural norms, but nevertheless retain their own unique customs and values.

My research reviews the literature exploring work-family balance and highlights strategies that Kuwaiti mothers working in management use to combine work and family. The qualitative methodology and sample size enable in-depth analysis of and insight into the reality of Kuwaiti working mothers at various levels of managerial responsibility in the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education.

## 1.5 Structure of the thesis

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows. The next chapter considers the barriers related to culture, gender and family facing employed Kuwaiti women. It begins by sketching the local historical background, before closely examining the values of Kuwaiti society and the factors that have led to changes in these values, reviewing the relevant literature with the aim of revealing the nature of barriers and obstacles facing Kuwaiti women in the workplace and society that have developed following modernisation and increased national wealth. Throughout the chapter, I argue that the position and status of women at work and in society are impaired by social values and beliefs. Chapter Three discusses the impact of social and gender identity on women employed in managerial positions. It moves on from the previous chapter's examination of literature in the Arab context to review the corresponding scholarship in the Western context—that is, from a cultural insider perspective to a

cultural outsider perspective—to determine the nature of obstacles facing women in different cultures. It argues that gender identity and beliefs regarding gender roles in different cultures and contexts lead women to feel conflicted both at work and in their daily lives. The chapter ends by discussing the primary choices facing women in management: whether to have children, whether to act in a typically masculine way in the workplace, and whether to hide their female bodies and pregnancies at work. In Chapter Four, I review the work-life balance literature and stress the importance of flexibility. Here, I provide an overview of the literature regarding gender and work-life balance, which identifies trends within the research and the gaps that this thesis seeks to fill.

Chapter Five presents the qualitative research methodology adopted for the study and justifies the choice of this research process. The research methods, data collection and data analysis are discussed in detail, as well as how and where the fieldwork was conducted and the obstacles that led me to add a second part to the study. The methodological basis of the second part of the study is also justified, and the experience of conducting life history interviews is documented.

In the next two chapters, Six and Seven, I analyse the data gathered from managerial mothers interviewed for this study. Chapter Six begins the data analysis process by detailing issues of work-family balance that women face in the Kuwaiti context. It compare issues of work-family balance in the Kuwaiti and Western cultures by discussing the different family structures in these respective cultures, the effects of having domestic servants in the home and the length of the working day. The chapter clarifies the cultural differences between Kuwait and the West, particularly with regard to systems of divorce and marriage. It also addresses the tensions faced by women due to their gender, status and social roles, and how these exacerbate work-family imbalance. Chapter Seven explores women's identities at work by analysing the negative attitudes women encounter in the workplace due to their gender, their relationships with other female colleagues and the characteristics of managerial women. To investigate women's experiences in depth, Chapter Eight discusses the data from life history interviews concerning women's bodily experiences of pregnancy and childbirth in relation to gender, family and social space. Additionally,

it presents the narratives of women's lack of agency regarding their bodies, marriage, having children or wearing the veil.

The final chapter of this thesis offers a discussion of the main findings reported in the three previous chapters, in the context of the existing research and of the literature reviewed earlier. Based on these findings and discussions, I draw conclusions and outline their implications for policy and practice, then make recommendations for further research.

# Chapter Two:
# Barriers of Culture, Gender and Family Facing Kuwaiti Women Employed in Managerial Roles

## 2.1 Introduction

This study is the first to examine the relationships between culture, gender and management in the Kuwaiti context, and the first to investigate the experiences of Kuwaiti mothers employed in educational management. This chapter sets out the context of the study by discussing the following aspects of Kuwaiti culture: cultural and religious perspectives on women; the effects of these views on women in the workplace; the influence of modernity on the worldviews that affect the status of women in Arab countries; and hindrances to the application of modern ideals in Kuwait.

## 2.2 An overview of Kuwait

### 2.2.1 Location

Kuwait is a small Middle Eastern state with an area of 16,000 square kilometres. It is situated at the head of the Persian-Arabian Gulf and is surrounded by large and powerful neighbours: Saudi Arabia to the south, Iraq to the west and north, and Iran to the east, across the Gulf (Salih, 1991). Before 1930, Kuwait and Bahrain had the only two major harbours in the Arabian Gulf (Al-Suwaihel, 2009). The harbour of Kuwait was an outstanding location for merchants and sailors to do business, as it facilitated access to trade entering and leaving Iraq and the northeast Gulf. While Kuwait's location at the head of the Gulf enables it to compete in the global economy, its proximity to Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran constitutes a potential threat to its security.

### 2.2.2 Economy

Economic activity in Kuwait historically depended on pearl diving, seafaring and ship and boat building (see section 1.2 above). The strategic location of the country led to its development as a first-class Gulf port (Al-Suwaihel, 2009) and as the regional centre of boat building. Kuwait met the needs of the seafaring industry by

producing a wide range of vessels, and was linked with India and East Africa by the trade in black teak and boats. Kuwait was also considered the pearling centre of the Gulf region, even though pearling was an extremely dangerous and difficult profession (ibid).

In 1945, oil was discovered and the small state found itself sitting on the largest known reserves of the cheapest oil in the world (Salih, 1991; Tetreault, 1993). The discovery of oil moved the economy away from trading and pearling to oil production and made Kuwait one of the wealthiest countries in the world (Crystal, 1992). The Kuwaiti government controls the country's oil industry, and helped to establish the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1960.

Today, the oil sector continues to dominate Kuwait's economy. Earnings from hydrocarbons generate more than 90% of both export and government revenues and constitute about 40% of GDP; furthermore, most of the non-oil sector is dependent upon oil-derived government revenues to provide infrastructure development and increase industrial diversification (Metle, 1995).

### 2.2.3 Population

It is thought that Kuwait has one of the highest naturally increasing population growth rates in the world (Metle, 2001), much of which has been the result of immigration. Kuwait's population was 113,622 in 1957 and increased in 1961 to 321,621; 62% of this number were men and 37% were women (Ministry of Planning, 2005). This increase was entirely due to the arrival of large numbers of migrants. In 1985, the population reached 1,967,301, comprising 56% men and 44% women, and increased further in 1990 to 2,141,465 – 72% of whom were non-Kuwaitis. However, this percentage fell to 58% in the same year, due to Iraqi aggression against Kuwait. In 2005, the population was 2,213,403, of whom 880,774 were Kuwaitis and 1,332,629 non-Kuwaitis. In 2008, the population reached 3,328,136, of whom 1,038,598 were Kuwaitis. 26.7% of the population that year was aged 0-14 years (340,814 boys and 328,663 girls); 70.5% were aged 15-64 years (1,128,231 men and 636,967 women); and 2.8% were aged 65 years and above (44,542 men and 26,342 women) (Central Intelligence Agency, 2008).

80% of the Kuwaiti labour force is made up of immigrants into Kuwait. As a result, the government has encouraged Kuwaiti families to have more than four children in order to increase the indigenous population (Shah and Al-Qudsi, 1990), and has encouraged Kuwaiti women to join the workforce to reduce the need for expatriate labour (Sanad and Tessler, 1988). However, two major obstacles to this latter effort arose, the first of which was the negative attitude towards employment among Kuwaiti women and their families (Sanad and Tessler, 1988). Traditionally, Kuwaiti women believed that they were under the authority of male relatives and thus did not need to work outside the home. Secondly, extended contact between men and women in the workplace was not acceptable in Kuwaiti society. The government therefore designed a work environment specifically enabling women to work without coming into direct contact with men. This persistence in the face of entrenched cultural barriers displays the government's commitment to introducing more women into Kuwait's workforce.

### 2.2.4 Education

Since the discovery of oil, primary, intermediate and secondary education has been compulsory for both genders. Kuwait's schools are gender-segregated, and each stage of education lasts four years. Books, school uniforms, transportation and meals are provided free of charge to encourage families to enrol their children in school. The main goal of education in Kuwait is to prepare young people for entry into the modern labour force. In the period 1985-2003, total Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti enrolment in government schools increased from 22,118 to 107,825 at the primary level, from 6,530 to 99,734 at the intermediate level and from 1,270 to 116,281 at the secondary level (Ministry of Planning, 2005).

Expenditure on education rose from KD 6.5 million in 1955/1956 to KD 451.3 million in 1989/1990, during which time it accounted for 14% of total government expenditure (Metle, 2001). In the early 1960s, the government established teacher training institutes in Kuwait and developed a programme to send Kuwaiti students abroad for teacher training. The resultant growth of the teaching field brought about the establishment of Kuwait University, which started with 500 students and had 32,078 students (22,691 female and 9,387 male) in the academic year 2003-2004 (Ministry of Planning, 2005). In 2011 there were 34,510 teachers in Kuwait; 26,977

of these are women and only 7,514 are men (Public Authority for Civil Information, 2011).

Although the background given here may initially suggest that Kuwaiti women are active players in all aspects of the national economy, many aspects of Arab culture are still hindrances for women. While Metcalfe (2006) has noted the importance of women's participation in economic development in the Middle East, Kattara (2005) states that women employees in Arab countries still face gender discrimination, detrimental relationships in the workplace and lack of mentor support.

The next subsections focus on how Kuwait's government, culture, society and religion encourage and discourage working women, and on how this affects the family lives of Kuwaiti working women.

### 2.2.5 Governmental approaches to women in the workforce

One result of the advances in education and employment in the 1960s for women in Kuwait (Al-Mughni, 2005) was that the proportion of Kuwaiti women in the labour force rose from 20% in 1985 to 40% in 2003. The term "Kuwaiti women" in this research adheres to the formal definition, whereby only those women born to fathers who are Kuwaiti nationals and hold Kuwaiti passports can be considered Kuwaiti. Most employed Kuwaiti women work in the public sector, which accounted for 90.4% of female employment in 2003 (Ministry of Planning, 2005). By contrast, only 4.1% of employed Kuwaiti women work in the private sector. This discrepancy is due to the fact that previous experience is not required to secure a job with the government, and to the salary scales of the public and private sectors. Private sector employees with low levels of education are paid less than public sector employees with similar levels of education and salary increases are contingent on performance. In the public sector, employees with low levels of education are paid relatively highly, while those with higher levels of education are paid a reasonable salary which increases very slowly. Salary increases and promotion in the public sector are approved on an annual basis and are not linked to productivity, whereas promotion in the private sector is based on productivity and not on length of service (Al-Ajmi and Elhagrgsey, 2010). Employees in the public sector have shorter working hours, longer holidays and lower productivity expectations than those in the private sector.

However, training and development in Kuwait's public sector has been very poor, leading to slow growth.

Kuwaiti women tend to avoid the private sector because the long working hours affect their family commitments; some private sector jobs also require travelling alone which is not acceptable for women from conservative families. The length of the standard working day for both men and women in the public and private sectors is eight hours. If a woman has to work at night, her employers must provide transport. This policy is intended to ensure that working women are kept safe and to discourage employers from taking women away from their families and children. They are expected to be home in time to prepare evening meals, put their children to bed and carry out similar domestic duties.

In addition, the Kuwaiti government restricts women to certain jobs, such as managerial roles that allow little chance of promotion, because of a belief that women cannot cope with practical work (Shah and Al-Qudsi, 1990), high-risk occupations or demanding roles. This policy is also meant to provide women with ample time to take care of their families. In 1996 only eight Kuwaiti women worked in leading positions in the government service; this figure rose to 20 in 2004 (Ministry of Planning, 2005). By contrast, the equivalent numbers of male managers in these years were 291 and 324 respectively. Kuwaiti women are also prohibited from working in law enforcement, courts of law and the military. Policymakers are able to achieve this through the education system. Male and female students have different GPA requirements for higher-level courses of study to maintain low numbers of women in certain fields (Al-Mughni, 2005; Tetreault, 1995). As a result, although there are women in many professional fields, including engineering, medicine, law and architecture, their numbers in these fields are highly limited (Al-Wugayan, 2008).

Despite such restrictions, there are some incentives for women to work. For instance, women generally receive equal pay to men in the public and private sectors, and the law stipulates that a woman may file a complaint if she feels that she has been discriminated against. However, there is no legislation prohibiting sexual harassment within the workplace (Al-Mughni, 2005), meaning that sexual harassment is not punishable by law. Often, those who have been harassed or abused are reluctant to

report this for fear of social shame and ridicule. Women's organisations are therefore fighting to protect women who have suffered abuse (ibid). Currently, the law sometimes punishes those who abuse women in the workplace, but this depends on the perceived severity of the case.

Another incentive for mothers to enter the workforce is the provision of maternity leave for up to two months with full pay. If a woman requires additional maternity leave, either for health reasons or at her family's request, she will be given four months' further leave on half pay; however, this is often dependent on proving by means of a medical certificate that she is in poor health as a result of pregnancy. There are also numerous affordable day care facilities for children between the ages of three and six. Most of these are provided by the government of Kuwait, while others are run by the private sector. The mandated closing time of these facilities coincides with the end of the working day, to allow women to leave work in time to pick up their children.

The last and most significant incentive for Kuwaiti women to work is the recent rise of two-income households. Economic hardship on a national and global scale has induced families to encourage their daughters to undertake education and training in order to secure employment (Nilofar, 2010). Over the last five years, the number of women working and contributing to household income has noticeably increased.

It is clear that Kuwaiti mothers who wish to work are supported by the government in their efforts. However, this progress is continually hindered by loopholes in Kuwaiti law which limit the freedom of women. For example, male and female students are both permitted to study abroad, but women have to seek permission from male authority figures such as their husbands or fathers. Conservative religious groups create further obstacles to women entering the workforce. Such groups have had an active role in the government, especially since the 1990s (Al-Mughni, 2005), and have entered into coalition with conservative tribalists and with Islamic leaders and extremists to oppose any parliamentary decision championing the rights of women. For example, they successfully stopped the passage of a women's suffrage bill as well as the admission of women into the military in 1990 (Longva, 1993). In 1996, they forced through a bill obliging tertiary colleges and universities to create systems to promote gender segregation. Until these issues are addressed, the

incentives for working women set up by the government will not be wholly successful.

## 2.3 Attitudes towards working women in Kuwait

### 2.3.1 Working women in the Arab world

As may be expected from the preceding section, the literature shows that working mothers in Kuwait and the rest of the Arab world face a range of challenges. Sikdar and Mitra (2012) state that women in Arab society struggle to overcome social barriers to find gainful employment outside the home and often attribute this to factors related to gender differences. Likewise, Sfeir (1985: 300) writes that "Arab women are still captives in a society which instructs them to be obedient, economically dependent on men and confined to housework and procreation". Work by Rizzo et al. (2002) and by Ray and Korteweg (1999) suggests that the status of wife and mother is primary to Arab women's identity and place in the community.

A study conducted by Al-Kharouf and Weir (2008) found that Jordanian women generally had a more positive attitude towards employment, although culturally the husband would decide whether their employment was essential. The authors argue that Arab women still suffer from the traditional perception of their role as largely domestic, from discriminatory hiring policies and from weaknesses in official policies towards preventing discrimination.

A more recent study by Rutledge et al. (2011) shows that Arab cultural attitudes continue to act as barriers to women in management positions due to gender beliefs. It found that women from the UAE reported having greater difficulties in earning promotion and making progress to higher positions than did their male colleagues. More than a few of the sample reported feeling that some men considered them to be 'window dressing', while the majority of respondents complained that there were no equal rights when making decisions in the organization and that they were not being offered any training or advancement opportunities. The study also found that private sector employers tended to avoid recruiting female UAE nationals to high positions because of social and cultural sensibilities.

A comparative study of gender stereotypes and managerial positions, conducted in Egypt and the USA by Elsaid and Elsaid (2012), found that both males and females in Egypt held negative views of women in managerial positions, whereas US women held more favourable views of women managers than did their male counterparts. This indicates that Arabs, both men and women, believe that women are not suitable for management posts – a view which certainly has a negative impact on women's development and progression in Arab society. The emphasis placed on women's role as homemakers and their low social status undoubtedly have a detrimental effect on their behaviour and attitudes to employment.

In Kuwait, working women are similarly challenged by their culture and government. For instance, Shah and Al-Qudsi (1990) report that women are often not allowed to work if their youngest child is below a certain age. Katulis (2000) suggests that mothers who work will neglect their family and domestic roles, which may strain the bonds of Kuwaiti society; from another viewpoint, the combination of domestic, family and career workloads can be seen to place a strain on women's working lives (ibid).

Notwithstanding these tensions, there is a growth in the number of working mothers, driven, according to Al-Wugayan (2008), Al-Mughni (2005) and Yamani (1997), by a need for financial independence. As with women from other Arab nations, Kuwaiti women's dependence on men for financial support is the source of many social problems. This is particularly the case for divorced women, who are shunned by society, lose their homes, and – as they are not heads of families – are not eligible for government financial assistance (Al-Mughni, 2005). Yet the same families and society that look down on these women respect the financially stable mother.

Kramarae and Spencer (2000) state that many reports fail to recognise the amount of work imposed on women by their societies. This is particularly the case in Arab cultures, where women are seen as producers and are expected to devote themselves to multiple tasks in order to be perceived as "good" women. Women in Kuwait, like those in other Islamic societies, are expected to perform numerous domestic activities. These not only include cooking, cleaning and the like, but can extend to farming, raising animals, managing small shops, producing craft items (mats, rugs and pottery) and performing social roles such as religious advisory services. Thus,

Islamic society views women as producers, but when Western culture defines economic power, it ignores such informal and domestic production activities and focuses solely on paid organised labour. As a result, modernisation places pressure on women to join the paid labour force but does not give them the option of relinquishing domestic duties. It is also worth noting that in Lahtinen and Wilson's (1994) study carried out in a Western context, almost half of their sample believed that mothers should not work. In other words, even in developed countries, women are seen foremost as mothers and wives.

It has been suggested by Sikdar and Mitra (2012), Tracy and Rivera (2009) and Marini (1990) that gender role differences are encouraged through socialisation during childhood and adolescence, and influenced by parents, peers, society and the mass media, so that men and women learn at an early age to associate gender with specific tasks. Socialisation consists of the ongoing process whereby an individual acquires a personal identity and learns the norms, values, beliefs, behaviour and social skills suitable to his/her social position and roles. Similarly, Chugh and Sahgal (2007) state that gender roles and gender identity are taught and learnt through a complex set of family relationships and are reinforced through the socialisation process, with socially ascribed roles and duties appropriate to the norms of each particular society. This early reinforcement of gender roles may explain why Arab women and men both tend to hold negative views of women who work long hours or work in management.

Rizzo et al. (2002) found that Kuwaiti women's rights were considered more valuable by government institutions and political processes if they were the wives or daughters of male citizens. This indicates that the government of Kuwait treats women as second-class members of society on the basis of their gender. Nevertheless, in spite of these barriers, Al Dafery (1996) found that 82 per cent of Kuwaiti women felt that work helped them to feel independent economically, while 90 per cent reported that working outside the home made them feel equal to men. It has also been suggested that Kuwait's government has handled the issue of gender in a more progressive manner than Saudi Arabia and the UAE (Jamal and Langohr, 2009).

In the modern Western context, the role of housewife reconciles two opposed structures in society: home and work (Oakley, 1974). Oakley argues that in the UK, housework is the major occupational role of women and that employment does not itself alter the status or reduce the workload of being a housewife. As the virtual "underclass" of private domestic servants has disappeared, housewife and house worker roles have merged. Housewives in urban Britain in 1971 spent an average of 77 hours a week and between 3,000 and 4,000 hours a year on housework. Oakley also states that women are instructed in their oppression as housewives by other women. The learning of domesticity by daughters from mothers is driven home through the identification of mother and daughter with gender role differences. As a woman from a non-Western culture, I had previously assumed that British men were involved with family duties, and was surprised by Oakley's conclusion that "when you ask a husband to help, the answer is always the same: Do you want me to do a woman's work? Why, the neighbours would laugh at me" (p. 237). These findings indicate that gender socialisation has a direct negative impact on men's family involvement in both Western and non-Western cultures. Nevertheless, it could be argued that Oakley conducted her study many years ago and that many changes are likely to have happened in the UK since the 1970s, particularly in beliefs about gender and men's involvement in family life. Thus, during this chapter and the next, I explore how gender beliefs about men's and women's roles continue to negatively affect the career progression of women in both Eastern and Western societies, for example.

## 2.4 Barriers facing women in management

So far, this chapter has discussed the social expectations and responsibilities that limit the potential career progression of Kuwaiti women and has covered the general patterns of behaviour and attitudes that result from gender socialization. This section reviews the literature on the constraints and barriers facing women in management, with particular focus on gender-related barriers.

Jones and Oppenheim (2002: 103) argue that a number of obstacles hinder women's careers in management, citing the following definitions offered by Maach and Passet (1994):

- **restraints:** "social expectations and responsibilities placed on women that may limit their career potential"
- **constraints:** "internalised patterns of behaviour and attitudes that result from gender socialisation"
- **barriers:** "external variables – such as overt and covert discrimination – that make entry or advancement in a field more difficult for women than men".

In the Kuwaiti context I argue that there are many restraints, constraints and barriers that hinder women's career development because of their different gender roles and social expectations, and because of the negative attitudes and behaviour towards them due to their gender differences in the workplace. This section discusses in detail how these barriers and obstacles affect managerial women. Its two subsections address in turn men's attitudes and family-related barriers.

According to Ugurlu (2002), gender stereotypes are responsible for workplace discrimination and for negative attitudes towards women as managers. Tlaiss and Kauser (2011a) point out that sex-based stereotyping is one of the barriers to the progress of women managers in the Middle East, and that women may not be able to take on the work, commitment, sacrifice and responsibility of management positions due to their family duties. Traditional gender roles are also said by Ugurlu (2002), Elamin and Omair (2010), Kaul (2009) and Neal et al. (2005) to be polar opposites: men are dominant, independent and competitive, whereas women are submissive, dependent, caring and good at domestic tasks and child-rearing. Moreover, Carli (2006) and Kattara (2005) argue that women in management positions, whether in the West or in the Arab world, must perform better to be considered equally competent to men. Consequently, female managers are more critically evaluated than their male counterparts and are less likely than men to be perceived as possessing management skills. Women in management positions also have less decision-making power than male managers (Elamin and Omair, 2010); however, some studies (e.g. Powell, 1990) report no significant gender differences in managerial decision making. Other studies conclude that women place greater emphasis on non-financial and personal goals and are more likely than men to see their contributions to the quality of the decision-making cycle as their competitive edge (e.g. Carter et al., 1997). Additionally, women's access to power and management is less clearly

defined and more limited than men's (Klenke, 2003). Klenke reports that women show a greater concern for interpersonal relationships and greater reliance on fairness in the exercise of power, whereas men's power orientation is towards maximizing individual gains. Denissen (2010) adds that women in management face a double bind, often being viewed as either too feminine or too masculine. Yet despite the general assumption that women are more cooperative and relationship-oriented, empirical support regarding the differential use of power by women and men is far from conclusive. It has been argued that women's more cooperative, compliant behaviour in power-oriented situations arises from their having to adapt to lower-status positions in organisations and in society in general, not from inherent gender characteristics or internalised gender roles (ibid).

Regardless of gender, the most important traits for managers are aspiration, creativity, patience and the ability to deal with unexpected situations (Khader, 2012). We cannot assume that all men are suitable for management positions or that all women are suitable only for domestic work. Many men are not fit for management and do not have the ability to be leaders. Conversely, many women can lead effectively while managing their private lives (Chugh and Sahgal, 2007; Ryan et al., 2011; Adler 2002).

In the Kuwaiti context, Dr Masuma Al-Mubarak is a pioneer for women in management who broke down cultural issues and gender stereotypes. When she first wanted to take a graduate course abroad, her parents prohibited her from going: a typical reaction for a traditional family. As an alternative, she took a post at the Ministry of Planning and while working there obtained a diploma in social and economic planning (Peterson, 1989). When she married in 1973 at the age of 24, her husband supported her desire to complete her studies abroad. She received her PhD in 1982 and at the age of 34 was appointed head of the Political Science department at Kuwait University – the only woman to chair a department in the Faculty of Commerce (ibid). The quality of her work was such that the President of Kuwait offered her a post at the Ministry of Planning and in 2005 appointed her Minister of State at the Administration Department. Masuma Al-Mubarak was and still is an excellent example of a Kuwaiti woman in a very high-level position at work in a male-dominated culture.

Despite the discrimination and the cultural and organisational barriers women managers face in some parts of the Arab world, women are aided by social networks in obtaining top management positions (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011b). Throughout the Arab world, social networks are a significant force in all aspects of decision-making and thus play a key role in career advancement (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011b). Family, especially spousal support and influence, can play an important role in the public arena for some women (Al-Lamki, 1999). *Wasta*, the Arab world's term for leveraging networks or connections with other powerful people in the workplace and other social spheres which might not be available to other candidates, can also help women to advance in the workplace. For instance, Metcalfe (2006) reports that training and development opportunities, managerial recruitment, promotion and many other aspects of management are ultimately based on personal relationships and family networks, rather than on the individual's abilities. Wasta may appear similar to the use in Western contexts by both men and women of developmental relationships, such as mentoring and networking, to advance their careers (Burke and McKeen, 1995). However, wasta in the Middle East is a way of life and appears to be the key determinant of the recruitment of women managers and thus of their career success. This dominance of wasta in Middle Eastern workplaces emphasizes the informality of work relations and supports strong family connections (Metcalfe, 2006). The absence of wasta is therefore detrimental to the success of women managers in the Middle East in the same way that the absence of networking and mentoring hinders the career success of women managers in Western countries.

### 2.4.1 Men's attitudes to women in management

This subsection reviews literature on male attitudes towards women in management in order to obtain a clear understanding of the barriers facing employed Arab women. Such an understanding will help to determine whether Kuwaiti women's negative attitude towards the workplace is a result of men's negative attitudes towards employed women, or whether it stems from Arab culture seeking to confine women to the home.

According to Kolb and McGinn (2008), Omar and Davidson (2001) and Kattara (2005), men believe that they are more suited than females to exercise control over organizations and to be managers. Abdalla's (1996) study of attitudes towards

employed women in the Gulf suggests that although Arab women are willing to take on more duties in the political, occupational, educational and social spheres, Arab men are still not willing to share these duties with women. The study concludes that women in this region are hindered by restrictive cultural roles and a wide gender gap. Mostafa's (2003) study of Egyptian attitudes towards employed women draws similar conclusions.

The negative attitude of men toward women, together with workplace experiences, may lead women to resign from their jobs even after reaching the peak of their careers. While many organizations adopt a family-responsive policy to support women, especially those in management positions, the problems faced by women in the workplace continue to be a source of dissatisfaction (Kaul, 2009). Omair (2008) points out that women in management positions face discrimination at work, negative attitudes from men and a lack of confidence and trust in their abilities.

Although Lebanese women enjoy greater freedom than women in any other Arab country, Jamali et al. (2005) state that patriarchal expectations that women will be solely wives, mothers and homemakers are strong barriers to their career advancement. Their study found that in response, several women managers openly confronted highly stereotypical attitudes from both female and male subordinates and colleagues to earn respect and assert authority. Similarly, Burke et al. (2008) report that women working as managers and in other high-level positions in a Turkish bank faced career challenges related to the patriarchal norms of Turkish society. Men are the dominant gender and are expected to control the home (Ugurlu, 2002), while women are meant to stay at home, and motherhood is seen as a woman's most important function (Culpan et al., 2007).

In Oman, the obstacles to women's career progression are fairly comprehensive. Al-Lamki (1999) sets these out as follows: limited education available to women, traditional attitudes of male managers towards women, working in male-dominated fields, a lack of female role models, and the difficulty of professional and family responsibilities. More than a few women manager in this study indicated that they felt inferior to men in a management environment. An investigation of the attitudes of women towards management in Oman, the UAE and Lebanon asserts that women "are increasingly entering the workforce in Arab states and rising to leadership

positions in the public and private sectors" (Neal et al., 2005: 478). However, a closer reading reveals that although the number of women who hold management positions is increasing, it is still far from equal to the number of men in such positions.

El-Ghannam (2003) reports that only a few Arab countries have had female government ministers and offers an account of the status of Arab women in government:

> In Arab societies, despite some increase in women's representation... they are in a minority among top leaders and their power is generally more limited than that of men. Even when they do have great power, they cannot utilize it to the same advantage as by men. Women are unable to exploit their power in the same way that men do. Women do not have access to the same positions of power that men have. There is presumptive evidence of structural barriers that impede their access (p. 42).

Focusing on the case of Kuwait, Shah and Al-Qudsi (1990) conducted research into the female workforce, reporting the under-representation of women in management positions in the public and private sectors. Women in Kuwait, they argue, "are not given an equal opportunity to occupy senior positions" (p. 31). This problem arises as a result of the conventional assumptions that the right place for a woman is in the home and that paid work is important only to fill the gap in her time until she is married. Although women in Kuwait typically marry at a young age, between 18 and 20, some may not be married by then for a variety of reasons, such as their family having a negative reputation, being perceived as unattractive, or simply not receiving any proposals of marriage before they reach normal marrying age. Keeping women occupied until marriage is important in Kuwaiti culture, as it is feared that single women who spend long periods of time unoccupied will engage in relationships with men and thus harm their families' reputations. Similarly, Allaghi and Almana (1984, p. 27) conclude that "women's labour is accepted neither to fill a need nor for the economic reward it produces. It seems primarily to be accepted to give educated girls something to fill the time between graduation and marriage." Currently, the occupational choices of Kuwaiti women remain relatively narrow, and are heavily concentrated in fields such as teaching and nursing. This may be the result of women trying to avoid discriminative behaviour and attitudes in the workplace by choosing all-female working environments. Whilst some women are forced by their families to

work in all-female environments, other women may voluntarily work in such environments to conform to social expectations or to avoid problems with their husbands, fathers and brothers, who make the final decision regarding where they work. Yet even in single-gender work environments, women will still be pressured to revert to traditional roles. These roles, their conflicts with work duties, and the effect of this conflict on Kuwaiti women in management are explored in the following subsection.

### 2.4.2 Family-related barriers facing women in management

Many scholars agree that women face challenges in trying to balance work and family life (Milkie and Peltola, 1999; Kaul, 2009; Srivastava, 2007; Ozbilgin and Pines, 2007). However, little research examines the emotions of women as they struggle to balance family and work or identifies the factors that affect their sense of success. It can be argued that women's place in the social structure gives them less power and control and requires greater sacrifices in both work and family circles.

Many companies have instituted policies which in practice prohibit employees from integrating their work and personal lives. These policies occur in cultural contexts that prioritise the 'ideal worker': the employee who is willing to put work before all else, whose time at work is unlimited and for whom the demands of family, community and personal life are secondary (Kolb and McGinn, 2008). Such a model presents challenges to women for whom separation between work life and home life is impossible. For example, does a pregnant woman need to stop work due to pregnancy, or does she need to hide the pregnancy to satisfy her employer? In my view, hiding pregnancy to balance work and family is not always an option for women. During the first few months of pregnancy, women can hide their changing body shape by wearing loose clothing, but may find it tricky to conceal symptoms such as morning sickness. In the later stages of pregnancy, bodily changes will be even more difficult to conceal. Thus, hiding pregnancy in the workplace is not a possibility for many women. Milkie and Peltola (1999) contend not only that trying to fulfil multiple roles creates stress which can lead to health problems, but that resolving this situation may cause further problems. For example, a woman may choose to forego career progress in order to spend more time with her children. This

choice may reduce some work-family strain, but may create a sense of lost opportunity (McCrate, 2003).

In Asian countries, women who work in high positions are pressured to choose between career and home due to the assumption that it is difficult to be successfully involved in both of these spheres. When women enter the workforce, the new roles that they add to their lives induce a decline in their traditional roles as wives and mothers. Empirical studies have demonstrated that women who combine work and family are 'superwomen' (Omar and Davidson, 2001). In Turkey, women are poorly represented in senior management; many women do not apply for senior management positions due to this mindset and to increased responsibilities in their daily lives. When a woman holds a high position in an organisation and needs to invest a great deal of time in her work, she may neglect her family responsibilities (Ozkanli and White, 2009). Despite having the chance to hold senior positions, many women in Turkey choose family instead.

A recent study by Rehman and Roomi (2012) found that the primary challenge faced by Pakistani women in employment was managing work and family responsibilities, and that the disproportionate amount of domestic tasks allotted to women in Pakistan may delay their career progress; employment is not their first priority, however much they may strive to fulfil the demands of work and family. The authors state that "women tend to work too hard and often make difficult choices, even at the cost of their health, only to satisfy their customers and keep their family happy" (p. 212). This suggests that the tension of combining work and family responsibilities impedes women's professional development and acquisition of skills, and can even be physically detrimental.

In the Gulf countries, women reach motherhood before joining the labour market and this reflects the limited time that they have to work before having to withdraw from the labour force or juggle motherhood with employment (Neal et al., 2005; Al-Qudsi, 1998). As stated in section 2.4.1, women usually marry at an early age and bear children as soon as possible, to fulfil social expectations. In this study, for example, many of the mothers sampled were married and had given birth to their first child before the age of 21 (see Appendix D). Women in Kuwait do not participate in the workforce at this point; instead, they enter the workforce after completing their

bachelor's degree, normally at the age of 22. Mothers in the Gulf region, especially those with many children, are obviously restricted in terms of access to work and their ability to rise to positions of management. Neal et al. (2005) note that the Arab pattern of early marriage and large family size affects not only women's attitudes towards work, but also extensive social beliefs about their ability to remain in work and to assume management positions.

It is reasonable to argue that Kuwaiti women do not wish to hold management positions due to the same conflicts between work and family commitments as those identified in the countries mentioned above. Although I was not employed in a high-level position when I worked in teaching, my colleagues had a negative attitude towards employment because they could not integrate work and family, in spite of the government offering an exclusively female working environment, short working hours in comparison to other careers, long summer holidays and a reasonable salary.

Peterson (1989) estimates that the average Kuwaiti woman works for only three to four years as a result of family size and having to care for young children, and that she eventually stops trying to balance work with a large family and leaves the workforce after that period. However, Peterson does not state whether Kuwaiti women use state-provided childcare facilities, or whether these facilities are adequate. The study also fails to incorporate primary data, which prevents the possibility of gaining insight from Kuwaiti women's personal experiences.

Kuwaiti women are not exposed to career-oriented female role models. Metle (2002) found that Kuwaiti women's circles of friends were confined to other women with similarly limited career involvement. At home, the traditional Arab wife does not share or discuss her career issues with her family, especially her husband, but tends to suffer in silence and solitude. Whether at the office or at home, women are expected to behave as though nothing is wrong and to express no qualms or worries. Nobody makes an effort to understand their problems as they try to fulfil the many expectations placed upon them by society (Srivastava, 2007). A traditional assumption in Arab nations is that work diminishes the quality of life, so women are discouraged from prioritising career over family and children (Hijab, 1988; Elamin and Omair, 2010). This may explain why Arab women do not discuss career matters

with their husbands or families. Additionally, husbands are unlikely to help with childcare and domestic responsibilities.

Women around the world often prioritise their families above all other areas of life; cultural and patriarchal reminders of their responsibilities towards their children are not only unnecessary but detrimental. Women also have the ability to successfully integrate their professional duties and domestic responsibilities, but for this to occur, the state and employers must implement family-friendly policies, while attitudes towards working mothers must become more positive.

The first few sections of this chapter have sought to offer a rich account of the history and culture of Kuwait and their impact on women's working lives; they have also discussed cultural and gender-related barriers facing Arab women employed in management. The remaining sections explore how modernity relates to the misconceptions that affect the status of women in Arab countries. A review of literature on modernity, linked to gender and religion, seeks to clarify the persistently contradictory position and status of women in Arab societies.

## 2.5 Modernity and the status of women in Arab countries

The last three decades have witnessed remarkable changes for women in Arab Muslim societies, which have been ascribed to Westernization, modernization and globalization (Metcalfe, 2008). Nevertheless, these societies are currently in a state of confusion for many reasons, which include underdevelopment, inequality and the late entry of women into the workforce, in both qualitative and quantitative terms (Elamin and Omair 2010). The prevailing perception is that men are the primary breadwinners (Omair 2008) and the overriding notion is that having a career and a working life is not essential for a woman.

Modernity can be said to have begun with the industrial revolution in Western Europe in the late eighteenth century (Omair, 2008), whereas for Kuwait it can be argued that it properly began with the initiation of commercial exports of oil in 1946 (Tetreault and Al-Mughni, 1995). Arabs use the concept of modernity in different ways, especially to denote social change in relation to industrialisation.

El-Ghannam (2001) reports that the social and economic changes in Arab societies following modernization include the transformation of attitudes, ideologies and institutions. Arab people recognize that they need to adopt new ideals, attitudes and institutions. This has come to be known as the modern processes of economic growth and change in their social, political, technological and culture structures. Nevertheless, I argue that beliefs and attitudes cannot simply have changed in the short time since the mid-1940s when oil was discovered. The consequence of modernization and globalization can sometimes be a clash of cultures as people move from rural to urban areas, taking up new occupations as a result of economic growth and improved education. However, the cultural stance towards women is virtually the same, regardless of the changes that have taken place.

Furthermore, Culpan et al. (2007) point out that the close integration of countries is one of the prime features of modernization and globalisation, while accepting that beliefs, attitudes and behaviours unique to each country's culture continue to exist. This helps explain why culturally, Arabs today seem to be engaged in a futile search for an original identity, which although not denying their deeply rooted background, at the same time impels them to look to the future and think about development (Omair, 2008).

Modern cultures are characterised by a high level of literacy, research, secularisation, healthcare, bureaucracy and transportation facilities. There is a low birth rate and high life expectancy, and people are more concerned with the future, focusing strongly on their rights and on gender equality. These features of modernity are weak in the Arab region, however, according to El-Ghannam (2001). In addition, Shafik (1996, p. 2) reports that the region has

> ... the largest gender gap of any region in the world, despite the considerable evidence that gender equality is associated with higher economic growth and improved human development. The worst affected were the Middle Eastern and North African women who are consistently underrepresented in schools and labour force. They die relatively younger than their sisters in other parts of the world, and they give birth to large numbers of closely-spaced children that jeopardizes their own and their children's health.

A study by Metcalfe (2006; 2007) suggests that the process of modernisation in the Middle East has increased support for gender equality. She argues that male-female

relations complicate men's attitudes towards women, and that Islam and modernity have helped Arab women to improve their position in society by enabling them to contribute to the economy. In a later study, Metcalfe (2008) found that Arab women were still suffering from patriarchy and gender discrimination and that their overall participation in the public sphere remained limited. My own experience as a Muslim woman from the Middle East supports these arguments.

### 2.5.1 Women, education and modernity

There was an assumption in the Arab world that in order to become more modern and develop, it needed to have more educated people, which meant providing education for both sexes. In spite of this, the objective of educating women was, and still is, to prepare them to become mothers rather than to contribute to civil life. As Mensch et al. (2003) put it, "education makes girls better mothers and helps them deal better with life… and education is thought to improve a girl's chances of finding a suitable husband" (p.11).

Furthermore, El-Ghannam (2002) argues that the majority of Arab families educate their sons rather than daughters, on the assumption that boys have greater economic orientation than girls. In other words, it is clear that the importance of girls' education was to prepare them for family life and to be housewives. Conversely, education for boys was to prepare them to secure good jobs and help their families in later life (Omar and Davidson, 2001). In the same vein, Hegland (2009, p. 56) states that "more fathers are willing to pay for sons' higher education, even at the more costly and less prestigious private schools. However, far fewer males attend university, as they have lower entrance exam pass rates than girls".

In my own experience, this is not strictly true of modern Kuwaiti society. I think that while Kuwaiti women do obtain their status from their fathers and husbands, people in Kuwait have nevertheless in recent years derived their status and position in society from their level of education and their occupational rank; for example, an individual who works as a doctor is seen as better than a person who works as a teacher, whether they are men or women.

The new culture created by modernity presents a paradox for Kuwaiti women. Tetreault (1995) notes that Kuwaiti women can work, drive and live in a democratic

country, but do not have access to full rights as citizens. Interestingly, Kuwaiti women seem to be better employees than Kuwaiti men, because they are disciplined workers and have significantly higher education levels than men (Hosni and Al Qudsi, 1988) – yet women are still seen by society as wives and mothers.

### 2.5.2 The post-modernization gender gap in Kuwaiti

Modernisation theorists argue that increased urbanisation, improved education and women's growing participation in the labour force have led to increasingly similar roles for men and women and hence a more favourable attitude towards women (Mostafa, 2005). Nevertheless, women still face social and economic discrimination, particularly in the Arab world, where resistance to women's equality has been particularly strong (Omair, 2008). In Saudi Arabia and the UAE, for example, women are not allowed to vote, have lower education levels than men, and are underrepresented in senior positions in politics and public administration (Kazemi, 2000; Metle, 2002; Mensch et al., 2003). Moreover, Sidani (2005) reports that Arab women are severely limited in terms of "their participation in political, economic and social life, access to employment opportunities, high illiteracy, and wage discrimination" (p. 501). El-Ghannam (2002) accepts that modernity has transformed economic opportunities for women in the Arab states, but notes that their contribution to the market is still the lowest in the world. There is a high level of gender segregation in employment, with the majority of Arab women working in the public sector, where there is greater security. This is particularly true in oil-rich states such as Kuwait and Bahrain, which have natural resources, import much of their labour and have the highest proportions of working women in the Gulf States (Metcalfe, 2006). In spite of the increasing number of women participating in the workforce, females still lag behind their male counterparts in terms of salary and status (El-Ghannam, 2002; Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011a). The negative emotions evoked by this discrepancy affect women's behaviour and outcomes at work (Kolb, 2009).

With regard to Kuwait, Shah and Al-Qudsi (1990) state that Kuwaiti women earn less than men despite being more educated. This may be a consequence of the country's patriarchal social model, which casts men as providers and women as homemakers. The Kuwaiti government offers men public funds after marriage and for every new baby, to help them with their family responsibilities, whereas women

are not entitled to these funds (ibid). This may contribute to the disparity between men's and women's salaries in Kuwait.

Hijab (1988) and Peterson (1989) report that the difficulty of reaching high-level positions in Kuwaiti organisations and unfair employment practices, such as lack of opportunities for promotion, lead women to feel discriminated against. The attitudes and behaviours of employers who deny women equal access to career opportunities and rewards are reinforced by wider beliefs: men are more likely than women to believe not only that parental responsibilities cause job performance to suffer, but that a woman's current performance provides no guarantee of future performance because her family status is likely to change unexpectedly (Lobel and Clair, 1992). As Schwartz (1989, p. 67) states, "Men continue to perceive women as the rearers of their children, so they find it understandable, indeed appropriate, that women should renounce their careers to raise families". When a woman's role investments are viewed as unreliable, employers are less likely to reward her performance. Drazin and Auster (1987) found that among the managers of a financial services organisation, men received greater returns on each point increase in their performance ratings than women did. Gender discrimination theory would predict, then, that female gender has a direct negative effect on performance outcomes, irrespective of work effort. Autin et al. (2014) assert that women's awareness of their perceived inferiority in the workplace may create an extra burden that prevents them from performing at their best. This phenomenon is known as stereotype threat, which is a subtype of a broader social identity threat that arises when people believe they might be devalued because of their membership of a social group. Identity threat has a variety of negative consequences including stress, negative thoughts, task-related worries, depleted working memory capacity and impaired intellectual performance. Gender stereotypes can therefore have a significant detrimental impact on women's performance in the workplace.

Before concluding this section, it is important to mention that the problems facing women in Kuwait due to gender differences are not as great as those of women in some other Middle Eastern countries. For instance, while many Kuwaiti women prefer to work in closed environments with other women due to the influence of their culture and their male relatives, they are, unlike Saudi women, permitted to work

with men. Nevertheless, discrimination and negative attitudes and behaviour towards women in Kuwait, in the workplace and society as a whole, must be remedied. The next subsection builds on these findings and analyses to identify problems with the notion of modernity itself in Kuwait.

### 2.5.3 Problems with the notion of modernity in Kuwait

Although modernity has improved educational and employment opportunities for Kuwaiti women, it has not affected traditional attitudes towards employed mothers. The growing demands of employment are simply combined with household responsibilities, creating an even greater workload for women. The increased number of working mothers "is associated with the breakdown of the Kuwaiti family" (Longva, 1993, p. 10). Between 1978 and 1988, the divorce rate in Kuwait doubled from 616 cases to 1,284. According to the Ministry of Justice, there were 2,603 marriages in 1990; in the same year, there were 1,161 divorces, representing 45% of that number. This percentage fell to 35.6% in 1999, when there were 7,865 marriages and 2,799 divorces (Longva, 1993; Tetreault, 2001).

Juvenile delinquency, poor school attendance and drug addiction also rose significantly during the 1980s. Women were blamed for causing this social breakdown by neglecting their responsibilities and placing foreign housemaids in charge of raising their children (Shah and Al-Qudsi, 1990; Longva, 1993). Indeed, the number of foreign housemaids in Kuwait increased dramatically from 20,000 in 1980 to nearly 73,000 in 1985 (Metle, 2001). Shah et al. (1991) found that 62% of Kuwaiti households had at least one maid to help working mothers to fulfil their responsibilities and raise their children. Islamists and tribalists in Kuwait argue that the rise in divorce rates and child delinquency and the decline of the family are due to women departing from their traditional roles and abandoning their duties as mothers. The Islamists forced Parliament to pass a law allowing early retirement for mothers in an attempt to make more public posts available to Kuwaiti men so that women can concentrate on their primary responsibilities (Al-Mughni, 2001b).

The issues facing Kuwaiti mothers in employment may be seen as being caused by Kuwaiti men placing family problems solely on women's shoulders and failing to recognise that the male-dominated government has encouraged women to produce many children while joining the labour force in order to support the local economy

and to reduce reliance on expatriate labour. This situation presents Kuwaiti women with a series of difficult questions: should they work or stay at home to raise children? Should they focus on their families at the expense of their careers, or should they pursue higher education, only to stay at home? Whatever the answers to these questions may be, the lives of Kuwaiti women are strongly affected by conflicts of culture, gender, modernity and government policy.

## 2.6 Conclusion

From the review of literature presented in this chapter, I conclude that there are many barriers, obstacles and issues facing managerial women in Arab countries due to the complexity of the intersections between culture, gender and management. Gender discrimination, stereotypes and negative attitudes are among the challenges that such women encounter due to their gender identity in the workplace. Given that the main role assigned to Arab women is that of the mother, I explore the experiences of employed mothers in Kuwait and to ask how they attained management positions. To offer a clear understanding of the problems facing Kuwaiti and Arab women since the discovery of oil, the remainder of the chapter discussed modernity and its relationship to the gender gap and to women's education in Arab countries. It also addressed problems with the notion of modernity in Kuwait and the confusion among Kuwaiti women caused by tensions between modernity and conservative traditions.

Total reform in Kuwait with regard to women and work requires interventions in terms of both culture and gender. Consequently, the next chapter will offer insights gained from an exploration of gender, women's social identity, ethnicity, race and sexuality to illuminate the similarities and differences between the barriers facing women in the workplace in Middle Eastern and Western societies, and will justify this study's focus on gender.

# Chapter Three:
# The Negative Impact of Social Identity and Gender on Mothers Working as Managers

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter moves from the previous chapter's focus on Kuwait to explore how Western literature deals with women's social identity in relation to gender, ethnicity, race and sexuality, and how these affect their experiences in management, particularly in the education sector. I show that Western literature tends to emphasise the effects of ethnicity, race and sexual orientation on women's social identity, whereas the social status attached to gender is the primary influence on Eastern women's social identity (Metcalfe, 2011). The reason for this focus on Western literature is the lack of equivalent work on Arab women in management, especially in Kuwait. This helps to explain why I have identified culture and gender as the main factors affecting the social identity of Kuwaiti women and their role in management, and chosen to analyse these two factors in depth, rather than emphasising the effects of ethnicity, race and sexuality.

I also examine the contradictions and dilemmas facing employed women stemming from social and work expectations due to gender identity and maternal potential, suggesting that there are no clear strategies for women to avoid sexism and discrimination. I argue that employed mothers and non-mothers alike face a tension between social and workplace expectations, while employed women who want to combine family with employment face many issues and pregnant women are subject to stereotypical attitudes towards their bodies.

This chapter first considers the meaning of identity and social identity, then examines women's social and gender identities in management, followed by a discussion of the characteristics of men and women in management. It then explores Arab women's identity in management, taking clothing as an aspect of their identity and addressing the importance of virginity in the Arab world. The remainder of the chapter offers an in-depth discussion of the conflicts facing women at work and in

society due to their gender and reproductive bodies, which leads women to suffer a double bind.

## 3.2 Identity and social identity

Identity refers to who people are and why they do what they do. According to Whitbourne et al. (2002, p. 30), it involves "broad bio-psychosocial self-functioning, cognition, personality, relationships, occupation, and social roles broadly defined", while Jenkins (2004, p. 5) defines social identity as "the systematic establishment and signification between individuals, between collectivities, of relationships of similarity and difference". 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 prominent group memberships, such as sex, race, class, language and nationality (Omair, 2009). Therefore, an individual may have numerous different identities that become evident in different contexts. Multiple identities are constructed from many factors, such as age, career, gender, nationality, politics or even clothing, while being female or male (gender) is one aspect of social identity (Jamali and Nejati, 2009). Gender is the most crucial category relevant to my research and to Kuwaiti women's position and status in society and in organizations. Therefore, I review Western literature on gender as a factor affecting women's social identity in management. This section focuses on Western literature due to the lack of Arab literature on the topic of gender and management. In addition, this chapter will discuss the similarities and differences between west and east regarding factors influencing women's social identity, especially as concerns ethnicity, race and sexuality. The aim of this chapter is thus to identify the main issues facing Arab women related to their social identities.

## 3.3 Women, social identity and gender in management

Many Western scholars, such as Schein et al. (1996) and Leinonen (2012), have considered how gender affects women's social identity and their position in the corporate world. Symons (1986) states that managing gender identity will continue to be a challenge for women as long as they are the minority in the corporate world. Women are the minority in management because of gender stereotypes which give men strong opportunities to dominate the higher positions in organizations; indeed,

"managerial jobs have conventionally been understood as male and thus as not being directly suitable for women" (Billing, 2011, p. 298).

Cassidy and Warren (1991, p. 194) examined gender and management in the USA and found that even in work environments dominated by females, such as education and nursing, men tended to dominate the higher ranks: "Although men are the minority in these occupations (teachers, nurses), they do not appear to be disadvantaged by their minority status: They tend to progress faster in the occupational hierarchy." This clearly reflects the prevalence of gender discrimination against women throughout their careers. Women in male-dominated environments cannot easily reach high positions because they are in the minority (Symons, 1986), whereas men in female-dominated environments can reach high positions faster than women, despite being in the minority (Cassidy and Warren, 1991).

In the context of the UK, Watts (2007) notes that professional occupations are still strongly dominated by men, while women remain poorly represented, particularly at senior management levels. Notably, Watts found that gender barriers had negative impacts on women in organizations and that these were translated into low self-confidence, loss of motivation, reduced productivity and a deterioration of interpersonal relationships. She concludes that women in the UK, in common with those in many developing countries, face cultural and gender constraints that position them as secondary players to male colleagues, particularly in relation to policy and decision-making roles. This was surprising to me as a woman from the Middle East, having lived in the UK for three years and having observed that women in the UK appeared to have greater opportunities than Kuwaiti women to hold high positions in society and in the corporate world. However, the work of Watts shows that women in developed countries may face the same gender issues as those in developing ones.

More than a few Western scholars have argued that gender barriers in management affect women's identity, causing them to abandon their femininity and to act like men in order to earn the same recognition and success (Reay and Ball, 2000; Kyriakidou, 2011). This idea is supported by Powell et al. (2009, p. 412):

> Women face a series of gender-related barriers to success in male dominated careers. Women are typically viewed as 'honorary men' or 'flawed women' for attempting to participate in fields traditionally dominated by

> men…women who seek entry into male-dominated cultures either have to act like men in order to be successful, leave if they are not adaptable to the culture, or remain in the industry without behaving like men but maintaining unimportant positions.

In a study of gender and management in Sweden and Denmark, Billing (2011) found that even in female-dominated environments, males had more opportunity to hold high position without losing their identity, while women needed to adopt masculinity to earn success in both feminine and masculine careers: "Whereas men benefit from emphasizing masculinities in women's jobs, women do not benefit from acting in a feminine way in a managerial job… Women who do masculinity are the most successful, [while] workers who do masculinity are more successful than others in feminine and masculine occupations" (ibid, p. 304). Similarly, Adams et al. (2010, p. 372) studied gender and management in the USA and found that

> Women who ascend to positions of power usually adopt masculine gender behaviours such as risk taking and assertiveness rather than feminine gender ones such as nurturance and sharing as a way to survive in the masculine culture… The masculine behaving women leaders see masculine behaviour associated with higher level of success.

Adams et al. also found that women managers in the USA reported feeling less valued by the organization than male colleagues, which led them adopt negative actions and behaviour in the workplace, reflected for example in increased turnover. This shows that gender segregation in the workplace impacts women's attitudes and behaviour towards work.

The reasons why women act like men in the workplace have also been studied by Jamali and Nejati (2009), who focused on Western literature and connected the relevant knowledge to the Arab context. They report that most Western female managers borrow masculine traits and modes of appearance in order to appear more powerful and to try to diminish their differences in male-dominated workplaces. This finding is congruent with the observation of Chugh and Sahgal (2007, p. 355) that "adopting masculinity becomes a way out for women managers in their search for upward movement. One of the ways women try to minimize being stereotyped is by making themselves disappear." However, Jamali and Nejati (2009) argue that Arab women do not have the option to gain more power and authority by acting like men, as it is forbidden in Islam, so this further hinders their chances. My own observation

and experience of working for three different organizations dominated by females leads me to disagree with Jamali and Nejati: while it is true that employed Muslim women cannot adopt a masculine appearance, for instance by their choice of clothing or by taking a masculine tone of voice, many Kuwaiti women managers do nevertheless appear to adopt male characteristics such as aggressiveness in management. Surprisingly, no previous research appears to mention this reality, which gives the present study the great worth and value of filling a significant knowledge gap regarding Kuwait, gender and management.

Another study showing the practice of discrimination against women is that of Olsson and Walker (2003, p. 5), who suggest that it is men who mentor successful women managers, adding: "You just have to find someone to give you a chance and then you are away." It is not clear whether the 'someone' who helps has to be male. In my understanding, 'someone' could be anyone, including a woman or a mother. Olsson and Walker (ibid) also suggest that establishing relationships with men in key and powerful positions is seen as an important factor in women's career progression. This leads back to the fundamental question of why women need to build relationships with men in high positions in order to achieve success. This question cannot be related directly to the Arab context, because neither Islam nor Arab society would allow a woman to build a relationship with a man, which would explain why Arab countries have designated and closed work environments for females and others for males, in order to reduce the influence of sexual issues in the workplace. Such issues and the importance of virginity in the Muslim world will be discussed in detail in section 3.5.2, after a consideration of ethnicity, race and sexuality.

Chugh and Sahgal (2007, p. 352) predict that "...men will continue to have access to the organization elevators, while most women are forced to take the stairs, even if they work harder". The same sentiment is expressed in other words by Ryan et al. (2011) to explain the gender barrier to women's career progression. However, these researchers discuss women's gender identity and management from a narrow angle, without mentioning family or women's and men's roles in a particular society, which would help to produce a clear and rich explanation covering all aspects of women's work development and progression. By contrast, Cortis and Cassar (2005) conducted

a study in which they examined gender, family and management. They found that domestic responsibilities had an impact on women's careers:

> Female managers who are both career and family oriented are at a disadvantage. This is because family demands may be interfering with women's careers, leading them perhaps to refuse overtime, rearrange their working hours or refuse extra work assignments, thus risking the possibility of being perceived as less job-involved than their male counterparts (ibid, p. 151).

Cortis and Cassar (ibid) suggest that due to the difficulty of combining work and family, many female managers remain single or childless in order to reduce their social roles and to minimise the conflict between the two worlds. This raises the question of whether a woman can successfully raise a family while being a manager or leader at work. An answer is given by Major et al. (1984), who found that in spite of gender issues and the high demands facing women at work and in the family, women tended to be better employed than men: "Women worked longer, did more work, completed more correct work, and were more efficient than men" (ibid, p. 1409). Three other studies, by Bielby & Bielby (1988), Milkie & Peltola (1999) and Clark (1997), also found that women worked harder than men despite the level of obligations women usually have towards their households. Furthermore, their findings imply that when women add work roles to their family roles, they are capable of generating the energy necessary to fulfil their commitments to these two sets of activities.

The foregoing section has shown in general terms how gender identity impacts women negatively in organizations and in their family life. The following subsection looks in depth at how gender stereotypical attitudes in the workplace can affect women's identity at work.

### 3.3.1 A double bind: to act like men or women at work

Many Western studies have argued that women who hold managerial positions face gender stereotypical attitudes from colleagues and employers as a result of which some tend to lose their gender identity and act like men to gain the same recognition. For example, Forrest (1989) states that "think manager—think male" remains a reliable guide to the power structure of organizations. She indicates that employed women need to adopt masculinity because it is seen to be the norm in most

organizations, while to be female is to be 'other', different, suspect. Indeed, to gain access to managerial levels, women must think like men, talk like men, dress like men, but this places employed women in a perpetual double bind, because if they accept men's terms, act like men and try for assimilation, they risk being ostracized for their unfeminine behaviour, whereas if they behave as women are supposed to behave, they are apt to be denigrated for not having the 'right stuff'. Similar findings are presented by Schwartz (1989), who reports that women who compete like men are considered unfeminine, while those who put too much emphasis on their family are considered apathetic. Thus, whether women act like men or like women, men have the power to punish and exclude them for their difference.

In a more recent study, Fielden and Cooper (2001) also claim that to achieve success, women typically have to adapt to organizational culture by taking on male attitudes and values, but those women who are allowed into male domains often feel isolated and alone, being unable to relate to either male or female colleagues. The researchers found that women perceived greater levels of stress in both female- and male-dominated organizations, whereas men perceived greater levels of control than their female colleagues in female-dominated organizations. This indicates the influence of cultural norms, giving men opportunities to dominate the positions of power when working with women in either male- or female-dominated environments. This study offers a rich review of previous research into the impact of gender on the identity and mental health of women in the workplace.

However, I suggest that it would have been better if the researcher had gathered primary data and focused on a specific context, because cultural beliefs and the situation of mothers and non-mothers is likely to vary between different fields and contexts. In other words, women in different contexts can face different forms of discrimination. For instance, Kuwaiti women are prevented by both culture and government from working as judges, pilots or soldiers because these are seen as men's occupations, while women in other countries are allowed to fulfil these roles. Additionally, Islam prohibits women from travelling alone. In different contexts – for example, in the UK – women can be pilots, but they are likely to face some gender stereotyping from colleagues (Neal-Smith and Cockburn, 2009).

Furthermore, there are many different social categories of women: mothers, non-mothers, single mothers, divorced women and widows, each with their unique experiences and issues. Non-mothers may be seen by their managers and colleagues as independent women who are able to focus more on work; however, outside of work, they may be perceived as selfish for choosing work over having a family (this is explored further in section 3.6.3). Employed mothers will face a different set of stereotypes and problems. This study focuses specifically on employed Kuwaiti mothers in a single professional field.

Vinnicombe and Singh (2002) conducted just such a primary study, using a survey to examine attitudes towards women managers and sex-role stereotyping in a leading British/Australian insurance company. They found that most women managers indicated that they faced discrimination and stereotyping attitudes from their colleagues due to their gender, leading them to act like men in order to reduce this discrimination. The authors also report that women managers were significantly more likely to prefer a male boss to a female one, without giving any explanation.

Another UK study of the obstacles facing female managers is that of Liu and Wilson (2001), who used personal interviews and focus groups to gather data from women undertaking a vocational training programme in London. They found that women managers faced stereotyping attitudes on the part of male colleagues and employers due to their maternal potential. The participants said that males around them found it hard to perceive females in anything but a nurturing, child-rearing and spousal support role, which was reflected in these males' behaviour towards them at work. Moreover, they indicated that their spouses and partners tended to have stereotypical attitudes toward them.

> Partners were surprised that they took their jobs as seriously as they did; this was because the assumption was that women's first priority had to be the family, and a career rarely came into the equation… At work, men displayed the same stereotypical attitude, believing that women's rightful place was "in the home doing women's work" (Liu and Wilson, 2001, p. 171).

These women therefore faced stereotypical attitudes from all sides, which may have reduced their self-confidence and exposed them to conflict regarding their role in society.

This section has reviewed Western literature on the gender-related barriers faced by women in management and their effects on these women's social identity. The next subsection discusses the issues facing Western women related to gender characteristics and management, while the following subsection examines the characteristics of successful Arab women managers and the barriers that they face.

### 3.3.2 Gender characteristics and management in the West

Several Western scholars of gender and management have identified factors which they consider as explaining why men are seen as more appropriate than women in management positions. According to Sikdar and Mitra (2012), Ely et al. (2011), Lahtinen and Wilson (1994) and Duehr and Bono (2006), men are more aggressive, risk-taking, forceful, rational, decisive and autonomous, whereas women are relatively kind, caring, relational, understanding, modest and indecisive, and these specific characteristics translate into gender and thus suitability. A similar distinction is expressed by Ridgeway and Correll (2004, p. 513): "Men are viewed as worthy and competent overall as women are seen as less competent in general."

The authors of studies mentioned above (Duehr and Bono, 2006; Ridgeway and Correll, 2004) appear to support the dominance of men in management by stressing the different characteristics of male and female managers. They would perhaps have made a better contribution to the study of management if they had mentioned that men and women with their different credentials and attributes could support and help each other to create very successful organizations. Organizations not only require people who are assertive and forceful, but also need people with strong communication skills, who have the ability to share information and are educated. This idea is expressed by Chugh and Sahgal (2007, p. 355), who note that "women tend to be collaborative, share power and information and often lead in an interactive manner". Additionally, they argue that women who gain higher education qualifications should then help themselves to prove their ability and suitability in senior positions. Haveman and Beresford (2012) agree that women are more collaborative than men in management, while Ryan et al. (2011) state that women managers have a greater ability than men to cope with failure and to balance urgent situations and crises. Similarly, Adler (2002) argues that the traditional terms that have been used to describe women—as talkative, gentle, tactful, religious, quiet,

empathetic, aesthetic, submissive and expressive—have consistently undermined their image as effective managers, particularly in Western societies, whereas despite these negative descriptions of females in Western culture, women have important characteristics which make them effective managers, specifically their "greater tendency to use more democratic, inclusive, participative, interactional and relational styles of managing" (ibid, p. 749). This shows that women have many positive attributes which give them the ability to be effective and successful managers, such as stressing democracy rather than aggressiveness, which in my opinion is not an important feature in a manager.

This subsection has shown that Western women face gender barriers in management due to their feminine characteristics. In contrast to the plentiful Western literature on women and gender characteristics in management, there is none on Kuwaiti women employed in management, especially in high and middle management in education. Researching the characteristics of Kuwaiti mothers who are successful managers in the education sector would provide new knowledge helping ambitious women to identify the characteristics required for them to be managers. The next subsection will review the sparse Middle Eastern literature which mentions the characteristics of successful women managers and gender issues in the Arab context.

### 3.3.3 Characteristics of female managers in the Middle East

In the Middle Eastern context, Jamali and Nejati (2009) found that Iranian women managers had very positive features which helped them to be successful managers: they were more open to new ideas, better suited to teamwork and had excellent qualities such as listening and negotiation skills. However, their findings also indicated that there was a gender power imbalance in the workplace. This shows that even though women have more positive traits that are important to help them develop in organizations, the gender power and identity issue still hinders their career development. Corroboration is provided by a later study, in which Jamali et al. (2010) showed that successful women managers in the Lebanon were characterized as independent, hard-working, persistent, ambitious, motivated, responsible, determined and devoted to their work, which helped them to flourish and achieve success in their organizations, but that despite these positive characterizations, the majority of the women managers who were interviewed (11 out of 18) said that they

had to be more accomplished and work harder than men in order to be granted a fair chance. According to one woman, "women need to put in double the effort and work harder to prove themselves, whereas men are easily seen and appreciated" (ibid, p. 175). Moreover, they reported that they were not fairly represented at the top level at work and concurrently faced more pressures at home.

This section has offered an account of how gender affects women's identity in the context of Western management, indicating that many Western researchers have suggested that women need to lose their identity in order to be effective and successful managers. It became clear to me that many scholars have discussed gender and management without mentioning the family, which is part of women's social identity especially in Kuwait. In this section, I have analysed the Western research focus on male and female characteristics in management, showing that some researchers have stressed the importance of aggressiveness and ignored other important attributes of the effective manager, such as collaboration, which is a female trait. I have also highlighted the paucity of Arab literature on Arab women's identity and the issue of gender characteristics in management.

According to Holvino (2010), the social identity of women cannot be studied without considering both race and class, while working-class culture cannot be understood without referring to gender and race. Therefore, the next section will focus on women's social identity and will analyze both those aspects where there are differences between the Middle Eastern and Western notions and those where women's identity appears to be different, especially in terms of race, ethnicity and sexual orientation.

## 3.4 Ethnicity, race and sexuality

Numerous Western researchers have examined the interactions between gender, race, ethnicity, class and sexual orientation as factors that help to identify people both in organizations and in society (Wright, 2011; Adib and Guerrier, 2003; Acker, 2006; Holvino, 2010; Atewologun and Singh, 2010; Risman, 2004; Howell et al., 2002; Pompper, 2011).

Acker (2006) argues that gender is a social paradigm which creates differences between males and females, and the beliefs and identities that support difference and inequality. For example, managers were almost always men, while women worked in lower-level jobs regardless of their race or colour. In addition, Acker (ibid, p. 444) reports that class relations in the workplace, such as supervisory practice or wage setting processes, were shaped by gender and sexualized attitudes and assumptions: "Gendered and sexualized assumptions still shape the class situations of women and men in different ways." She also claims (ibid, p. 443) that "all organizations have inequality regimes, defined as loosely interrelated practices, process, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations... Managers, executives, leaders, and department heads have much more power and pay than secretaries, production workers, student, or even professors." She argues that these regimes have built and linked inequality into surrounding society, its politics, history and culture. The basis for inequality in organizations varies, although class, gender and race factors are usually present. I would not agree that race and colour interact importantly with gender in all cultures; for example, in Kuwait the people in some organizations are all Kuwaiti and the main factor acting as a barrier to success in that context is gender. However, I share the view of Acker that job rank affects women in organizations where the management is dominated by men, who have the power and the authority to direct the company, which makes women feel discriminated against and less valued than men.

In the UK, Adib and Guerrier (2003) studied the ethnicity and colour of women working in UK hotels and found that migrant black female employees tended to work in the lowest skilled, lowest status and 'dirtiest' hotel jobs and that they did not hold managerial or receptionist posts. The reasons for these conditions to exist are suggested by Lucas (1995, cited by Adib and Guerrier (2003): employers do not hire back women in managerial roles in hotels because they cannot be represented as sexually attractive to (white, male) customers in the way that white women can. Consequently, white faces and white bodies are on show, whilst black faces and bodies are kept behind the scenes. Being sexually attractive is of importance in this context. This example simply demonstrates the presence of discrimination in Western culture due to colour or ethnicity, which does not exist in Arab culture

because Islam forbids it. Kuwaiti people cannot openly discriminate against others due to their skin colour, as this violates a tenet of Kuwaiti law: "All people are equal in human dignity and in public rights and duties before the law, without distinction to race, origin, language, or religion" (International Human Rights Clinic, 2013, p. 62).

While Western readers may feel that Asian domestic workers in Kuwait face racial or ethnic discrimination, I would argue that the issues faced by Asian domestic workers do not include discrimination based on race or ethnicity. The issues that Asian workers do face include non-payment or late payment of wages, or payment lower than the agreed amount; withholding of passports; long working hours, with insufficient rest periods or time off; limited freedom of movement, including confinement to the house; compulsory tasks different from or beyond those agreed under contract; personal or emotional problems, including homesickness; and maltreatment, including verbal, physical and sexual abuse (International Human Rights Clinic, 2013). However, Kuwait is unique among Gulf Cooperation Council countries in that if a domestic worker wishes to return home but cannot obtain his or her passport from their employer, the Kuwaiti Ministry of the Interior will issue a travel document to the worker and pay for his or her airfare (International Human Rights Clinic, 2013, p. 36).

Further evidence that ethnicity and race as well gender affect women's social identity in the Western context is offered by Holvino (2010), who reports that women of colour are seen as a third gender category in society. These women of colour, face more sexual harassment than white women: "While white women's femininity is exalted and their virginity protected, women of color's sexuality is demonized and their femininity degraded or exoticized" (p. 255). This shows the oppression and discrimination that black women face due to their race and ethnicity. I argue that oppression based on gender, race and sexuality do not exist in Kuwaiti culture because the Islamic religion forbids discrimination due to people's colour. However, as a woman from Kuwait, I can say that Kuwaiti women face a gender problem due to cultural beliefs concerning their different roles. This also shows the importance of studying Kuwaiti culture, as it is different in its beliefs, values and circumstances.

Other Western researchers have examined the interaction between gender, race and women's sexual orientation. For example, Wright (2011) contends that women of colour face 'double oppression' based on gender, race and sexual orientation. She found that lesbian black women who worked in male-dominated jobs reported that they felt their gender, rather than their sexuality, to be the greatest barrier to success in the organization. Lesbians also stated that being a woman was of greater concern than being accepted as a gay woman; consequently, some of them chose not to be open about their sexual identity, to avoid "putting your hand up twice" as a woman and a lesbian (ibid, p. 690). Phillips (2008, p. 10) also addresses gender and women's sexual orientation in organizations, arguing that gender is a greater barrier to success for females in the workplace than sexuality: "Being a woman is a greater barrier to career progression than being gay... Most lesbians are not willing to 'out' themselves in the workplace because they already feel at a disadvantage being women". Wright (2011) and Risman (2004) agree that gender is the main factor affecting women's social identity in the workplace; however, they report that sexual orientation also affects women's career progression.

In the Middle Eastern context, Metcalfe and Rees (2010) started their research by comparing Western and Middle Eastern cultures in terms of factors affecting women's social identity. They state that in the west, gender is fused by interlocking relationships with other differences such as ethnicity, race and class, whereas people in the Middle East focus on one dimension, sex, which is most relevant for analyzing organizations and management processes and provides a mechanism to evaluate policies of inclusion of men and women. This suggests that there is no room to consider ethnicity and race problems, an area which has been totally neglected by Arab societies because Islam and society have disregarded this problem. On the other hand, the issue of gender is still a matter of contention between Islam, society and modernity.

The next part of this chapter examines in depth Arab women's identity and management in relation to gender as a major determinant of their social identity. It will discuss the importance of virginity among Arab women, offer an explanation of the Arab tendency to segregate the sexes and consider why employment in the education sector is preferred by Kuwaiti women.

### 3.5 Arab women managers and their social identity

The rise of women's participation in the labour force in the Arab region has resulted in a greater number of females advancing to managerial positions and assuming leadership roles in organizations. Women managers who progress to traditionally male managerial positions see the need to balance the conflicting statuses of 'female' and 'manager', due to stereotypical attitudes (Omair, 2009; 2011).

To help understand the problem of gender identity and management in Arab countries many researchers have focused on women's identity with respect to Islam as the main religion in the Middle East, which has influenced women's position and status in society and organizations (Yaseen, 2010), whereas other researchers have focused on cultural and traditional beliefs as the main reasons for gender issues (Rutledge et al., 2011; Elsaid and Elsaid, 2012).

According to Sfeir (1985, p. 295), "Islamic society has been restrictive in controlling women in all aspects of their lives. Women are constrained by customs and social attitudes limiting their access to the world." Sfeir insists that Muslim women face conflict between cultural traditions and modernization. In addition, she states that globalization and Westernization have made Arab women more aware of their rights in the world. "Westernization, socialist ideologies, and secularization have influenced women's lives. Women are discarding progressively the veil, seclusion and the segregation of the sexes" (ibid, p. 298). I agree with this assertion that Islam has given women equal rights with men; however she concludes her research by stating that religion and the traditional culture have together affected women's participation in daily life, without offering a clear explanation. In other words, having started with evidence that Islam has treated men and women the same, she ends with the conflicting opinion that Islam has had a significantly negative impact on women's participation in working life.

Research conducted by Yaseen (2010) identifies other factors to explain why Islam has not affected women's identity and why it should not treat them as second class because of their gender. He argues that "Islam has given women rights and privileges, which they have never enjoyed under other religious or constitutional systems" (ibid, p. 64). For example, Khadija, the first wife of the Prophet

Mohammed (PBUH), was a businesswoman and there were no restrictions imposed in those times. Furthermore, he asserts that

> ...in Islam, women's rights are included but not limited to education, learning, life, security, and financial support through all the life cycles – child, mother, wife, and or sister. Muslim women have the right to go to any academic institution and the right to work outside their homes to earn money which they must have full control over (ibid, p. 64).

Ray and Korteweg (1999) accept that Islam has controlled women's movement, but also argue that Arab society has had great power over women. However, I believe that Islam cannot be held responsible for the gender problems and sex discrimination evident in Arab societies. Rather, the social beliefs in Arab culture seem to imply that it seeks methods to control the social development of women through unequal expectations, including appropriate clothing.

### 3.5.1 Muslim women's clothing as an aspect of their identity

Some of the existing literature has focused on Muslim women's attire in the workplace as part of their identity. However, this literature can be criticized for taking a narrow focus, mainly via the debate between traditionalist and feminist views on how clothes should be worn, but not examining women's experiences of wearing traditional dress or considering the different aspects of women's lives, such as their professional roles (Omair, 2011).

Additionally, Omair (2009) has explored how Arab women managers construct their social identities though the meanings they ascribe to their clothing while pursuing a managerial career. She illustrates the contention that clothing in the workplace is a sensitive issue for Arab women. Women in management positions need to wear clothes that do not appear either too feminine or too masculine. If their outward image seems too feminine, there is a possible loss of credibility and women may be perceived as sexual objects instead of as professionals. Nevertheless, the study was conducted in the UAE, where the main religion is Islam, so perhaps the results are somewhat misleading. Women certainly would not wish to be too feminine, because they wear traditional clothes that may even require covering the face. In addition, wearing the hijab in an Arab country is seen as an exercise of Muslim women's power. Indeed, the veil is still interpreted in the Gulf countries as a sign of a

women's social status; women who cover their bodies are considered respectable (Omair, 2011; Metcalfe, 2011).

Upon analysis of her data collected in the UAE, Omair (2009) found that the 'right clothing', i.e. traditional Arab women's clothing, opened the door to pursuing a professional career and guaranteed easy interaction with males without being dubbed immoral. She also found that traditional dress become a tool to avoid sexual harassment and to gain sexual neutrality in managerial work. This study would have been better if she had researched in depth the factors affecting women managers' identity in the Middle East, especially cultural beliefs, and the tension between these beliefs and the understanding of Islam and modernity.

In an earlier study, Nagel (1998) identified two strands of opinion among Arab women concerning traditional clothing: one group argued that being veiled was liberating, since the veil shields a woman from the sexual gaze of men, allowing her to be a person, not a sex object, whereas the second group saw veiling as a means of signifying their discontent and protesting their loss of economic and social position as a result of urbanization and industrialization.

In the case of Kuwait, my own experience indicates that traditional clothing is still seen as important by many Kuwaiti females and their families because it shields them from men and protects them, while at the same time making them respectable within society, especially in the workplace. A minority of women living in the capital, Kuwait City, believe that traditional clothing limits and controls women. They see it as a thing from the past from which women need to be liberated by education and globalization.

The next subsection considers sexuality and virginity as the most important factors in the social identity of Arab women. My purpose is to explain why Arab societies operate a system of gender segregation.

### 3.5.2 Arab women and the importance of virginity

Many scholars have studied gender and women's sexuality in Arab and Muslim countries, focusing particularly on women's sexuality and virginity as important in helping to understand Arab cultural beliefs and values and to understand women's identity, position, roles and status in those countries (Ilkkaracan, 2002; Nagel, 1998;

Metcalfe, 2011; Poulakis, 2004). This section explores the reasons why Arab societies tend to segregate men from women.

Metcalfe (2011) reports that both men and women in Gulf countries believe that it is men's responsibility to protect and control woman's sexuality. The same idea is reported by Akpinar (2003) who states that Arab female sexuality was and is still regarded as being under the control of men and the law, according to a code of honour and shame. Izugbara (2004) studied women's sexuality in Nigeria, where the majority of people are Muslims who share many beliefs, values and norms with the Arab countries. Indeed, he reports a set of beliefs which are shared by Arabs generally and Kuwaitis in particular:

> Men are rational and capable of self-control and women are emotional, lacking self-control. Culturally female sexuality, if uncontrolled, could lead to social chaos. To be chaste is to be a good woman and to remain so she must avoid publicity, loitering, and unnecessary intermingling with men... he protects his wife from publicity as publicity diminishes her value (ibid, p. 17).

Thus, due to cultural beliefs and values which stress women's sexuality and virginity, men have the authority to protect their sexuality and they have created several ways to do so, such as gender segregation in public and early, enforced and arranged marriages (Hegland, 2009). In addition Hegland (2009) states that Arab families often feel they cannot trust a mixed work environment and the males in such an environment, even if they do trust their daughters, so families refuse to allow their daughters to work with men, preferring them to work in female-dominated jobs such as teaching, which is seen as a way to protect their daughters' sexuality.

Akpinar (2003) reports that home is seen as the perfect place to protect an Arab woman's purity until she is married and becomes a mother, which will be her main responsibility, defining her identity.

> Motherhood is crucial for women to achieve full status, but more important than that is their being chaste. On one hand, women are idealized as mothers; on the other hand, they are seen as dangerous because they can bring disgrace to the group by breaking the rules. So they must be protected and controlled... Women's virginity is an asset not only for the individual women but also for her family because it is an 'index' for masculine reputation (ibid, p. 430).

This shows the stress on women's sexuality and the importance of control by males because it is related to the reputation of all family members. Ilkkaracan (2002) suggests that another reason for controlling Arab women's sexuality is to uphold the continuance of the newly constructed 'national identity' and 'uniqueness' of community by being a mother. She also stresses that the controlling of women's sexuality in the Arab world is not the result of an oppressive vision of sexuality based on Islam, but instead is due to a culture which gives men the right to commit honour crimes, perform virginity tests and engage in female genital cutting, for example.

To end this section, I turn to the case of Kuwait, in whose culture women's sexuality and virginity are seen as of paramount importance, where males have the authority to direct the lives of females in their family, and where the most important aspect of women's engagement with the world of work is seen to be the need to protect their virginity and honour from the sexual harassment of male colleagues. They must therefore work in a 'protected' environment such as a government agency or a school and among socially acceptable people, preferably Kuwaitis. Ethnically mixed occupations are not accepted by Kuwait's tradition or social structures (Longva, 1993; Metle, 2001). Thus, it is not surprising that the majority of Kuwaiti females work as teachers or nurses, because the government has shaped and designed this work to satisfy Kuwaiti social values concerning the segregation of the sexes (Hosni and Al-Qudsi, 1988).

The remainder of this chapter examines issues, problems and conflicts facing employed women due to their gender identity and bodies. I discuss the contradictions facing employed mothers caused by work and social expectations, and show that women are in a double bind as to whether they combine family and work or delay having families. Finally, I explore the issues facing pregnant women at work; as there is no literature examining these issues in the Kuwaiti context, I draw briefly on my own experience as an employed pregnant woman.

## 3.6 Double binds and conflicts facing working women

### 3.6.1 Double bind: whether to meet career or social expectations

Several western scholars have argued that employed women, whether mothers or not, face discrimination because of their maternal potential and gender roles. For example, in the UK, Gatrell (2008) found that women were still excluded from certain types of occupation, particularly high status careers, because of maternal expectations.

> Despite the increased entry of women in higher education, women still experience restricted career opportunities on the basis of their potential of maternity. Women's bodies are central to gendered power relations and remain a negotiated site of power between men and women within contemporary society. [Whether] in the birthing room, in the home, or within the workplace, and whether or not they have children, women are identified principally through their reproductive characteristics in a way that men are not (p. 4).

Gatrell (2008) stresses that employed mothers are most likely to suffer tension between social and career expectations, thus finding themselves in a double bind. They face social pressure to be "good mothers" by breastfeeding their infants and choosing part-time work in order to give their babies sufficient attention, whereas in the workplace they are expected to be "good employees", conforming as closely as possible to the embodiment of prevailing male norms. The double bind thus arises as employed mothers feel themselves obliged either to meet social expectations at the cost of being perceived as less committed in the workplace, or to meet career expectations and so risk being seen by society as selfish in sacrificing the needs of their family to achieve career goals.

Furthermore, in another study, Gatrell and Cooper (2008) found that employed mothers were still in such a double bind when working full time if they limited themselves to working contracted 'office' hours; their career development would be constrained because they would be seen as inflexible and uncommitted to their paid work. The authors also report that mothers who work full time in demanding professional roles often experience role stress both because of the multiple demands of running a career, a home and a family, and because of the criticism they receive from colleagues for combining mothering with a high work orientation. Thus a

mother employed full time as a manager can find herself constructed simultaneously as a 'nominal' mother, "who is failing to perform her maternal role appropriately, and also as an uncommitted, unambitious employee" (ibid, p. 81).

The study by Gatrell and Cooper (2008) provides valuable knowledge of how flexibility and part-time career choices can limit the progress of employed mothers of young children. However, I argue that the authors would have done better to collect primary data and focus on one professional field, because the discrimination and problems facing employed mothers will differ from one workplace to another. For example, it would be valuable to ask whether mothers employed in education would face the same discrimination and other issues as those employed in engineering or medicine. Since it seems likely that they would not face identical tensions, examining one particular professional field would provide more focused data on the situation of mothers employed in that field.

One UK study which addresses the criticisms of the study above is that of Haynes and Fearfull (2008), who examined one relatively narrow field of employment, viz. the accountancy, business and management areas of academia, following an autobiographical methodological approach and thus offering a rich exploration of their own experiences and the barriers facing them because of their gender and fertility potential in a male-dominated culture. The researchers report that they faced gender stereotypical attitudes and discuss the tension between the cultural pressure to be good mothers and the workplace pressure to be good workers. They emphasise that social expectation still frequently represents the ideal mother of young children as one who does not work outside the home.

### 3.6.2 Double bind: whether to choose employment or motherhood

For a long time, scholars in different contexts, such as Metz (2005) in Australia and Houle et al. (2009) in Canada, have noted that the conflict women face when combining motherhood with employment sometimes forces them to choose between the two worlds. Cooper's (1984) review of literature on the tensions experienced by women combining family with high-status careers states that women in management face the difficulty of maintaining their dual managerial roles of corporate manager and family manager. He notes only a slow change in men's attitudes toward career women, leading increasing numbers of women to remain single or to seek divorce:

> More and more women are having difficulty in their dual managerial role and are either divorcing, limiting their family size, or coping with both worlds at the expense of their physical and psychological health (p. 28).

Moreover, Cooper (1984, p. 28) suggests that women who want make progress and hold managerial positions are in the double bind of having to choose between "individuality and the opportunity of a career, but without a family, or a family without the professional development". This shows the tension facing aspiring women due to cultural gender stereotyping, which makes women in different situations choose between work and family. Cooper's study provides rich insight which surprisingly appears to remain relevant today.

In a recent similar study, Legault and Chasserio (2003) examined the issues affecting professional women (managers and engineers) in seven Canadian IT companies. Many participants indicated that combining work with family would hinder their career progress and that they therefore chose to remain single and childless. Some indicated that the stress on flexible working hours and part-time working in order to accommodate family responsibilities meant that they would be seen as less committed to a career, so they chose to delay having a family in order to focus on the career. This suggests that women need to choose between career and family and that they cannot combine these roles, even if they have the ability to focus on both.

In a UK study, Gatrell (2005) suggests that women from middle- and upper-class origins or in high status careers could combine family and career and succeed in both by retaining another female (a nanny or a domestic worker) to help them with domestic duties and to care for their small children. However, I think that society is still likely to perceive women who leave their children with other women to go to work as selfish mothers. Indeed, Gatrell (2008, p. 179) later reports that to reduce the bind, aspiring women are likely to have to sacrifice opportunities for marriage and thereby motherhood:

> Women who 'choose' to combine motherhood with paid work are likely to 'pay a price' in relation to job prospects, especially if they decide to work part-time, in which case they may be expected to accept demotion as a trade-off for the chance to work less than full-time – as one door opens, another is closed firmly shut!

This indicates that in the UK context there is also a tension for employed women regarding time spent in the workplace, between meeting social or workplace expectations.

Finally, Brown (2010) also examined the impact of motherhood on career progression, this time in the context of the USA. Women in Brown's sample reported that they suffered stereotyping and discrimination in the workplace following motherhood and that flexible work arrangements and maternity leave had strongly affected their career progression. Consequently, Brown suggests that women who combine work and family are more likely to feel pressure and conflict between the two roles and are more likely to chose less demanding positions or occupations, or even to stay at home to raise their children. Women in her survey indicated that they faced stereotyping and discrimination from colleagues and employers following motherhood, but without reporting the reasons for these attitudes and behaviour in great detail. This limits the study, which could be criticised for failing to fulfil the researcher's aim of exploring the realities of working mothers. It could be argued that a questionnaire survey would help to explore the experiences of working mothers, but this would not be appropriate in my research, especially because I seek deep and explicit understanding of women's realities, which will be different in the particular situation of each woman, even in the same context.

Scholars such as Legault and Chasserio (2003) and Cooper (1984), whose work has been reviewed in this section, have examined the issues that face employed women in a general way, without focusing on mothers or non-mothers, which tends to cause confusion and raises questions such as whether employed mothers face the same barriers as non-mothers and whether employed non-mothers have the experience of how children and family life interface with employment. Moreover, I observed that some researchers have simply reviewed existing literature without collecting primary data, while others have used quantitative methods to explore the experiences and issues of employed women; I argue that the full experience of women cannot be explored by means of close-ended questionnaires, simply because reality will differ between people. Finally, I observed that many researchers in different Western contexts have found that employed women face issues related to working time which impact negatively on their lives and lead them to delay having a family to meet

workplace expectations by working full time. This raises the questions of why employed mothers cannot 'have it all' and why women in different contexts have contradictory roles created by social and workplace expectations.

Following on from these last findings, the following subsection argues that even when employed women decide to forego or delay having children, they remain in a double bind of social and workplace expectations.

### 3.6.3 Issues facing employed women who choose not to have children

> Never-married women without children are often stereotyped as being career-driven, competitive, and aloof, and they have no mate or offspring to validate their attractiveness, desirability, or compassionate nature ... [T]hese women often struggle to achieve a balance between being perceived as serious professionals and maintaining their femininity (Hamilton and Gordon, 2006, p. 398).

> The labour of reproduction—of becoming pregnant, giving birth and raising children—is still seen to be one of women's principal roles in late modern society. Western women—particularly those who are educated and in high-status paid work—are seen to be failing both in their social duty and in their performance of femininity if they do not use their fertile bodies, during their fertile years, to produce children (Gatrell, 2008, p. 36).

In spite of modernization and education, women still face gender issues and are still culturally defined as mothers, while motherhood is seen as a woman's main social duty (Gatrell, 2008). Women who choose to work in high status jobs and delay having children are perceived as selfish or odd, since they have failed to make their due reproductive contribution to society. Additionally, Gatrell claims that women who apparently lack the opportunity to have children either through circumstance or due to infertility are singled out for negative attention as a source of both pity and opprobrium. This group of non-mothers may be charged with being too highly educated and/or with investing too much time in their careers, at the expense of their fertility, especially if they are over thirty-five.

Gatrell further argues that society affords childless women less respect than mothers. Their maternal potential influences their position within both social and employment contexts. In the workplace, non-mothers are viewed as free women with no responsibilities outside the organization who should therefore be available to work 24 hours a day. Employers and colleagues expect them to place work at the centre of

their emotional lives and to extend their mothering capacity to their colleagues and to the greedy organization. On the other hand, the social expectation of non-mothers is that they are free women who will undertake the care of elderly parents, which is not expected of kin who are mothers or men. This suggests that even if women decide to delay having children to achieve work goals, they will face discrimination and the double bind of social and workplace expectations. This chapter thus shows that all working women, be they mothers or not, face issues and barriers due to their gender.

Reflecting on the Kuwaiti context, women appear not to have the option to delay marriage or having children, because in Kuwaiti culture women learn at an early age that their main roles in society are those of wife and mother, with work coming later. Thus, Shah et al. (1998, p. 134) argue that Kuwaiti society has shaped women's identity and makes them evaluate motherhood and children as their main roles: "Child bearing is an essential social role for Kuwaiti women. Some women feel that if they cannot have more children, they have lost their femininity, and some fear that their husband will marry another wife". However, this study was conducted 15 years ago and it could be that the situation of employed Kuwaiti women has changed since, due to education, modernization and globalization. Therefore, examining the challenges facing employed Kuwaiti mothers and the conflicting demands of culture, gender and management will help to build a rich picture of their current circumstances.

Following on from the exploration of the issues encountered by mothers and non-mothers in employment, the last two subsections of this chapter examine the problems facing pregnant women in the workplace and larger society due to perceptions and stereotypes regarding their bodies.

### 3.6.4 Body issues faced by employed pregnant women

An examination of how pregnant bodies are perceived in the workplace and elsewhere can promote new understandings of relationships and power dynamics between people and place. The body, argues Longhurst (2001), has become the ultimate vehicle for writing one's identity, while pregnant women in public spaces are often perceived as threatening and disrupting a social system that requires them to remain largely confined to private space during pregnancy. Pregnant women can be seen to occupy a borderline state that disturbs identity, system and order due to

the possibility that they might, for instance, vomit, cry or leak colostrum from their breasts.

Among the little scholarship which has been published on pregnancy at work, Acker (1990, p. 152) observes that a large part of the discrimination that employed women face is due to their maternal bodies: "Women's bodies—female sexuality, their ability to procreate and their pregnancy, breast-feeding and child care, menstruation and mythic 'emotionality'—are suspect, stigmatized, and used as grounds for control and exclusion."

Similarly, Gatrell (2011b) reports that pregnant employees faced negative beliefs and attitudes on the part of colleagues and employers, who tended to see pregnancy as an illness. She argues elsewhere that pregnant women face discrimination when holding high-level positions at work due to their maternity and gender, p. "Women's pregnant bodies underlined their sexual difference from cultural and, by implication, male norms at work. Pregnant women's unpredictable and potentially leaky bodies were treated as alien and were consequently rejected" (Gatrell, 2011a, p. 177). In an earlier study, Gatrell (2007) notes that "employers often associate pregnancy with reduced employee commitment, instability, ill health, workplace absence and contamination" (p. 465) and asserts that "the maternal body is 'taboo' in the context of professional paid work because pregnancy, birth, babies and breast milk set mothers apart from male 'norms' and expectations" (ibid, p. 462).

Consequently, according to Gatrell (2008), some employed pregnant women will conceal pregnancy for fear of discrimination, whereas others will strive to prove themselves by working beyond their usual standard in the hope that their 'supra-performance' will make them appear healthy and enable them to conform to the workplace norms associated with 'ideal male bodies'. Thus, the discrimination faced by pregnant women leads them to struggle to establish the normalcy of their situation in the eyes of colleagues and employers.

In the Kuwaiti context, it might seem reasonable to suppose that pregnant women employed in the education sector would not face such discrimination, simply because they work in a wholly female environment. It could also be supposed, particularly by non-Kuwaitis, that Kuwaiti women in high-level and middle management would

know that the performance and energy of pregnant employees would not be the same as it would when they were not pregnant. However, during interviews with Kuwaiti mothers employed at all levels of management, several participants in lower-level management positions reported facing discrimination from female line managers during pregnancy. These explained that this discrimination and the health effects of pregnancy itself negatively affected their performance and behaviour at work. Participants in top-level and middle management positions spoke about pregnant employees in a very negative way; their responses are discussed in more depth in Chapter 7. Unlike pregnant women in the West, who mainly face discrimination from men in the workplace, pregnant employees in Kuwait tend to face discrimination from other women.

My earlier assessment of the paucity of research into pregnancy and employment in Western scholarship is supported by Gatrell's (2008) assertion that there has been little research on the social experience of combining pregnancy and paid work, especially in Western journals dealing with management practices. I have been unable to identify any research on pregnancy and employment in the Arab world generally and Kuwait in particular, a gap which the present study will help to bridge by exploring the experiences of Kuwaiti mothers – some of whom have firsthand experience of the impact of pregnancy on work – who attempt to combine family life and employment.

### 3.6.5 Pregnancy in the Kuwaiti context

As mentioned previously, since this research area is very new in Kuwaiti and Middle Eastern scholarship, I was unable to find any literature examining how pregnant female bodies inhabit Kuwaiti social spaces. I have therefore relied on my own experience of being pregnant while working in the Kuwaiti education sector. This subsection briefly explores these experiences and their effects; Chapter 8 combines these findings with earlier findings regarding the limitations placed on women's agency in the areas of marriage and motherhood by cultural gender roles.

Kuwaiti society, as noted in Chapters 1 and 2, traditionally constructs women's identities in terms of relationships with their husbands and children. Women marry young and become mothers not long after marriage. Those who delay motherhood are pressured by those around them to have children as soon as possible.

When I got married and gave birth to my first and second child at a young age, I did not consider that simply being pregnant was a fulfilment of my social role. This became clear only when I delayed having a third child in favour of pursuing my studies. People around me frequently asked when I was going to give my husband a new child and perceived me as selfish, abnormal, immature, bitter and a child-hater. I consequently planned to have my third child during the second year of my PhD.

When I was pregnant with my second child, I was working in the education sector. Although I had fulfilled my prescribed social role by bearing children, I found myself facing discrimination and negative attitudes at work from my manager and colleagues, all of whom were women. I informed my manager and colleagues that I was pregnant in the second month of my pregnancy. My manager appeared angry when I delivered the news, and my colleagues also seemed to be unhappy. My manager asked me about my due date, then assigned me more work – perhaps to get the most out of me before I commenced maternity leave. Despite my telling her on several occasions that I felt tired, she continued to set me more work, much of which was not within my normal purview. I blamed myself for my failures to keep up with this increased workload and adopted strategies of isolation and silence in order to block out the discrimination that I faced.

After I gave birth, my colleagues continually contacted me by phone, warning me that if I took maternity leave for more than two months the manager would transfer me to a different organisation far from my home. My manager also told me that if I took maternity leave, she would give me a low mark in my performance appraisal. I felt that I was being punished for having given birth. This treatment led me to develop a negative attitude towards my job and towards working in a closed female environment. My experience illustrates how pregnancy constitutes an unwelcome intrusion of the female reproductive body into the social sphere of the workplace and how, regardless of when or whether they choose to have children, women are hindered and detrimentally affected by cultural beliefs.

## 3.7 Conclusion

Having reviewed the relevant literature, this chapter concludes that Western and Eastern women face the same gender-related barriers to success in the workplace.

Both Western and Arab women also face stereotyping and discrimination in society, in organizations and in management, because of their gender identity, their reproductive bodies and their socially sanctioned roles as mothers and family-oriented carers, not workers. I argued that women are in a double bind if they choose to work and to delay having family, as they are if they choose to have a family and undergo pregnancy while holding a managerial position. I found it significant to examine the importance of flexibility within organizations, to help working mothers to achieve work-family balance. Thus, in the following chapter I present a review of Western studies of work-family balance. I also examine the significance of flexibility in the workplace and family support in helping employed women to cope with their family and work responsibilities, using this as a basis to evaluate related findings from other contexts and cultures.

# Chapter Four:
# Work-Life Balance and the Importance of Flexibility

## 4.1 Introduction

The topic of this study is novel in Kuwait, where very little has been written about mothers employed in low, middle and higher management in the education sector. Moreover, the theme of work-life balance and working mothers has been totally neglected by Arab scholars. Therefore, since most of the available literature on work and family is set within a Western context, I refer in this chapter to many contributions to the body of Western literature regarding the importance of work-life balance for employed mothers. This review offers an overview of the meaning of work-life balance; the importance of flexibility in the workplace for work-family balance; work-family conflict and its negative outcomes, and the significance of the age and number of children as related to work-family conflict.

## 4.2 Work-family balance

Work-family balance is defined as good performance, both at work and in family life, which functions well, together with a sense of wellbeing and a feeling of satisfaction in both domains, with little conflict in either area (Clark, 2000). In relation to this, Kofodimos (1993, p. 511) emphasises that work-family balance often implies "cutting back on work to spend more time with the family". It is worth mentioning that work-life balance does not mean that work and family are regarded as equally important; neither is this balance based on dividing one's time equally between one's work and family (Sree and Jyothi, 2012).

These considerations highlight just how complex and difficult it is to achieve and maintain equilibrium between work and family life. Loscocco (1997, p. 206) states that "work and family roles do not fit together very well". Therefore, as Clark (2001) and Azim et al. (2011) assert, work-family balance has become one of the key concerns in workers' lives. This has encouraged some organisations to create 'family-friendly' policies. A family-friendly work atmosphere involves three crucial aspects: good management, an understanding of what the notion of family means to

workers, and flexible work processes and scheduling. In addition, Thornthwaite (2004) states that flexibility in organisational processes will include a level of understanding and concern to help workers combine both worlds.

Given the importance of the above, therefore, Azim et al. (2011), Roehling et al. (2001), Clark (1997) and Shaffer et al. (2001) all agree that work-life balance will result in positive outcomes for organisations, among which are increased commitment and satisfaction due to the positive feelings associated with working for an organisation that visibly cares about the wellbeing of its employees. Consequently, employee performance is likely to improve. In addition, it has been found that work-family conflict has a negative impact on employees' attitudes, especially on their commitment and performance, while Guest (2002) argues that work-family imbalance can have a very negative effect on families and children. These contributions indicate a close and reciprocal relationship between work and family, which have the potential to affect each other either positively or negatively.

### 4.2.1 Work-family balance and working mothers

Numerous Western scholars have illustrated a trend whereby the increasing participation of women in the workforce currently poses a number of challenges. In this regard, coordinating work and family responsibilities is one of the most significant challenges facing employed women, especially mothers who work in highly demanding jobs, such as management (Rehman and Roomi, 2012; Bielby and Bielby, 1988; Han and Moen, 1999; Subramaniam et al., 2011; Lyness and Kropf, 2005).

Furthermore, Youngberg and College (2011), Dann (1995) and Vincent et al. (2004) all argue that employed mothers who face the conflicting demands of work and family are more likely to place the demands of family above those arising from work. Miller (2005) expresses the same idea in a different way, stating that working women may sacrifice promotion and high positions at work to focus on motherhood, as illustrated by this interview excerpt: "We decided we would either have children or would apply for promotion and that would have been a big change because I would have been in a very much more important job and being looked up to as a more important person and I decided not to go for that, I decided to go for motherhood" (pp. 84-85). These studies show the importance of family life and

motherhood over work for many women. They also indicate that it is important to offer employed mothers enough flexibility to encourage them to combine the two worlds, thus reducing the contradiction between their roles.

Gani and Ara (2010) have studied this conflict facing employed mothers in their attempt to combine work and family, reporting that many such women experienced "contradictory role expectations" between home and work (p. 61). They describe the contradictory roles facing women in the workplace, noting that women are "expected to be committed, dynamic, competitive, straightforward, and non-sentimental on a professional level" while at work, but "sweet, soft, sensitive, adaptable, gentle, and domesticated" at home. In attempting to play these different roles, the working mother often feels "pressure to reconcile the dual burden of the two roles at her home and workplace because each is a full time job" (ibid, p. 62). This indicates the intense conflict facing employed mothers when trying to play out different and demanding roles. It also shows the need to seek ways of helping mothers in employment reduce the tensions involved in combining work and family life.

In the Canadian context, a study by Houle et al. (2009) found that gender roles within society impacted employed mothers in the workplace, because women were generally seen as primarily responsible for the home and family, spending more time than men on childcare and domestic activities. As a result, many talented and well-educated women decided to scale back or simply opt out of the market. It emerged that mothers in professional and managerial positions felt exhausted by trying to reconcile work and family roles, resulting in them being less committed to their jobs. Hence, they were more likely to consider changing careers or quitting work altogether to concentrate on their family roles.

In the context of this work-family conflict, many Western scholars, such as Eversole et al. (2012), Lippe et al. (2006) and Bettany and Gatrell (2008), have noted the value of affording employed mothers more flexibility and family-friendly policies. Fleetwood (2007, p. 389), for example, found that providing women in employment with flexibility improved their job satisfaction, thus helping to increase productivity and improve performance in the workplace, because "flexible working practices make satisfied employees, and satisfied employees are more profitable". Conversely, Gani and Ara (2010, p. 62) conclude that employed women facing work-family

conflict are less satisfied, which in real terms translates to "lower standards of work performance and disregard of organizational goals". This shows that for working women there are both negative and positive relationships between their satisfaction, their performance and the presence of flexibility in the workplace. In short, if an organisation allows its female employees some flexibility, their performance will improve, in comparison with one that does not offer such flexibility.

However, Hubbard and Datnow (2000) and Lautsch and Scully (2007) argue that mothers employed in managerial roles may face discrimination and other issues within their organisations if they request more flexible working conditions. They also state that a mother working part-time so that she can meet her family responsibilities may encounter a negative attitude from her colleagues. As a result, asking for flexibility to accommodate family responsibilities can lead a working mother to suffer discrimination in the workplace (see section 4.4).

More importantly, Aycan and Eskin (2005) and Premeaux et al. (2007) contend that the support of the family and husband at home is a key factor in helping an employed mother to achieve positive work-family balance and cope with work-family conflicts, while at the same time enabling her to experience psychological wellbeing and satisfaction with married life. I agree that spousal support a is a very important factor in helping women to succeed in both their work and family lives, but the Kuwaiti cultural context nevertheless precludes husbands from supporting their wives in this way; wives cannot ask their husbands to become involved with raising children or to share domestic chores, as these are viewed in Kuwaiti culture as the sole responsibility of women.

The literature reviewed above generally highlights the significance of flexibility for working mothers, without giving much detail or mentioning the positive impact of flexibility on employee productivity, for example. However, the following subsection will further explore the importance of flexibility for both organisations and employees.

#### 4.2.2 The importance of flexibility in the workplace

Many studies have shown that workplace flexibility can have benefits for both employees and organisations (Mattei and Jennings, 2008; O'Brien and Hayden, 2008; Sheridan and Conway, 2001; Shepherd, 2006; Blair-Loy, 2009). For example,

Kelliher and Anderson (2009), Richman et al. (2008), O'Brien and Hayden (2008), Hall and Parker (1993) and Sheridan and Conway (2001) have all found that flexibility in the workplace leads to employees reporting higher levels of job satisfaction, increased autonomy, reduced absenteeism and increased loyalty. There is also evidence that it increases organisational commitment, employee morale and productivity. Increased flexibility in working conditions is linked with reduced employee stress, which would show the need for flexibility to achieve organisational goals, at the same time helping employees to reduce the stress arising from tensions between work and family demands, by helping them to balance these demands.

On the other hand, Schneider (2011) states that research consistently shows that inflexible work schedules have a negative impact on parents, children and organisations. Parents often struggle to spend enough time supporting their children in their education, due to a lack of flexibility at work, and this could ultimately affect the children's academic performance. Schneider also reports that parents can feel pressure due to an imbalance between family and work demands, with a negative effect on health and increased stress levels. Employees who experience stress as regards their children's after-school time were also found to have reduced productivity and increased absenteeism, which affected their organisations: "Working parents, in struggling with work and family commitments, describe feelings of stress; emotional and psychological pressure; and lack of energy to cope with their spouses, children and jobs… Feelings that can adversely affect their health and productivity" (ibid, p. 109). Similarly, Subramaniam et al. (2011) report that workplace flexibility helps mothers to reduce the pressure and stress arising from the tension between work and family commitments. This conflict between the two worlds can then affect employees' productivity, health and family life. Support for this comes from Clark (2001) and Heijstra and Rafnsdottir (2010), who suggest that flexibility offered to employees will help to achieve work-family balance, enhance job satisfaction and ensure effective family care. Such flexibility may enable female employees in high positions to reduce the effects of any work-family conflict causing them unwanted stress.

In contrast, Kossek et al. (1999) argue that flexible schedules do not necessarily reduce work-family imbalance, having failed to observe any relationship between

flexible working times and productivity. After collecting primary research data, the authors found that only a handful of employees reported a supportive workplace as being the most important factor behind increased commitment and satisfaction, leading to higher productivity and performance. Nevertheless, Beutell (2010) and Barling (1995) agree that the availability of support, especially from supervisors, is the most important factor in an organisation to help workers increase their work commitment and satisfaction. Similarly, Greenhaus et al. (1987) state that employees who work in a non-supportive workplace are more likely to experience higher levels of stress and lower personal and marital wellbeing, and that a non-supportive workplace will affect employees' ability to maintain satisfying relationships with each other, which may severely impair performance and satisfaction. However, as Clark (2001) notes, support from supervisors was associated only with increased employee citizenship.

With regard to Kuwait, this author's experience as a teacher has involved the option of flexible working times for female teachers being dependent on the attitudes and decisions of head teachers. Sometimes, the latter are observed granting flexible time schedules to those who do not absolutely need them for family reasons, while another teacher with more pressing needs for flexibility might have such a request refused. In a Kuwaiti school, the head teacher will always have the authority to divide and assign classes based on the teachers' experience and according to his or her own preferences. This can create conflict between teachers and heads of department, ultimately affecting teachers' performance and making them more likely to adopt a negative attitude towards work, as indicated by increased absenteeism and turnover.

It is therefore not surprising that work can have a considerable impact on a woman's life, so flexible work times, suitable scheduling and a supportive head of department are all very important factors in achieving organisational goals. Employees' personal lives must be taken into consideration. If they feel that their managers are sensitive and supportive, allowing flexibility in the working schedule, they will do their best to achieve the organisation's objectives and will remain loyal, although it is also important that managers supervise staff on an equitable basis. I would suggest that flexibility has a positive impact on the life of a working woman, which would

include reducing her stress levels, increasing her ability to meet the demands of her children and family, and allowing her to fulfil her aspirations by combining the two worlds.

According to Coronel et al. (2010, p. 230), “family matters such as marriage and children influence aspirations and achievements in women’s goals”. I suggest that this statement could be made in respect of any organisation which offers no flexible time arrangements or family-friendly policies. Conversely, it would not apply to an organization which provides female employees with flexibility, as women in this situation will achieve their goals.

This study explores the experiences of working mothers in Kuwait as they try to combine a managerial position with raising a family, examining their strategies for managing their work outside the home alongside taking care of a large family. Here, the importance of flexibility as a factor in helping working mothers to balance work and family responsibilities will be highlighted.

This subsection has explored the significance of flexibility in the workplace and its value in helping working mothers to achieve success in both worlds. The following section reviews the literature on the negative outcomes of work-family conflict for both families and organisations.

## 4.3 Work-family conflict and its negative outcomes

Work-family conflict, which has been measured in earlier Western studies, is regarded as one of the most significant factors affecting job performance amongst women. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985, p. 77) define it as “a form of inter-role conflict in which role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect”. They state that work-family conflict can occur when the job or the family starts to become more and more demanding, to the point where a person has to choose one role over another. Since these demands require the individual concerned to invest all their energy in that role and spend more time focusing on it, less energy and time remain for their other roles.

The recent body of evidence has shown links between work-family conflict and poor psychological, physical and general wellbeing in women (Moen et al., 2008;

Broadbridge, 1999). These studies indicate that tension between work and family responsibilities can lead to job dissatisfaction (Perrewe and Hochwarter, 2001; Cinamon and Rich, 2004; Burke, 2004), stress (Cinamon and Rich, 2004; Perrewe and Hochwarter, 2001; Choi, 2008; Shelton et al., 2008; Choi and Chen, 2006; Becker and Moen, 1999; Milkie and Peltola, 1999; Kossek et al., 1999; Clark, 1997), burnout (Cinamon and Rich, 2004), depression (Higgins et al., 2000) and exhaustion (Shaffer et al., 2001; Hall et al., 2010). There is also evidence of an association between poor work-life balance and reduced marital satisfaction, marital happiness and family satisfaction (Bedeian et al., 1988; Tausig and Fenwick 2001). Indeed, a diminution of general wellbeing has been demonstrated (Burke, 2004; Broadbridge, 1999; Barling, 1995; Brummelhuis et al., 2010). It is worth mentioning here that most of these studies adopted quantitative methods to examine employees' health problems arising from work-family conflict. In this research, I have applied a qualitative methodology to explore the issues of work-family balance facing managerial mothers in the education sector in Kuwait. The choice of a qualitative approach was appropriate, because no previous research has examined this issue in the context of Kuwait. Additionally, this approach has helped me to investigate deeply women's circumstances, realities and experiences of combining work and large families in a male-dominated society.

Other scholars have identified negative behaviour and attitudes to work among employees as a consequence of work-family tensions. These include absenteeism (Heijstra and Rafnsdottir, 2010; Boyar et al., 2008; Tuten and August, 2006), turnover (Heijstra and Rafnsdottir, 2010), greater intention to quit (Burke, 2004; Boyar et al., 2008), lateness (Cinamon and Rich, 2004), poor role performance (Cinamon and Rich, 2004; Srivastava, 2007; Greenhaus et al., 1987; Tuten and August, 2006) and low occupational commitment (Cinamon and Rich, 2004; Roehling et al., 2001; Brummelhuis et al., 2010).

However, among the many studies of how work and family influence each other, very few have been conducted in Arab countries. Most of the abovementioned studies were carried out in the West, although I have found two examining this topic in the Chinese context (Choi and Chen, 2006; Choi, 2008), both of which substantiate the dearth of studies of work-family conflict in an Eastern context. More

specifically, to my knowledge no study has yet examined the reciprocal impact of work and family amongst Middle Eastern employees and, apart from a limited number of studies on work-life balance, little is actually known about Arab women in employment.

In a recent example of research on work-family conflict, Sidani and Al Hakim (2012) investigated how this differed between single and married women in Lebanon and compared their experiences with those of their male counterparts. The authors concluded that more research is needed into the many issues facing single women in Arab societies at work and at home. In their study, married women reported higher levels of work-family conflict than single women, yet single women reported lower levels of job satisfaction than married women, and many expressed the intention to leave the workforce. At home, single women had to fulfil responsibilities to their extended families, while in the workplace their career development was hindered by lower salaries, insufficient opportunities for promotion and lack of organisational support. Being single, their family obligations were perceived as minimal and were accordingly ignored by employers. They also enjoyed far less upward career mobility than their male counterparts, remaining stuck in low-level managerial positions.

Another recent study of work-family conflict was carried out in Turkey by Ozutku and Altindis (2013), who collected questionnaire responses from 462 healthcare professionals working in 25 state hospitals across 12 cities in Turkey. They found that levels of work-family conflict varied with the number of children respondents had, their level of education, weekly working hours and organisational position. However, although Turkey is a Muslim country, the study findings cannot be automatically applied to the Kuwaiti context, as the social, economic and cultural systems of the two countries are distinct from one another.

Due to the scarcity of studies of work and family in the Arab context, my research will be valuable in helping to fill this knowledge gap, as it explores the complexity of social values and family relationships in Kuwaiti culture. Given the lack of existing studies with an Arab-world focus, however, this section of the review will necessarily concentrate on studies of family and work in a Western context. I will then connect these studies to an examination of Kuwaiti culture, using my experience as a Kuwaiti woman in employment.

Regarding women in employment in Western contexts, Becker and Moen (1999), Milkie and Peltola (1999), Heijstra and Rafnsdottir (2010) and Broadbridge (1999) found that working women were under much more pressure than working men, being usually tasked with attending to family obligations. Cinamon and Rich (2004) report that professional women face more conflicts and imbalance than unemployed women due to the importance and demands of their work and family duties, to the extent that they may choose to leave the workforce. Similar data is presented by Sree and Jyothi (2012, p. 35):

> Most professional women step off the career fast track at some point with children to raise, elderly parents to care for and other pulls on their time. These women are confronted with one off-ramp after another. When they feel pushed at the same time by long hours and unsatisfying work, the decision to leave becomes even easier.

Parasuraman and Greenhaus (1993) suggest that women with family responsibilities should select a job which is less demanding, as this will help them to reduce work-family conflict. Thus, Cinamon and Rich (2002) note that young women with children often prefer to work as teachers, because the role of a teacher is more compatible with that of a mother, which may minimise work-family conflict. In contrast, Acker (1992), Biklen (1995) and O'Brien (1984, cited in Cinamon and Rich, 2004) maintain that female teachers are highly committed to their jobs and teaching is one of the most stressful jobs for mothers due to its demands, whereby teachers have to dedicate a great deal of time and energy to prepare for a working day. In addition, one should not forget that mothers who teach need to reserve at least an equal amount of energy and time for their families. Such heavy demands will ultimately generate work-family conflict, leading the above authors to refute the claims made by Parasuraman and Greenhaus (1993).

From another angle, Moen et al. (2008) argue that faced with a demanding workload, workers need a certain level of flexibility to be able to control and manage their time. Those with heavy workloads and family requirements need to find ways to reduce the conflict between the two (Moen and Kelly, 2008; Kim, Moen and Min, 2003, cited in Moen et al., 2008). Clark (2001) is of the opinion that it is actually possible for both women and men to find satisfaction in their work and family life, although there may still be some conflict in these roles. As previous studies have shown,

work-family conflict may arise when a woman is unable to divide her time effectively to meet both work and family demands. However, some professional women are able to express their commitment to their careers in the same way as men, whilst also prioritising family life (Wallace, 1997). This would indicate that difficult situations can be mitigated by other factors, such as working conditions or the behaviour of others in the work and family contexts.

### 4.3.1 Age and number of children related to work-family conflict

Several Western studies have concluded that pre-school age children increase family demands and intensify work-family conflict (Erickson et al., 2010; Aycan and Eskin 2005; Bedeian et al., 1988). Erickson et al. (2010, p. 960) report that "mothers with pre-school age children seemed to be particularly vulnerable to work-family and family-work conflicts". In addition, Piotrkowski and Katz (1982, p. 229) state that "employed women with pre-school children may be especially susceptible to work overload, as household demands are particularly great when children are young". Crouter (1984, p. 436) has also suggested that "women with young children are 'at risk' of perceiving that impact of family upon work as generally negative, primarily because their family responsibilities at times result in their being absent, tardy, inattentive, inefficient, or unable to accept new responsibilities at work". Additionally, Shelton et al. (2008) and Voydanoff (1988) conclude that the number and age of the children involved are correlated with family role strain among employed women and can directly influence their job demands, while Cinamon and Rich (2004) agree that age and the number of children are important in predicting employees' attitudes and behaviour.

In contrast to the above, Boyar et al. (2008) argue that the number of children in a family is not fundamentally responsible for work-family conflict or for affecting employee's behaviour. Instead, they claim that the most important issue in this regard is the age of the children: those under the age of six require more time and attention from an employed mother than older children do. In fact, older children may help their mothers, thus reducing family demands and allowing them to spend more time at work. This is perhaps refutable on the basis of simple logic, namely that more children means more family duties. It is asking a lot to expect older children to

help in any substantial way, given the demands of schooling and their general disposition as children.

At an institutional level, Roehling et al. (2001) and Heilbrunn and Davidovitch (2011) found a strong relationship between childcare policies and employee loyalty among working women with school-age children. Bedeian et al. (1988) stress the importance of flexibility for employed women with children and claim to have found relationships between the age of the children and both job satisfaction and marital satisfaction.

In my master's research (Al-Suwaileh, 2011), I observed the barriers faced by Kuwaiti teachers in their efforts to achieve and maintain work-family balance, the main finding being that 86 per cent of the study sample reported that long working hours and a lack of time flexibility affected their children under six (pre-school age). Moreover, it is worth mentioning that more than a few participants in the sample reported feeling exhausted and stressed trying to balance family and work demands. They also reported that the lack of flexible work arrangements impaired their performance. All these findings show the importance of workplace flexibility, especially for employed mothers, to help them achieve success in these two spheres, while reducing their stress levels and health problems. Given the limitations of research conducted at the master's level, I felt in planning the present study that qualitative methods would provide an opportunity to gather more detailed data. In addition, the priority is to address the roots of the problem, i.e. culture and gender, to help explain the behaviour and attitude towards work of the research sample. Importantly, this study was conducted against the background of a particular culture and the changes taking place in Kuwaiti society, which appear to have had significant impacts, both positive and negative, on Kuwaiti women, especially on their roles and status. It would seem that the conflict between Kuwaiti women's roles before and after the sharp increase in the wealth of country, combined with inherent cultural beliefs and values, have all affected their behaviour and attitudes towards work.

The final section in this chapter examines the arenas of work and family through gender, since a close reading of the literature reveals that many scholars of work and

family have combined these topics with an interest in gender issues and roles (Gerson, 2004).

## 4.4 Work and family through gender

The literature from the Arab world generally stresses the importance of the family as the main area of activity for females, and Arabs tend to be socialised in this way. This is why the current study has begun by reviewing cultural beliefs, values and women's roles, status and identity, as well as male attitudes to women employed in high positions. These important sections help to build up a rich body of information which can be used to explain the uniqueness of the experiences of Kuwaiti women employed in management positions, in both their working and family lives. One of the goals here is to identify the challenges facing women in management as a result of gender, then to explore how all these challenges can affect their working lives and the task of bring up a family. Gender stereotyping is a challenge facing working mothers, especially those employed in management.

Sidani and Al Hakim (2012) report that for Arab women, work and family issues have their origin in Arab cultural values and beliefs, which give males the authority from an early age to direct the lives of females, while simultaneously teaching girls to accept their brothers' domination over their lives: Arab women "are socialized to allow their brothers' power over their lives and they learn to perceive such authority as eventually beneficial to their future lives" (ibid, p. 1378). They also report that "the son is socialized from his early years to be served by females in the household. This places undue burdens on unmarried females, which continue till they get married, a time when a different dynamic emerges" (ibid). Thus, Arab women have been shown to face gender stereotyping in their homes and within their families. However, as mentioned above, due to the sparseness of Middle Eastern literature on the topic of work and family through gender, this section must include Western literature.

The issue of gender being a factor which restricts a person's suitability for a particular job is addressed by Rapoport and Rapoport (1993, p. 36):

> Men were considered better (in the workplace) not only at the large muscle jobs such as the operation of heavy machinery, but at the tasks of

> management such as leadership, rational planning, and fiscal responsibility. Women, on the other hand, were considered naturally better at sensate activities, cooking and home making, childrearing and an intuitive understanding of human feelings.

Simply put, this shows gender stereotyping, which considers women as natural homemakers and nothing more.

Furthermore, Barling (1995) provides evidence that employed women face social stereotypes affecting their work and families, based on the idea that work is beneficial for men and their families, while for women, work often has a negative impact on family life. Barling further reports that employed mothers face tensions in balancing work and family, with a negative impact on their children's behaviour:

> Society has expected fathers to be employed. Moreover, fathers' employment is believed to be beneficial for children, whereas their unemployment is thought to exert negative effects. In contrast, society has expected mothers to remain at home. Hence, employed mothers have been perceived to exert negative effects on their children, while homemakers have been positive influences on child rearing. (Barling, 1995, p. 21)

In a similar vein, Sree and Jyothi (2012) studied gender roles and work-family balance in India. They not only found that men held certain perceptions of gender roles, but also that there were women who shared these perceptions and believed they were created to be homemakers. Therefore, work outside the home did not play an important role in their lives: "Work roles are often seen as secondary to family roles. Not just men but women also hold themselves and other women to the homemaker standard" (Sree and Jyothi, 2012, p. 38). This indicates that many women in India have been socialized and learnt to consider themselves and other women to be homemakers.

As an Arab female, familiar with the specifics of Arab society, I agree that the account given by Sree and Jyothi accurately reflects what Arab women would believe. For instance, many Arab women believe that working outside the home is not suitable for a woman. More importantly, they tend not to trust in other women's skills or quality of work. Another illustration is that when a Kuwaiti woman goes to hospital and is presented with two doctors, one male and the other female, she will always choose the male. Surprisingly, no research has been conducted to determine

the exact reason for this lack of trust in other women's professional abilities. This is a knowledge gap which the current research seeks to fill.

Another study by David (2008) examines the relationship between social factors and gender to investigate how women can combine work and family life. The author concludes that while women have made progress in their education, comparable with men, they still do not have the same economic or social positions, nor equal opportunities. Moreover, she asserts that women's work, whether as mothers or in paid employment, remains a major issue with no definitive explanations, despite the massive transformation of social and gender equality in developed countries.

In a recent study set in Spain, Coronel et al. (2010) investigated management in the education sector, gender and family. They found that in spite of the large number of females having strong academic qualifications and working in education, women simply did not tend to occupy high positions, which were dominated by men. The authors suggest that the reason for this imbalance is female identity itself, placing stress on family roles as part of a woman's social identity. They argue that "psychological differences resulting from male and female socialization at an early age can generate less self-confidence and low levels of perceived self-efficacy. Such explanations locate the problem within women themselves" (ibid, p. 221). Gender affects the status of power relations in organisations at a systemic level, as these are structured hierarchically in favour of men. Coronel et al. (2010, p. 222) conclude that organisations and culture have created obstacles to women's progress and their access to management positions: "Women in management positions must defy many more obstacles than men in order to maintain and improve their prestige and authority".

Lyness and Kropf (2005) also argue that gender is particularly relevant to work and family issues and that the demands of management make it difficult for women to combine such positions with family responsibilities. They suggest that women need support from the culture itself to help them develop and achieve success, recognising the importance of including women in all aspects of life to diminish gender boundaries in society. They also stress the importance of flexibility in the workplace, helping female managers to combine the two sets of demands. Granting men and women equal management opportunities would be a significant step forward.

In the UK context, Emslie and Hunt (2009) studied work and family though a gender lens. They report that more than a few males still think that women are responsible for the home and men for work. Emslie and Hunt explain this by noting that in spite of the UK government having created policies giving both parents (not just mothers) more choice on how to balance work and family life, there is in practice still a wide disparity in maternity and paternity leave, reflecting entrenched traditional gender roles. The assumption remains that flexible working hours and work-life balance are predominately issues for working mothers of young children, not for men.

Another example of gender imbalance in the UK context is given by Sealy and Singh (2006), who assert that despite the UK being a developed country, women still face gender issues which affect their work and positions in organisations. Sealy and Singh report that in 2005, in spite of 25 years of gender-equality legislation, only 3.4 per cent of executives in the UK's top 100 companies were women. This shows that the barriers which employed women in developed countries face are similar to those faced by women in developing countries, particularly with regard to rigid and male-dominated hierarchies, promotion based on uninterrupted occupation paths with little flexibility, and a lack of credibility in a masculine culture, separated from other women. Broadbridge and Hearn (2008, p. 39) support this, stating that "organizations and managements are not just structured by gender, but pervaded and constituted by and through gender", a point which is reinforced by Kyriakidou (2011) and Leinonen (2012), who claim that gender roles affect women's place in society and in organisations.

This section has shown that women at work face many barriers due to their gender. These arise from society, from gender itself and from organisations. The review has by necessity concentrated on Western literature; however, I think that Kuwaiti women face the same barriers related to gender and to the stress surrounding family roles. It is worth mentioning that the Kuwaiti government has implemented the same gender-equality legislation as the UK but that it has yet to be implemented in reality, because of the strong cultural belief that the right place for a woman is at home, focusing on her children, and that working will lead her to neglect her primary responsibilities.

## 4.5 Conclusion

From the many studies reviewed in this chapter, I conclude that scholars have addressed three broad issues related to work-life balance: time management, inter-role conflict and ways for mothers in employment to balance their family and work obligations. The number and age of children were found to be key factors affecting women's ability to balance work and family in many Western contexts. I have argued that the issues of work-family balance differ from culture to culture and that in contrast to the numerous observational and analytical studies set in a Western context, there is a significant absence of relevant literature regarding women in employment in the Middle East, particularly Kuwait. My research aims to fill this gap in knowledge by examining the issues of work-family balance facing Kuwaiti mothers employed at different levels of management in the education sector. Having reviewed the literature, I turn in Chapter Five to the methodology adopted for the study.

# Chapter Five:
# Research Methodology

## 5.1 Introduction

Researching the social world is a challenging activity which involves the assessment and reconsideration of a range of issues: what questions should be asked and of whom; what methods and methodologies should be promoted and why; the roles that the researcher plays; and how these issues influence the inquiry procedure. This chapter explores the epistemological and methodological approaches employed during this research; more specifically, it explains the rationale for using a qualitative research methodology and semi-structured interviews for data collection, as well as providing background information on Part One of the study process, location and participants. Additionally, this chapter outlines the ways in which I brought my own experience in the field to this project, particularly with regard to data collection, power dynamics and the challenges of interviewing Kuwaiti mothers employed in managerial roles.

The rest of this chapter justifies why I conducted Part Two of the study, which explores women's bodily experiences of pregnancy and childbirth in relation to the self as a whole and to specific gendered aspects of that self. It gives an overview of the life history approach and its use in this study and discusses certain aspects of feminist theory related to life history research. This is followed by a field study summary detailing where and with whom I conducted the interviews and why these locations and interviewees were chosen.

Even though the contributions of Arab women in the workforce are well documented, there remains a popular conception that Arab women are family-oriented, while men are work-centred. Research on women in the Middle East has found some evidence suggesting that Islam is the main factor in women's low social status and the segregation of gender roles in daily life, while other evidence asserts that the beliefs and values of Arab culture are mainly responsible for the barriers faced by women.

In the literature review, I noted that no existing study focuses on Kuwaiti women, particularly mothers in managerial positions in the education sector, and the barriers of culture, gender and family that affect their family lives and careers. Furthermore, I identified no previous research using qualitative methods to address the issue of work-life balance for mothers employed in managerial positions in the Arab context generally and in Kuwait in particular. This thesis provides new theoretical, empirical and methodological knowledge concerning Kuwaiti mothers employed in management roles in the education sector.

To address the research objectives listed in chapter one, I will now set out my approach to Part One of the study, which focused on the issue of work-family balance in the Kuwaiti context and the complexity of interrelations among culture, gender and management for Kuwaiti mothers working as managers in the education sector. I will first offer a reflexive account of my position as researcher and then discuss the research paradigm.

## 5.2 Reflexivity: the position of the researcher

My exploration of reflexivity begins with the feminist body of work that challenges the traditional role of the researcher as objective and value-free. As a result, I took a self-reflexive approach to this study, wherein by revealing my own experiences, values and attitudes I could be clear about my role in the construction of knowledge generated from my study (Oakley, 2000). In this regard I concur with Finlay (2002; 212), who reported that as researchers:

> We recognize that research is co-constituted, a joint product of the participants, researcher and their relationship. We understand the meanings are negotiated within particular social contexts so that another researcher will unfold a different story. We no longer seek to eradicate the researcher's presence – instead subjectivity in research is transformed from a problem to an opportunity.

In this research I suggest that my subjectivity is a catalyst for examining the complex relationships between culture, gender and management on one hand and between work and family on the other, focusing on the experiences of Kuwaiti mothers employed in managerial roles. In so doing, I created an opportunity to contribute to

the body of research on gender and management by undertaking a study which breaks new ground in the Kuwaiti context.

Yet where does my subjectivity begin? Drawing on my sex, nationality, and experience as a mother working in the field of education, I felt that my own experiences would contribute to my investigation of issues facing employed mothers due to their gender identity in Kuwaiti culture. During 2006, I struggled to balance my responsibilities toward my house, husband, children, and extended family with those related to my work. Many people around me insisted that a woman's role is that of a wife and mother rather than a worker, while others argued that women should work in order to help their husbands financially. In any case, I noted that Kuwaiti views of gender roles still prevent men or husbands from helping their wives to raise children or take care of household responsibilities. I therefore sought to understand whether women in modern Kuwaiti society primarily focus on family and domestic priorities or on work.

Alvesson et al. state that 'reflexivity is not primarily an end in itself but a means to improve research in some way' (2008, p. 495), although Harding (1987) argues that the researcher is unavoidably present in the research process and that her work is shaped by her social context and personal experiences. In this study, my challenge as a researcher has been to allow my own experiences to sit alongside those of participants and to maintain the drive to keep asking questions and listening to responses.

During my time in the education sector, I observed that several mothers in the same field reached managerial positions, which led me to wonder how they combined work and family, how they attained success in their careers, and what barriers they faced on the way to these positions. Therefore, I chose managerial mothers as the study participants; moreover, these questions helped me to formulate my interview questions (see Appendix C).

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## 5.3 Research paradigm

### 5.3.1 Epistemology

The nature of any study and the basis upon which it is evaluated are heavily dependent on the researcher's epistemological assumptions, i.e. about the nature of truth and how to examine it. It is important to consider the assumptions and perspectives surrounding the nature of the phenomena of interest and how they may be investigated. To find personal clarity around these issues, I read several recommended methodological texts such as those by Guba and Lincoln (1994) and Schwandt (1994), in Denzin and Lincoln (1994), by May (2001) and by Crotty (1998). I then reflected on the phenomenon of interest – women's experiences and perceptions of barriers to combining managerial roles with motherhood in the Kuwaiti context – and on my personal worldview and assumptions.

I decided to adopt an interpretivist epistemology because it entails the assumption that reality is constructed by the people involved in the research situation. The interpretivist researcher is interested in human experience and meaning and in how meaning and understanding are mediated through the people concerned (Schwandt, 1994). Interpretivism seeks to 'understand values, beliefs, and meanings of social phenomena, thereby obtaining a deep and sympathetic understanding of human cultural activities and experiences' (Tuli, 2010, p. 103). As William and May (1996, p. 85) state:

> Beliefs and desires appear dependent upon the attitude of a person toward his, or her, environment, as well as the actions in that environment. People attach meaning to things in the world, as well as the actions of others ... Meaningful behaviour is the product of consciousness and experience. It is this that is at the heart of the claim that human action is different to phenomena in the physical world.

Similarly, Bryman (2012), Ponterotto (2005) and Guba (1990) assert that interpretivism aims to understand the intention behind human action. Rubin and Rubin (1995, p. 34) add that interpretivism focuses on how people 'create and share meanings about their lives'. Schwandt (1994) states that the goal of interpretivism is to understand and interpret the complex world of lived experiences from the perspectives of the people who live them.

Thus, given that this research seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of employed Kuwaiti mothers, interpretivism is the most suitable theoretical perspective to adopt. It allowed me to investigate how the mechanisms of Kuwaiti beliefs and values affect women's attitudes toward work and family, with a particular focus on work environments and attitudes toward mothers as managers.

Interpretivism can be naturally applied to a real-world situation; an understanding of the subject of study can be gained through first-hand experience, accurate reporting and actual conversations from insider perspectives (Tuli, 2010, p. 98). This will enable me to present a richly detailed description of social issues facing Kuwaiti mothers who combine managerial work and family life. Moreover, the lack of available literature on the barriers facing Kuwaiti women who combine motherhood and managerial roles means that I will need to build a clear understanding of the issues under study from the ground up.

Having settled on an interpretivist paradigm, it is reasonable to adopt a qualitative approach to data collection, which is broadly grounded within interpretivism. This approach is discussed in the next section.

## 5.4 The qualitative approach

Qualitative research is an empirical strategy wherein the researcher conducts interviews or observes people's activities in order to understand their interactions in particular social contexts (Locke et al., 2000; Tuli, 2010). As a result, the qualitative approach is adopted to explore people's attitudes, beliefs and values, and is suited to exploring a range of perspectives (Creswell, 1998). Furthermore, qualitative methodology enables researchers to understand larger social complexities through participants' experiences.

Joubish et al. (2011, p. 2082) summarise the characteristics and aims of qualitative methods as follows:

> Qualitative research is used to gain insight into people's attitudes, behaviours, value systems, concerns, motivations, aspirations, culture or lifestyle... Qualitative research is used to help us understand how people feel and why they feel as they do. It is concerned with collecting in-depth information asking questions such as why...

> Qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena.

I chose a qualitative approach for this study because of the nature of the research objectives. I am not looking for direct causes or comparisons, but seek to understand the problems faced by women who combine motherhood and managerial roles in Kuwait. My research aims to explore the key variables that affect the careers and domestic life of these women and to produce a rich, clear, direct and deep understanding of the challenges facing Kuwaiti mothers combining work and family. Moreover, the qualitative approach assumes that reality is not absolute, but rather is based upon perceptions that vary among individuals and change over time; qualitative research stresses the significance of examining variables in their natural contexts.

To date, very little qualitative research has been published in this field (Fernando, 2012; Metz, 2005). During this research I have been unable to locate any qualitative studies of the experiences of Kuwaiti mothers in managerial positions and the obstacles to combining family and career responsibilities in a male-dominated culture.

The next section provides details of the specific qualitative research methods that will be employed for this study.

## 5.5 Methods

I conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews with 27 Kuwaiti mothers to collect data for this study. This section justifies the choice of data collection technique, research site, and interviewees.

### 5.5.1 Interview as the research method

I used semi-structured interviews to collect data because interviews are more conducive to a qualitative understanding of complex social phenomena (Qu and Dumay, 2011). This is suited to the focus of my research, which examines interactions between culture, gender and family. The interview method also enables researchers 'to learn about the world of others' (ibid, p. 239). I intended to use

interviews to determine how individual Kuwaiti mothers in employment see the world around them.

Additionally, the interview method allows researchers to access people's inner thoughts and beliefs concerning their personal histories, work situations, family life, and their dreams and hopes (Kvale, 1996; May, 2001). This is of central concern in women's studies, as it provides an insight into women's experiences and feelings as expressed in their own words. It also facilitates interaction between interviewer and interviewee, thus providing the researcher with rich, in-depth data (Rowley, 2012; Smart, 2009). Further, Rubin and Rubin (1995, p. 1) assert that qualitative interviews allow researchers to 'reconstruct events in which [they] did not participate'.

However, Devault and Gross (2007) warn that interviews may raise many problems. For instance, human speech and its meanings may be difficult to understand, given the flexibility and productive power of language; the subtle shades of meaning conveyed through the nuances of speech, gesture and expression; and the issue of translation. Devault and Gross also argue that social reality does not simply exist for the researcher to find. He or she needs to understand how the social contexts of individuals' lives are historically situated and constituted through their activities, recognising the research procedure as an integral aspect of the construction of knowledge about society.

Nevertheless, my experience as a Kuwaiti employee and mother, my reading on the topic and my careful planning of the interviews enabled me to use this technique successfully in pursuit of the research aims. Moreover, translation is a problem for all researchers, even when they speak and write in the same language as interviewees, so being an Arabic speaker does not mean that I faced more problems in this regard than would other researchers, especially as my interviewees also spoke Arabic. In other words, interviewees may use informal, everyday language, which is difficult and some time inappropriate to render in academic writing; this can be a problem for any researcher, even when interviewer and interviewees speak and write the same language. Thus, the difficulties and limitations that I faced in translating from Arabic to English may also affect native English-speaking researchers when trying to incorporate informal language or slang words in academic writing, for example.

### 5.5.2 Semi-structured interviews

Research interviews may be categorised into three types: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. I conducted semi-structured interviews which involved asking prepared questions in a consistent and systematic manner, guided by identified topics, interspersed with 'probers' designed to elicit more elaborate responses. This technique allows the interviewer to cover the broad themes which need to be addressed and to direct the conversation toward specific topics and issues (Rowley, 2012; Bryman, 2012). Qu and Dumay (2011, p. 246) state that a semi-structured interview is:

> ... flexible, accessible and intelligible and, more important, capable of disclosing important and hidden facets of human and organizational behaviour. Often it is the most effective and convenient means of gathering information. Because it has its basis in human conversation, it allows the skilful interviewer to modify the style, place and ordering of questions to evoke the fullest responses from the interviewee. Most importantly, it enables interviewees to provide responses in their own terms and in the way that they think and use language. It proves to be especially valuable if the researchers are to understand the way the interviewees perceive the social world under study.

Given this study's research objectives and complex themes, semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate method of data collection, as they offer a less formal, more flexible mode of communication. Moreover, semi-structured interviews are significant in feminist research, because they help to build a rapport between interviewer and interviewee.

To gain access to my interviewees' social sphere, I assured participants that their names would not appear in this research. I think that this helped them to be more relaxed when discussing the themes of the study. I also asked the manager of the host organisation to provide me with a quiet and private place to conduct interviews. This helped participants to feel free to discuss their problems without fearing that they would be overheard by their colleagues.

For the interviews, I combined the semi-structured format with some statistical questions about age, marital status, number and age of children, level of education and years of work experience. The themes of the interviews were as follows:

- Cultural beliefs and values
- Gender roles in modern Kuwaiti society
- Gender issues in the workplace
- Personal and professional identity
- Work-family conflicts/work-life balance

The interview schedule is reproduced in Appendix C.

### 5.5.3 Research site

The research was conducted in Kuwait, particularly at the Ministry of Education. Kuwait comprises six governorates, each of which has its own educational district with its own general manager, managers, monitors, supervisors and educational supervisors (Educational Statistical Group, 2012). At the time of writing, all six districts were the responsibility of one male minister and one female undersecretary; six of the nine assistant undersecretaries were men and three were women.

The present study concentrates on two of these districts: Al Ahmad and Mubarak Al Kabeer. Al Ahmad is the largest governorate in Kuwait, with a high percentage of Kuwaiti nationals in its population (Educational Statistical Group, 2012). Additionally, a considerable number of managers in these districts are Kuwaiti women. At the time of the study, Al Ahmad had one male general manager, whereas three of its four managers were women, as were eight of its fourteen supervisors; the district also had three monitors of each gender. Many of its educational supervisors were women, although no specific statistics for this were available from the Ministry of Education.

The general manager of the Mubarak Al Kabeer education district was a woman, whom I identified as a valuable potential recruit for my study. Mubarak Al Kabeer also had one female manager and three male managers, three female monitors and five male monitors, and eight female supervisors and five male supervisors. Again, no clear figures were available from Ministry of Education on the many women working as educational supervisors. It should be mentioned that all individuals holding high positions in educational districts are Kuwaiti citizens (Statistics of the Ministry of Education, 2009).

Since the general managers of Al Ahmad and Mubarak Al Kabeer were male and female respectively, focusing on these two districts enabled me to gather more information about the attitudes of mothers employed in middle management towards male and female general/top-level managers and how female and male managers treat employed mothers who face work-life imbalance.

### 5.5.4 Participants

I originally planned for the data collection process to consist of 27 interviews with Kuwaiti mothers in middle to higher-level managerial positions in the education sector, but in the event I included mothers in lower-level managerial roles, due to some unforeseen obstacles which are detailed in section 5.9. The demographics of the participants are set out in Appendix D.

The following sections discuss my analysis of the interview data, validity and reliability in qualitative research and the ethical considerations affecting this process. I then conclude the discussion of Part One of the study with an account of my fieldwork experiences.

## 5.6 Data analysis

The analysis of qualitative data is usually seen as one of the most challenging aspects of qualitative research (Basit, 2003), since it is a dynamic, intuitive and creative process of inductive reasoning and theorising, rather than a technical process. Analysing qualitative interviews involves organising data and breaking it into manageable units, synthesising it, then searching for significant patterns and trends (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003).

I analysed my data manually, rather than using computer software, for several reasons. Firstly, the quantity of data I collected was not overly large. Secondly, I recognized that computer software is merely an aid to build a hierarchical index of interrelated ideas about the data, rather than a tool that is capable of analysis in and of itself (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006; Rowley, 2012). Thirdly, I felt that I was more likely to find commonalities between themes when using a hands-on approach than when using computer software. Most importantly, manual analysis helped me to stay as close as possible to the data.

I began by listening to the interview tapes several times, then transcribing all 27 interviews by myself for maximum accuracy and to protect the anonymity of the participants. I translated them from Arabic into English, reading the transcripts line by line a number of times and noting down themes as I saw them appear in the data. For example, if a participant spoke about the negative impact on her health of combining work and family life, I would note this down as 'causes stress, pressure'. On reaching the bottom of each page of transcription, I looked over the themes that had emerged from it, then summarised each interview in one page, noting all the emergent themes. Direct quotes regarding participants' experiences were used as titles of some of the themes, one of the study's objectives being to bring in each participant's voice as clearly as possible. The initial themes underwent a continuous process of modification, including adding more relevant categories, deleting unrelated ones and combining others. The themes were organized manually and around three quarters of them were retained, especially those related to the research objectives, whereas a few others were rejected because they were too general, did not provide clear information or were unrelated to the research objectives. Having selected the themes, I identified the commonalities and differences between participants' responses and physically linked the themes by highlighting and marking them, then cutting and pasting them from the hard copy using scissors, thus directly handling the data in the most literal sense. I then found plausible explanations for the connections I had made. Finally, to enhance the validity of my findings, I sent a short summary of each interview to the participant concerned, asking her to confirm that I had accurately reflected the views that she had expressed during the interview.

Throughout the data analysis I included my experiences as a Kuwaiti woman in order to clarify certain cultural contexts for non-Kuwaiti readers, particularly in relation to how Kuwaiti cultural beliefs prevent men from sharing their wives' responsibilities regarding children and domestic chores.

## 5.7 Validity and reliability in qualitative research

Ramazanoglu (2002, p. 57) argues that feminist research seeks to "understand actual power relations and the nature of persistent inequalities so that people can work to transform these effectively". Although scholars have argued that quantitative methods do not enable an in-depth exploration of women's experiences and emotions

but stifle their voices, advocates of quantitative methods state that the limited safeguards of qualitative methods may lead to bias from the researcher and undermine the objectivity of the research (Mies, 1993). Feminist and other social science scholars now conclude that both quantitative and qualitative methods can be of value for feminist research. For instance, Oakley (2000, p. 14) initially viewed qualitative methods such as "in-depth interviewing and observation as ultimately more truthful ways of knowing", but "ended up advocating the use of quantitative and experimental methods as providing what is often a sounder basis for claiming that we know anything" (ibid).

The assumption that women's experiences are both valid and vital is generally considered to be the cornerstone of feminist work (Akman et al., 2001). Harding (1987) asserts that as feminist research begins with what seems problematic from women's perspectives, it is designed specifically for women rather than for establishments with set agendas. Driscoll and McFarland (1989) note that in order to make women's perspectives central to methodology as well as theory development, their experiences must be responded to and included in the ongoing research process. This principle is a hallmark not only of feminist research but of feminist psychological practice (Worell and Remer, 1992), and it is here that the overlap between research and practice becomes most evident. Maynard and Purvis (1994) state that what constitutes valid and reliable feminist knowledge is still an issue of concern, and that during the process of interpretation validation may be challenged by any number of political, social or environmental factors. Glucksmann (1994) suggests that researchers' analyses and interpretations must take into account the fact that people do not possess the knowledge to interpret everything about their own lives. More practically, Hagemaster (1992) offers a set of rules which may be followed to assess the validity of research adopting a life history methodology: assume that no one is lying; if information from an individual informant differs from that of an official or institution, accept the word of the individual; everything makes sense to the subject; assume that decisions are rational, even if they may seem illogical or unwise to the researcher; everything is relevant to the research; and finally, there is no such thing as certain truth. She also states that reliability can be increased by rephrasing and repeating questions many times during an interview, which is the approach I adopted in this study.

In this study, given the lack of empirical research into how cultural beliefs about gender roles affect women's personal and professional identities in Kuwait, uncertainty about the data being gathered was an ongoing concern. Nevertheless, I was able to triangulate participants' accounts with accounts in similar gender and management studies conducted in a Western context. By incorporating my personal experiences, I applied self-reflexivity during the research process to provide validation (Long and Johnson, 2000). I also sent complete transcripts to some of the managerial participants and to all four participants in the life history interviews, then telephoned the interviewees to ask whether they wished to add, delete or change any information.

Language plays a key role in qualitative research. It is through the interpretation of language that the qualitative researcher can attain an understanding of others' perspectives. Nes et al. (2010) state that while difficulties in the interpretation and representation of meaning may occur in any communicative action, these become more complicated when cultural contexts differ and inter-lingual translation is needed. Since interpretation and understanding are fundamental to qualitative research and text/speech is the 'vehicle' through which meaning is ultimately transferred to the reader, linguistic differences can hinder the transfer of meaning and cause a loss of meaning, thus compromising the validity of a qualitative study (ibid). Similarly, Esposito (2001) argues that translation into English affects the validity of findings based on in-depth interview data to minimise these negative effects on validity, I offer fluid descriptions of meanings using various English words. I also used a professional translator, to whom I explained the intended meanings of words and their contexts in the source language.

## 5.8 Ethical considerations

A certificate of ethical approval was approved and signed by the chair of the Swansea University Ethics committee. I then obtained written permission to conduct interviews with mothers employed as managers in the educational sector from the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education. In addition, I obtained permission from the Al Ahmad and Mubarak Al Kabeer education districts to conduct interviews there (see Appendix A).

All participants were asked to sign a consent form (see appendix B) which gave a brief introduction to the study's aims and objectives, laid out my responsibilities to preserve participants' anonymity and to maintain confidentiality, and informed participants that they were free to withdraw from the project at any stage of the research process. Each participant was given a copy of her signed consent form. Participants were also made aware via an introductory letter that responding to the interview questions was voluntary (Kvale, 1996).

Punch (1994) states that researchers must respect participants by not revealing their identities, as this could cause them to suffer harm or embarrassment. Therefore, this thesis does not report the real identities, names or addresses of participants; when specific participants need to be identified, I use pseudonyms rather than real names. I also provided participants with my phone number, my email address and my supervisor's email address in case they wanted to change any information about themselves. Finally, the participants were informed that the research findings would be made available to relevant and interested parties.

Additionally, as this research focuses on women's experiences of combining motherhood and managerial positions, I was concerned that the topic might cause some participants feel stressed or embarrassed. Therefore, to reduce these problems I gave participants the chance to refuse to answer any questions that they felt uncomfortable answering, and conducted all interviews in a private, quiet place. When I emailed the interview transcripts to participants, I assured them that they had the right to change any information contained therein as needed.

Most interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the interviewees. To ensure that only I would have access to the data, the interview recordings were stored on my personal laptop, while the interview transcripts were kept in my secure study.

The following section documents the thoughts and emotions that arose and the difficulties that I faced when conducting interviews.

## 5.9 Experiences during fieldwork

### 5.9.1 Data collection

I wished to disrupt interviewees' work routines as little as possible when gathering data. Therefore, I decided to conduct the interviews between July and September, when working hours in the Ministry of Education were reduced due to Ramadan and school holidays.

When data collection began on 15 July 2013, I was very confident about listening to and learning from others' experiences. I went to the education districts to gain approval to conduct the interviews, which had to be obtained from one female and one male manager. I decided to go to the male manager first. He signed the approval paper within 10 minutes and told his secretary to help me find Kuwaiti mothers working as managers to participate in the study. The secretary sat with me and arranged appointments with six mothers in mid-level managerial positions. However, she suggested that targeting top-level and middle managers was not advisable, because they would tend to look down on me and refuse to give me the information I needed. She explained that her manager had told her to help me 'because if you go alone to their offices they will never agree to participate in the interview'. After listening to the secretary, I felt worried but still remained relatively confident, as I had predicted this problem before beginning the data collection process. An excerpt from my notes on this point is below:

> The biggest problem that I might face is encouraging Kuwaiti mothers employed as managers to participate in the study. Kuwaitis tend to believe that being interviewed or completing a questionnaire is a waste of valuable time. For example, when conducting research for my MA I had to persuade Kuwaiti mothers employed as teachers to complete a short questionnaire; I found that most potential participants refused because there were no benefits for them in completing the questionnaire.

After that, I went to the female manager's office to ask her to sign the approval forms. I introduced myself and presented all my documents, finding that I was unusually nervous and stressed. The manager seemed very angry and negative, and told me that she did not want to sign the papers until I had shown her all the questions that I intended to ask in each interview. She then told me to come back in

two weeks to collect the approval for the study; when I returned after this two-week period, approval was granted.

I intended to interview Kuwaiti mothers in top-level managerial posts first and to obtain their permission to interview mothers in middle management roles in each department. I observed that senior women did not come to work before 9 am and left by 11 am, although the official working hours of the Ministry were from 7.30 am to 1.45 pm. When I met the first senior manager in her office, she had a kind, smiling face, which set me at ease and reduced my stress. I asked her to participate in the study and to give me her permission to interview mothers in mid-level managerial positions. Her voice then become loud and angry as she told me that she was too busy to participate herself, although she agreed to sign a paper giving me permission to interview any women in the department. The second senior manager said that she was very happy to participate and told me that she needed an hour before starting the interview. She took my consent forms and asked me to follow her to meet a colleague. She then asked me to wait outside her colleague's office, but came out again after three minutes, told me to leave and threw my consent forms on the table beside me.

After encountering these reactions, I was angry, ambivalent, discomfited and tense, and began to reflect on how I should proceed. I wondered what mistakes I had made to cause these negative reactions, and even whether I had made the correct choice in seeking to interview mothers in top-level managerial roles. It became clear to me that I needed to change my interview strategy. Consequently, I decided to interview mothers in low-level managerial roles, which became the most important decision of my study. Mothers in low-level managerial roles were more willing to speak about their experiences of combining motherhood with employment in Kuwaiti culture. Interviewing these women also helped me to observe the discrepancies in actions, attitudes and experiences between Kuwaiti mothers employed at different management levels in education.

When starting the interviews, I was primarily concerned with how I would be received as a researcher discussing sensitive topics. I wondered whether interviewees would trust me, how I would build a rapport with them and how I could ensure that they felt sufficiently relaxed in the interview setting. To allay these concerns, I began

the interview process by disclosing some of my own experiences about the obstacles and tensions I faced when combining work with family. Several interviewees were still reserved, telling me that they did not want to present evidence for Western readers that Kuwaiti women faced problems due to the cultural restrictions of gender roles. I dealt with this by presenting examples of the many Western studies showing that women in various parts of the West also face obstacles related to gender, ethnicity and race.

Interviews enabled me to reflect and to understand the issues involved and to develop my questioning technique from one interview to the next. Initially, my interview strategy was to listen as much as possible and not ask too many questions, but I found that this strategy was not effective, because interviewees, especially those in senior and middle managerial roles, simply did not want to speak. When I asked a question, they would give a very short answer of one or two sentences. Therefore, I tended to ask about their interpretations of specific issues by using words and phrases such as 'why', 'how', 'when', 'I don't understand', or 'could you explain'. This proved effective in encouraging uncommunicative managers to speak more.

In spite of what I had read, I still understood the interview to be an uncomplicated situation in which the researcher asks questions and participants provide answers. However, I felt that my interviewees did not give me much information and did not speak openly or clearly. This appeared to me when I asked the same question in different ways and respondents gave me different and contradictory answers. So although I managed to transcribe and at least briefly think about every interview before going on the next, I felt rushed and worried about how this would affect my interpretations.

Almost halfway through the interviews, after interviewing 12 women in different managerial positions, I panicked. Did I have the right data? Would interviewing 27 mothers for an hour each provide enough data for the study? Was I gathering enough of the appropriate data? These questions led me to stop and read my study objectives several times. I read through the interview transcripts, then read Kvale's 1996 book. I reiterated Kvale's (1996) statement on these matters in my notes:

> Kvale warns researchers to be careful about the nature of data collection. Researchers need to spend a lot of time in the field to gather sufficient data,

> but quantity alone is not enough – the content of the data is also essential. Thus I have realised to have the 'right' content I must know where I am going. On the other hand I have noted that qualitative research data is 'emergent'; therefore, I must learn to be open and sensitive to where my interviewees and my own insights may take me.

I believe that speaking to myself during the data collection period in conjunction with observing women's responses and actions enabled me to consider the problems facing employed Kuwaiti mothers in greater depth, and to realise that these problems were the result not only of cultural beliefs about gender roles but of women's treatment of and attitudes toward other women. Therefore, in each interview I asked each woman whether she would rather work with male or female managers and why. 26 of the 27 women interviewed said that they preferred to work with male managers rather than female ones, in spite of the Kuwaiti segregation system. This added a more complex dimension to my findings.

### 5.9.2 Power dynamics

I assumed that my Kuwaiti nationality, my female gender, my experience as a mother and my familiarity with the education sector in Kuwait would allow me greater access to women in managerial positions, but I also recognise that these same factors may have blinded me to certain key issues.

Kvale (2006) asserts that the qualitative interviewer is in a position of power over interviewees, and may thus exploit interviewees by taking their knowledge and giving little back. However, Cassell (2009) states that a problem of power dynamics exists within management research, where interviewees may hold more power than the researcher by virtue of their organisational positions and personal characteristics such as age and gender. In my case, I found myself in a much lower position than that of the managers whom I was interviewing. I therefore felt that I had to build a rapport with participants by telling them about myself and the barriers that I had faced in relation to the topic of this study, but this strategy was not useful. The age gap between me and my interviewees likely had a detrimental effect on the quality of communication. Lawthom (1997), a feminist researcher, also suggests that gender, age, nationality and sexuality affect interviews, and reports that her gender had an impact on the interaction dynamics when she interviewed male managers. However,

during my interviews, I found that being a Kuwaiti mother did not help me to build connections when interviewing other Kuwaiti mothers in managerial positions.

The reversal of the standard power dynamic during my interviews was evidenced in interviewees' frequent rejections of meetings and failure to keep appointments, as well as their guarded responses and rushed interviews. Potential interviewees' refusals to participate also demonstrated their power and agency. One woman remarked dismissively as she walked away from my attempts to speak with her, 'Not another one of you people with more questions again!' Seven supervisors in one department all refused to be interviewed: 'Why would we spend an hour in an interview with you? ... Why do you want to present our experiences to Western people?' They said mockingly that they would volunteer to take part if the interviews were to last for less than ten minutes, and asked me in a critical tone why I had not used a questionnaire instead of interviews and spared myself all this trouble. Rather than seeing these negative experiences as of no value, I used them to investigate how female managers build relationships with women employed at lower levels and the flexibility of their attitudes.

### 5.9.3 Obstacles encountered during fieldwork

Although I informed all participants that their real names would not be disclosed in my published research, more than a few participants did not allow me to record interviews and others insisted that they did not want their identity to be discovered. However, I was aware that this anxiety was reasonable due to the sensitive focus of my research.

Many participants did not complete the full one-hour interview and told me that they were busy, although I had booked appointments to meet with them on two consecutive days. Other participants interrupted the interviews many times to answer their phones. For example, one mother who worked as a senior manager did not seem invested in the interview at all. She would stop between questions to make or answer a phone call, to welcome other managers, and to provide coffee and biscuits for her guests. This participant also told me to ask questions while she met with a friend in the office. After I thanked her for her time, she told me that she had granted me a 20-minute interview because she knew my brother, implying that she had actually done me a favour.

Another middle manager did not allow me to take more than 15 minutes of her time, in spite of the fact that I had arranged for a full one-hour interview with her. This may have been due to her feeling embarrassed by her male colleague, who asked why she would refrain from allowing a student to benefit from her experience. Although she eventually agreed to take part, when I went to her office for the interview she asked me not to take too long. I therefore asked if we could carry out the interview on the following day and she agreed, but then during the session she looked repeatedly at her watch, which led me to finish the interview in 15 minutes rather than the standard hour. Nevertheless, when I thanked her at the end of the meeting, she asked me if I had benefited from the interview and from her personal experience.

During all of the interviews, I wore the traditional abaya. I observed that my mode of dress affected how the women I interviewed perceived me. Traditional clothing is respected by Moslems, by adherents of Kuwaiti culture and by men, but the women I encountered seemed to view me as less modern, from a conservative family, of low status or unintelligent. For instance, when I introduced myself, some women asked me whether I was really studying for a PhD and how I had persuaded my family to allow me to study abroad. When I asked one interviewee about the gender barriers that she had faced, she replied, 'You know, you are from a conservative family'. Another said, 'Look at yourself. You are from a conservative family where there are clear-cut gender roles, but your family lets you study abroad'. She added, 'Conservative families in Kuwait are very contradictory. They build a segregation system and let you study abroad!' I did not respond to such remarks, because I had not expected to face discrimination or negative attitudes as a result of my style of dress. These participants appear to have interpreted my traditional Kuwaiti clothing as meaning that I was from a conservative family and should therefore remain in a closed environment. They seem to have perceived a conflict between wearing traditional clothes and studying for a PhD in a foreign country.

Engaging in the interviews was one of the most difficult stages of my doctoral journey, as the issues I faced sometimes lowered my confidence yet at other times made me stronger and more determined to remove barriers to my own success. I learnt that conducting in-depth interviews with women does not guarantee greater

truth but I acknowledge that collecting such data can bring richness and complexity to an understanding of social life.

While collecting data, I found myself facing personal issues that led me to feel conflicted between focusing on my family or my study. The final subsection outlines these problems and their effects.

### 5.9.4 Personal issues

I did a great deal of writing during data collection, when details were fresh in my mind. Collecting data from Kuwaiti mothers in managerial roles was very difficult and required a significant commitment of time and energy. Despite the exhaustion and stress, I felt compelled to find out more; however, my eyes felt strained in a way they never had before from reading from a computer screen for long periods of time and from lack of sleep. I had neglected my family and my pregnancy, and had also faced difficulties in recruiting women to participate in my research, so I cried frequently and secluded myself from my husband, my children and my extended family. I felt tense and unbalanced, and decided to stop and rest as a result. After a short time, I became concerned that my study was having a negative impact on my family, regardless of its contribution to the greater body of knowledge.

Having analysed the data, I found that the managerial mothers had simply talked about work-life balance and conflict, rather than how they balanced choice and agency to decide what they wanted and needed in a patriarchal culture. I concluded that the study had generated observations, rather than rich experiences, and therefore felt that I needed to extend it, to explore in depth women's choice and agency and their ability to direct their lives freely without the imposition of men in a male-dominated culture. The result of these reflections was a second study to explore women's experiences of pregnancy and childbirth, in order to examine the relationship between the body and self within the material context of family, marriage, gender and social space.

In Arab societies, women's bodies are seen as private things that women cannot describe, write or talk about. There is therefore little or no literature that examines women's bodily experiences and how cultural norms and myths regarding gender affect women's lives in Arab countries generally and in Kuwaiti particularly. I

decided that if I was seeking to make a worthwhile contribution to knowledge in this area, I would need to conduct this second part of the study, where I would explore myself in conjunction with similar identities, in order to take my analysis further.

The following sections discuss the methodology of Part Two of the research and justify my choice of the life history approach.

## 5.10 Part two of the study: life history methodology

In the context of research, life history is defined as "an internalized narrative integration of past, present and anticipated future which provides lives with a sense of unity and purpose (McAdams, 1989, p. 161, cited in Musson, 2004, p. 35). This approach is firmly rooted in an interpretive epistemological perspective and a symbolic interactionist paradigm, which views human beings as living in a world of 'meaningful objects' rather than an environment of self-constituted objects. As life histories allow actors to speak for themselves, they are a major source of knowledge about how individuals make sense of themselves and their worlds (Musson, 2004; 1994; Smith, 2012; 2011). At this stage, I must point out the distinction between 'life story' and 'life history', as these terms are sometimes used interchangeably in non-research contexts. A life story:

> ...is the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another... A life story is a fairly complete narrating of one's entire experience of life as a whole, highlighting the most important aspect (Atkinson, 1998, cited in Roberts, 2002, p. 3).

In contrast, life history is "the collection, interpretation and report writing of the 'life' (the life history method) in terms of the story told or as the construction of the past experience of the individual (from various sources) to relate the story" (Roberts, 2002, p. 3).

Therefore, in a research context, the term 'life story' is generally applied to the account narrated by a participant, whereas 'life history' refers to the explanatory, presentational work of the researcher regarding this account.

The life history method helps researchers to understand the complex process that individuals carry out when making sense of their world's realities:

> The method gives researchers a tool with which to access the sense of reality that people have about their own world, and attempts to give 'voice' to the reality. It provides a fundamental source of knowledge about how people experience and make sense of themselves and their environments (Musson, 1994, p. 11).

Musson (1994) also notes that this approach has some disadvantages:

> Gathering and analyzing life history data commonly involve the researcher in many hours of data collection, and analysis can be an uncertain process requiring a high tolerance of ambiguity over considerable periods of time... (p. 24).

Nevertheless, I would argue that spending 'many hours' to collect and analyse data actually facilitates the acquisition of in-depth knowledge. The problem instead arises when the researcher spends a long time on interpretation of the data, as this may give the reader the inaccurate impression that data collection and analysis was a simple task, which does not reflect my experiences with qualitative interview data.

Smith (2012) states that life history methodology:

> ...offers scope for exploring subjective realities: it allows narrators to reflect as they speak, which for some can be a transformative experience, and it affords rich insights into the reasons behind the decisions people make that would not be possible via more structured approaches (p. 486).

Focusing on subjective realities allows narrators to reflect on and make sense of their lives – which, for some participants, can be a transformative experience – and enables researchers to gain rich insights into the multifarious aspects of people's lives and identities that influence their decisions and actions (ibid).

Bryant and Schofield (2007) argue that life history may be the most effective method of eliciting details about subjective experience; by capturing the ways in which people move through life, it reveals how subjects are produced or shaped over time and allows for the description of feelings, emotion, memory and identity. Since narrators tend to incorporate family members, friends, colleagues and others into their personal stories, life histories can actually provide insight into the lives of many individuals (Haynes, 2010).

Through allowing participants to discuss the social, economic and political spaces that they inhabit, life histories can be used to explore how structure and agency intersect to produce the circumstances of a particular person's life. By situating the experiences of the participant within a specific historical and cultural framework and stressing their temporal and existential specificity, life history avoids portraying people's experiences as mechanically determined outcomes of social culture.

Additionally, Sosulski et al. (2010) state that in life history interviews, a spectrum of negative and positive experiences emerge within the context of the person's whole life, which allows researchers to explore resiliency at different stages of life. The rich data gained from life histories enable researchers to examine the relationships between cause and effect and between agency and structure (Ojermark, 2007). Furthermore, the complexity of the stories that emerge can sometimes change the nature of the research itself (Cary, 1999).

This emphasis on the exploration of consciousness offers unique benefits to the feminist researcher. In patriarchal societies, culturally constructed expectations exert pressure on women to conform to certain ideals, such that it cannot be assumed that a woman's observable actions and behaviour reflect her private thoughts and emotions (Anderson et al., 1990, p. 102), and her ability to value her own thoughts and experiences can be hindered by self-doubt when "private experiences seem at odds with cultural myths and values concerning how women are 'supposed' to think and feel" (ibid). For instance, women who combine work and motherhood can feel guilty about being unable to commit completely to either role: an inherently impossible aspiration to fulfil, as each responsibility places a strain on the other. This guilt and conflict are influenced by a range of social and institutional factors. The life history method allows the researcher to explore how women understand themselves in the context of these factors at certain points in their lives (ibid).

In this study I seek to understand women's experiences, realities, choice and agency, how they make sense of their world and the problems they face due to their gender identity in the Kuwaiti context. Thus, life history is the most effective methodology for gaining an in-depth understanding of how women approach and react to these issues. Significantly, this approach has rarely been used in management studies (Haynes, 2010). No studies in the Arab context have used the life history

methodology to explore women's experiences, and those scarce studies which have done were all conducted in Western contexts. For example, Pollack (2003) used life history interviews to examine the effects of marginalisation and oppression on Black Canadian women's criminal activity; Smith (2011; 2012) employed this methodology to investigate women teachers' aspirations and career decisions in her research on women's under-representation at the most senior levels in school management; and Bryant and Schofield (2007) used life histories to explore the ways in which the body is implicated in sexual practices and the making of active feminine sexual subjectivities. My use of life histories in the current study therefore advances knowledge produced in the Arab world, in a field dominated by Western knowledge producers, and challenges methodological bias regarding my research.

### 5.10.1 Life history methodology in existing feminist research

Reinharz and Davidman (1992, p. 243) state that there is no single, unified feminist methodology or epistemological approach to research. There are, however, some shared assumptions and principles underlying feminist research, such as the importance of women's lives, experiences and perceptions as the material of research, the need to address their lives and experiences in their own terms and to ground feminist theory in the actual experiences of women, including those of different races, cultures, classes and so on (Harding, 1987; Smart, 2009), and the necessity to promote an interactional methodology which will be non-exploitative and non-hierarchical, and will establish reciprocal relationships with participants (Bergen, 1993; Edwards, 1993; Oakley, 1981; Kirsch, 2005). Research on women has to give the women studied explanations that could be used to improve their life situations, that is, to be empowering and emancipatory for participants. Thus, I found that the life history approach, incorporating some if not all of these assumptions, has been popular with feminists.

Life histories are invaluable as a feminist method because they do not treat life experiences as discrete, but provide a means of evaluating the present, re-evaluating the past and anticipating the future, while offering a challenge to other 'partial' accounts (Letherby, 2003; cited in Haynes, 2010). In studying 'silenced women' and other oppressed groups, feminist scholars give a voice to the voiceless (Geiger, 1985, p. 335); by employing life histories, such scholars uncover the diversity of women's

experiences and to project women's voices into areas where they have previously been ignored (Ojermark, 2007). In this context, life history methodology allows Kuwaiti women who have been ignored, marginalised or silenced to be heard.

However, the ways in which some feminists have used such methods and the claims that they have made for them do raise certain questions that I shall now consider. Firstly, Ramazanoglu (1989) argues by that the commonplace premise that the spoken and written narratives of women's lives should be seen as 'texts' is problematic in the sense that the narratives should be contextualized; otherwise the picture that is presented may be determinist and essentialist. Just to let women 'speak for themselves' is not sufficient for understanding the processes and practices through which their social relations are organized. For instance, Plummer (1995) asserts that "to sense the importance of stories in social life is never to suggest that stories are all there is: the telling and reading of stories is always grounded in social processes that by definition are 'beyond the stories'. There is more, much more, to life than stories" (p. 167).

Some feminists, however, have not explicitly taken this line, but have regarded experience as an end in itself (Maynard and Purvis, 1994). The experience depends upon influences resulting from ethnicity, sexuality, religion, social class or age, for example. Therefore, analysis has to proceed from a wider basis than the purely individual if it is to offer alternative and useful ways of understanding how people experience the world and what the social implications of their experiences and understandings are.

Secondly, 'reciprocity', which happens when the female interviewer shares personal experiences with the female participant, is regarded as good feminist practice (Oakley, 1981). It is suggested that reciprocity reduces the power imbalance between interviewer and interviewee and thus helps not only to overcome participants' inhibitions but also to place the interaction between the researcher and subject on a "more equal footing" (Cook and Fonow, 1984), although Oakley (1981) argues that there should be "no intimacy without reciprocity" (p. 49). Measor and Sikes (1992) accept that it carries ethical safeguards by diminishing "the distance between 'taker' and 'giver' of the life history" (p. 215), but they also warn that self-disclosure strategies are 'ethically dubious', because "while we talked about the importance of

relationships it nevertheless seems that we viewed them as exploitable; they could be sacrificed for the pursuit of data" (p. 216).

Edwards (1993) suggests that self-disclosure might be important in generating solidarity among females, regardless of the differences of race or social class among them, whereas race can be a more powerful placement issue than sex. Nonetheless, Phoenix (1994) writes:

> While it is sometimes very comfortable to be a feminist researcher interviewing women, that cosiness does not simply come from shared gender but is often partly the result of shared social class and/or shared colour. The interview relationship is partly dependent on the relative positions of investigators and informants in the social formation. Simply being women discussing 'women's issues' in the context of a research interview is not sufficient for the establishment of rapport and the seamless flow of an interview (p. 50).

Hence, adherence to a pure notion of reciprocity limits the scope of feminist research, because it pre-empts the possibility of interviewing men. It is also difficult to be sure whether the matching of researchers with subjects on specific characteristics will create better or richer data than not matching. I therefore suggest that the most important criterion for an effective interview is how two individuals get on, regardless of their class or sex.

### 5.10.2 Feminism in the Middle East and Kuwait

Readers may notice that the issues discussed in the previous section were all raised by Western feminist scholars, and that no Middle Eastern feminist research was mentioned. This is because I was unable to identify any feminist literature in Arab or Kuwaiti contexts that discusses life histories. I therefore seek to determine whether and to what degree these issues occurring in Western contexts speak to women in Kuwait, to examine Western feminists' stereotypes of Middle Eastern women, and to explore the culturally specific issues Kuwaiti women face that are not entirely applicable to Western feminist research.

Much published work on feminism and gender theory is situated in Western thought (Vidyasagar and Rea, 2004) and early feminist theory relies upon Western concepts of human rights, work ethic and equality. Radical feminism and post-modern feminism – such as Visser's (2002) examination of the relative contributions of

culture and the body to gender – would be impossible without essentialist theories of evolution and biology to challenge (ibid). While these discussions are useful and interesting to Western audiences, debates between, for instance, post-structuralists and essentialists on the construction of gender (Annandale and Clark, 1996) will speak little to women in a culture where bodies are seen in private and kept covered in public.

Many Muslim feminists argue that Western feminists have too harshly misjudged the status of women under Islam (Vidyasagar and Rea, 2004; Hamid, 2006); as Roald (2001) reports, most of the literature debates Muslim women's dress in terms of its socio-political implications and not the commitment of its wearers to Islam. While early Western feminists understood the covering of women as implying shame and disgrace, more contemporary feminist scholars acknowledge that the veil allows women to adopt active roles in public spaces (Yamani, 1996). Hamid (2006) argues that Western feminists have conventionally viewed Middle Eastern women as a monolithic group of powerless women. Based on the trope of women who wear the veil, these scholars depict Muslim women as passive, sexless beings covered in masses of cloth. Hamid reports that French feminists (whom she does not name), as a result of not comprehending the religious issues involved, have incorrectly analysed the circumstances of women in Muslim societies; for instance, some have viewed the prohibition of alcohol consumption for Muslim women as a sign of patriarchal oppression, despite the fact that Islam forbids both men and women to drink alcohol. This lack of comprehension can lead to mistreatment of Muslim women. Halim and Meyers (2010) have pointed out the problems facing Muslim women in France who wear headscarves, while Bullock (2002) states that in the West, particularly in Canada, Muslim women who cover suffer daily social indignities because of their mode of dress.

Atasoy (2006) claims that the veil is both a symbol of the subordination of Muslim women to men and a cultural element that restricts women's personal freedom and individual human rights. Such an outlook fails to take into account the phenomenon of 'voluntary veiling', whereby women – particularly young and highly educated ones – in Egypt and elsewhere adopt the veil as a personal strategy to ensure that they can be active in the public arena while maintaining their honour. For Mernissi

(1991), the problem lies not in Islam per se, but in the political dominance of a particular understanding of Islam held by a male elite which has reconfigured gender relations to require women to be obedient, subservient, modest and humble.

A similar binary view also informs research on the veiling of Muslim women in non-Muslim cultures. French commentators believe that veiled women are required to veil by Muslim men who wish to publicly demonstrate Islam's opposition to secular French values (Bloul, 1997). Canadian commentaries also depict the veil as a sign of the subordination of Muslim women to norms constructed by men (Shakeri, 2000). These viewpoints portray Muslim women as passive and submissive, and Islam as a religion of women's oppression. In contrast, Ahmed (1982) asserts that the veil is a historical symbol of women's oppression and inferiority constructed during the colonial encounter between Muslim societies and European powers, which structured a discursive tradition of essentialist cultural dichotomy between Islam and the West. The values and practices of Islam were seen to embody a backward culture that required women's passivity and submissiveness, unlike European cultural norms which, loosely identified with the liberal tradition, favoured individual autonomy and self-realisation. Ahmed argues that many Western liberal feminists back this discourse, perhaps unwittingly, to portray veiled women as largely unaware of their oppression under Islamic norms and practices that are seen as privileging men.

Further, Ahmed states that the potentially liberating feminist symbolism sometimes read into the act of veiling – representing a distinct cultural experience embedded in an indigenous Islamic culture and Muslim resistance to Western domination – over-generalises the political concerns of Muslim women and risks reproducing the cultural essentialism attributed to Islam by the West. Additionally, it reduces Muslim women to a uniform category who articulate a liberation discourse for themselves from within anti-colonial independence movements by uncritically adopting traditional cultural practices (ibid).

Hamid (2006) states that whereas feminism in most Middle Eastern countries, like Western feminism, seeks freedom from patriarchal oppression, feminist movements in Kuwait seek to maintain men's dominance over women. Nearly all feminist organisations in Kuwait agree that women belong in the home (ibid). When two Islamic feminist groups in Kuwait made opposition to women's suffrage one of their

primary issues, more than 1000 women signed a petition declaring that "true believing Muslim women support the rejection [of the women's suffrage bill] and disapprove of any debauchery. We ask that the debate on this matter be closed forever" (Al-Mughni, 1997, p. 203). In 1994, women's groups across Kuwait came together to form an umbrella organisation called the Federation of Kuwaiti Women's Association (FKWA). Their mission was to "raise women's awareness of their religion, their identity, and their role in the family" (ibid, p. 205). The only women's group in Kuwait that did not join the FKWA was the more secular and liberal Women's Cultural and Social Society (WCSS), whose members believed that Kuwaiti women had the right to participate in Parliament and that religious beliefs should be separated from everyday practice (Al-Mughni, 2010). Yet despite WCSS's advocacy of equal political rights for women and men, its paradigm is distinctly patriarchal; its mission statement stresses women's "mission as mothers, wives, and paid workers" (p. 206). This statement displays what is termed "contradictory consciousness" (Hamid, 2006, p. 86), wherein actions appear to oppose stated opinions. Azam Torab (quoted in Hamid, 2006, p. 86) describes this phenomenon as "an ethnographic situation in which an individual accepts dominant cultural versions of gender, yet also speaks and behaves in ways which contest them".

Further, FKWA calls on women to push for the implementation of *shari'a* (Islamic) law and to comply with "Arab and Islamic traditions" while ignoring the many cultural and economic barriers that Kuwaiti women face in their everyday lives (Al-Mughni, 1996). Foreign husbands and children of Kuwaiti women are denied all protections to which Kuwaitis are otherwise entitled (Al-Mughni, 1996); this is particularly problematic given that many Kuwaiti women married non-Kuwaiti men after the Gulf war. There are now more than 7,000 Kuwaiti women married to foreigners, 718 of whom were on welfare assistance in 1993. The patrilineal character of citizenship in Kuwait allows the state to disavow any responsibility for supporting these women and their families. Government housing, child allowances and unconditional welfare assistance are instead provided directly to Kuwaiti men as heads of household.

In 1993, the WCSS adopted the cause of Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaiti men and demanded that Kuwaiti women be given the right to pass citizenship on to

their children (Al-Mughni, 1996). However, the much larger FKWA supported the politics of female marginalisation practiced by the state. The group blamed women for their children and foreign husbands being stateless and potentially unemployed and/or their husbands failing to support them, advising Kuwaiti women not to marry 'outsiders' and to look after the stability of their family. This is but one case of women's citizenship rights being cast aside as incompatible with *shari'a* principles of differential gender responsibilities (ibid). I present this fascinating and troubling example in order to illustrate the complexity of feminism and the problems facing women in contemporary Kuwait, and to compensate to a small degree for the almost complete absence of published feminist research on Kuwait.

Before moving to the next section, it is important to discuss how 'the West' is perceived in Kuwait and how Kuwaiti people view Western conceptions of their culture. Such a discussion is fundamental to advancing the reader's understanding of why many mothers employed in Kuwait's education sector refused to participate in my study and why others criticised me for wishing to present their experiences to Western audiences.

As a Kuwaiti woman, I can confirm from a firsthand perspective that Kuwaiti people believe that Western nations view Arab women as unintelligent, willing to suffer abuse, and oppressed by Islam. There is also a general perception in Kuwait of Westernisation and globalisation as detrimental to Arab and Islamic identity. During fieldwork, I discovered that the primary motive for potential participants refusing to be involved in my study was the worry that Western readers would misinterpret their experiences and view them as powerless women discriminated against by religion. The women I spoke to insisted that they were not oppressed and that they enjoyed a superior kind of liberty to that of Western women, who (some women stated) could not buy food if they were unemployed. In contrast, the women who refused to participate in my study stressed that they did not need to work in order to live, citing their employment of maids at home and asserting that if they chose not to work, their husbands, fathers or brothers would support them financially.

In the course of my fieldwork, I spent some time discussing women's rights and liberation. I found that the women I spoke to perceived me as having been negatively affected by the views of women in Britain during my studies there. Even though I

never mentioned women's clothing or sexual behaviour in this discussion, some women, including my relatives, asked whether I wanted them to stop wearing the veil and to engage in sexual relationships in order to achieve equality with men. This type of response reflects an impression that in discourses regarding women's liberation and equality, women in Kuwait give more attention to clothing and sexual relationships than their Western counterparts do.

The perception of Westerners and Western women in Kuwait was another likely factor in these women's decisions not to participate in my study. Kuwaiti people generally tend to think of Westerners as morally loose, obsessed with sex and career-driven, and of Western women as selfish or bad mothers who cannot cook or raise children. Many Kuwaiti people, particularly those who have little contact with the West, hold a media-influenced view of Western women as highly sexualised, which is based on Hollywood films and pornographic magazines such as *Playboy.* This provides a counterpoint to Hollywood's frequent portrayal of the Arab woman as:

> ...the closeted, subservient, and oppressed wife, the exotic, scantily clad, and sexually seductive harem maiden, the fat, unattractive beast of burden, the shapeless, ululating bundle of black, and the mindless fanatical terrorist (Belk and Sobh, 2009, p. 34).

These negative attitudes toward Western cultures significantly affected the quality of the data I was able to gather, led some participants to be more reserved, and caused other women to refuse to participate in the study altogether.

Life history research clearly depends upon stories as data, in analysis and in presentation. The articulation of voice through the telling of a story is undoubtedly problematic and significant, considering some of the methodological dilemmas that may arise when conducting life history interviews. This is discussed in the next section.

### 5.10.3 Methodological issues surrounding the life history approach

The act of telling one's story is an act of creating one's self. The story of a life is created in the consciousness to give order and meaning to events that have no "intrinsic or immanent relations" (Freeman, 1993, p. 95). "Stories mean nothing on their own. What gives them their meanings are the interactions which emerge around story telling" (Plummer, 1995, p. 20) and these interactions involve the explanations

made by tellers and hearers. But tellers and hearers are bound by conversational structures to a limited variety of expression and understanding. These conventions shape, and in many ways limit, how we construct our own versions of a life as experienced, how we arrange and express ourselves through story, and how a life can be understood and represented in writing. According to Maynard and Purvis (1994):

> The notion of experience needs to be problematized, since individuals do not necessarily possess sufficient knowledge to explain everything about their lives. Accounts will vary depending on such factors as where respondents are socially positioned, memory etc. There is no such thing as raw or authentic experience which is unmediated by interpretation. (p. 6)

Language itself fundamentally affects what we can understand during the process of life history. As Denzin (1989) has pointed out:

> There is no clear window into the inner life of a person, for any window is always filtered through the glaze of language, signs, and the process of signification. And language, in both its written and spoken forms, is always inherently unstable, in flux, and made up of the traces of other signs and symbolic statements. Hence there can never be a clear, unambiguous statement of anything, including an intention or a meaning" (p. 14).

Indeed, I think that the question here is not only how language in general impacts our understanding, but how the researcher working in English with data originally in Arabic translates, quotes, interprets and writes the life history of women without changing the meaning and without compromising the validity of the data (see section 5.7).

In the following section I summarise my experience of conducting life history interviews, detailing where I held them, with whom and why.

## 5.11 In the field: my experience of conducting life history interviews

I was pregnant during the third year of my study, providing me the positive opportunity to explore myself as a pregnant woman before examining other women's experiences of how their gendered bodies impacted their lives. I delivered my baby on 10th March 2014 and went to Kuwait on 28th March 2014. I decided collect my data during my maternity leave, for several reasons that will become clear in my account of conducting the life history interviews.

Shortly after my arrival in Kuwait, four of my sister's friends came to visit her and to congratulate me on the birth of my baby. They showed great interest in my experience of giving birth abroad, with no family support, asking me how I balanced the needs of my two other children, those of the new baby and my domestic responsibilities with my studies. They spoke of their own experiences of childbirth and the difficulties they faced in balancing their responsibilities in spite of the family support they enjoyed. During these conversations I found myself building a rapport with these four women, so I invited them to participate in the study, which they all agreed to do, expressing an interest in the study. I consider myself to have been extremely lucky on this occasion, compared with my earlier experience of conducting interviews with managerial women.

It is important to note that I decided not to interview women in managerial positions at this time, because I was anxious to avoid power relation problems that might have a negative psychological impact on me, as my first experience had done. Additionally, I judged that exploring how gender identity affects Kuwaiti women's lives did not require me necessarily to focus on managers. My target was to interview Kuwaiti women who were married, had children and worked in the education sector, but not as managers. These characteristics were found in my sister's friends whom I recruited to the study. Further information about the participants is given in chapter eight.

As to the setting of the interviews, three of the four asked me to interview them in my home, explaining that they wanted to be able to speak freely without being overheard by members of their own families, which might lead them to avoid mentioning issues or problems they felt to be relevant to the study but sensitive in the family context, while the fourth interviewee invited me to her mother's house, as her husband would not allow her to visit me or my sister sufficiently often.

I discussed the research objectives with each interviewee and explained why her experiences would be significant for my research. I told the women that I had chosen semi-structured interviews and described the themes, explaining my role and theirs during the interview. I listened more than I spoke, because I found that they told their stories very fluently. I gave them the freedom to do so in whatever way they chose,

moving at their own pace and setting their own limitations on what information they were willing to share.

All the interviews were taped with the participants' permission. I assured them that no one but me would ever listen to the tapes. However, when I mentioned the possibility of publications arising out of the research, I found that they became reluctant to have their stories recorded in their own voice, so I promised them that I would delete all recordings after transcribing their responses.

I offered information about myself and about my personal life, freely answering participants' questions about my experiences. I encouraged them to 'talk back' to me regarding the study (Reinzetti and Lee, 1993). Rather than biasing my data in a negative sense, I believe that this self-disclosure was fundamental to the success of the life history interviews. Self-disclosure reduced the exploitative power imbalance between the subjects and me as researcher and showed solidarity between us (Oakley, 1981; Edwards, 1993).

In this experience I did not consider the power of the participants over me or mine over them to be a major problem, because we were all wives and mothers of approximately the same age and position. Hence it was unlikely that the interviewees would feel intimidated or exploited by me. It is impossible to tell exactly how they did perceive me, but I do not think that they saw me as far removed from them, partly because I interviewed them in a domestic setting, where they saw me holding my small baby.

Using life history interviews means opening up to public scrutiny deeply hidden feelings and painful aspects of a person's life. Consequently, I felt some concern that using the women's stories, with detailed references to their families and their problems, might make it is possible for others to identify them, despite my having used pseudonyms for all participants. To address this potential problem, I sent a transcript of each interview to the participant and stressed that she was free to add or amend anything that she wished and to delete anything that she might not wish me to include. I did not want to cause any psychological distress to the interviewees and I was very careful not to cause offence, embarrassment, discomfort or mental stress with persistent questions or insensitive comments.

In contrast to my concern to protect their identity, I found all four participants very relaxed on this matter. One said, *"Don't worry, you just need to delete your recorder and change my name in your transcript and I don't think that anyone will be able to recognize me ... Many women have a similar story to mine"*, while another assured me that her husband and brothers would not read my thesis in English. Thus, it seems that the women were not afraid of public exposure and identification, but had some anxiety concerning their husbands and brothers, who were actors in their stories.

My interview questions concerned many highly personal matters such as sex, possible negative or ambivalent feelings towards their children, husbands or family, their personal experience of giving birth, their feelings about their body shape and how their gender beliefs affected their lives. I was concerned not to inflict any emotional harm on the interviewees by eliciting their stories. However, I noted simply that three participants appeared sad from their facial expressions, their shaking hands and voices. For example, in one case I saw tears in the eyes of an interviewee when she spoke about the violence that she had experienced at the hands of her father. I noticed that my own heart was beating strongly and I became unsure how to proceed: should I stop the interview or change the topic? I decided that it would be better to stop the interview and complete it later, but when I suggested this to the participant, she told me that she preferred to continue, so I tried to change the topic, but again she refused. I eventually ended the interview and switched off the recorder after ninety minutes. I then had coffee and sweets with the interviewee to make sure that sharing her experiences had not caused her excessive emotional distress.

After conducting the interviews, I felt emotionally exhausted by having supports the participants. I realized that I had been upset by listening to their stories, their problems and how their families, brothers and husbands had directed their lives, which led me to think about my own life and how my brothers and husband treated me. I found myself reflecting and applying the participants' stories to my life, which caused me to feel that I hated men. I found myself fighting my brothers and my husband without good reason; they in turn dismissed my behaviour laughingly as resulting from emotional tiredness following the birth of my daughter, which was not the case.

It is important to note that my experience of interviewing managers was very different from that of conducting the four interviews with young women who worked in the education sector but not as managers. The latter were open and clearly wanted to share their stories about searching for ways of making sense of their realities and how to change their lives. Listening to these women's stories gave me the depth that I sought and had not found in interviewing women in managerial positions. On the other hand, I do understand some of the managerial women that I interviewed for being closed, because I was asking them about private matters such as their gender and their family life, which they may well have felt it inappropriate to discuss with me.

The following section discusses my analysis of the data obtained from the interviews and sets out my rationale for drawing on my own experiences during the analytical process.

## 5.12 Data analysis

Despite interviewing only a small number of women, I was able to generate rich subjective data. During the interviews, I made a conscious effort to keep questions as open-ended as possible, to allow participants to recount their experiences in the way that they wanted. When trying to decide how to analyse and organise the data, I considered introducing the life history of each woman before identifying common themes and characteristics of their stories, or perhaps carrying out thematic analysis similar to that conducted in Part One of this study. I also had to decide whether to use my own experiences when analysing and interpreting the data or whether to confine these experiences to a separate section of the research.

Feminist qualitative research emphasises the interpretation and analysis of experiences through words, concepts, meanings and actions. I therefore listened to the interview recordings several times, paying attention not only to what interviewees said but to when they laughed, cried or stopped speaking, and to when their voices grew louder or quieter, sometimes to the point of whispering, as these variances gave insight into their emotional states.

In contrast to traditional qualitative research, which presents the accounts and experiences of multiple participants in tightly edited excerpts, life history research seeks to provide concentrated biographical vignettes based on select life stories. As interviewer, researcher and interpreter of others' life histories, I was engaged in the co-construction of a set of narratives that existed in "a dialectical relationship between author and 'subject'" (Tierney, 1994, p. 98), within which personal involvement is both inevitable and crucial:

> The heart of life history research is not merely the verbatim transcription of what an individual says. The basis of our work is in the involvement with the individual... As researchers, one face of our research capability must be to exhibit a sense of care and concern to understand the 'other's possibility'...our research endeavours need to be reformulated so that they include a capacity for empathy (ibid, p. 104-105).

Life history usually entails lengthy descriptions, since its main objective is to present and understand people's lives as collective experiences (Bryant and Schofield, 2007). My analysis thus relies on cultural context as well as personal experiences.

Realising that an empathic engagement with the data would enrich understanding of the problems Kuwaiti women face due to their female bodies, I drew on my own experiences during data analysis. As stated earlier, I do not accept the idea of a single perfectly objective version of the 'truth', and argue instead that as reality is always apprehended by a plurality of subjects (Warren and Brewis, 2004), there are as many realities as there are people to tell stories about them. In this context, I am a source of data, because I too have a life history to recount.

In summary, I analysed my data by briefly introducing the participants and the topics they discussed, then examining the themes that emerged from their collective experiences, rather than writing each of their life histories separately, to show the commonalities and differences between their life histories. I included my own experiences of pregnancy and child-rearing in Kuwait to further clarify the issues that women face in Kuwaiti society. These themes, similarities and differences are explored in the analysis and discussion chapters.

## 5.13 Summary

This chapter outlined and justified the research methodology and data collection methods adopted in pursuit of the research objectives. It has discussed the rationale for choosing an interpretivist and qualitative approach. It has also detailed the development of my thesis – from inception to fieldwork, analysis and conclusions – as a fluid journey which, with critical consideration, can contribute to rigorous research. Each stage of this research has been challenging, but has presented an opportunity to consider new perspectives on the methodology by negotiating solutions to meet the overall objectives of the research.

To advance the aim of gaining a better understanding of women's choice and agency regarding their lives and bodies, this chapter also justifies the conduct of Part Two of the study, using a life history approach, and establishes its relevance for feminist theory. I also explored the ramifications of the absence of published Arab studies of issues in feminist research and noted that Western feminists pay much more attention to relatively powerless participants, but neglect the researcher when s/he is in a similarly powerless position, sometimes to the detriment of his/her wellbeing and confidentiality. The power dynamics between researchers and participants need to be redressed, and both Western and non-Western scholars must be much more attentive to problems facing researchers. Furthermore, I presented a picture of feminism in contemporary Kuwait, highlighting the contradictions between the promotion of female agency and the adherence to and perpetuation of a patriarchal social model.

The following chapter analyses the data from Part One of the study, focusing on Kuwaiti mothers employed in managerial roles in the education sector. It explores the issue of work-family balance and how it is different in the Kuwaiti context.

# Chapter Six:
# Kuwaiti Mothers Employed as Managers and Work-Family Balance in the Kuwaiti Context

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the data collected during twenty-seven in-depth semi-structured interviews with Kuwaiti mothers[1] employed in managerial roles in the education sector. In this chapter I explore the challenges facing employed Kuwaiti mothers and their work-family balance. Of particular interest are the ways in which cultural values and beliefs influence the family lives and working lives of these women and the relationship between them. My aim is to contribute to the body of literature on work-family balance, focusing on women's experiences of combining motherhood and managerial positions in a developing country, Kuwait.

I have organized the chapter to present successively the key themes emerging from the interview transcripts: women's home and work lives in Kuwait, experiences of work-family conflict in relation to employees' wellbeing, work-family conflicts in relation to time, how the family negatively affects the attitudes and behaviour of employed mothers towards work, work-family conflicts in relation to number of children and their age, and work-family balance in relation to Kuwaiti cultural values and beliefs.

## 6.2 Women's home and work lives in Kuwait

As shown in Chapter Four, most of the existing literature on work-family balance refers to the situation in Western Europe, the USA and similar Anglophone cultures, where the typical working mother lives in a nuclear family without servants and is expected to work long hours. In this section I outline how the circumstances of working mothers and issues of work-family balance in Kuwait differ from those of working mothers in other cultures. To give Western readers more insight into the unique culture in which Kuwaiti women live, I first provide an overview of the

[1] The demographic variables of the participants are listed in Appendix D. The average length of interviews discussed in this study was between 45 and 50 minutes.

primary factors that helped my participants to attain a sense of work-family balance: living with in-laws and extended family, the presence of domestic servants at home, and the short working day at the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education. I then discuss how family structures and the systems of divorce and marriage in Kuwait differ from those in other cultures. Following this, I explore participants' experiences of work-family conflicts and the effects of increased modernity and national wealth on their lives and gender roles.

### 6.2.1 Living with in-laws and extended family

Some Western studies referred to earlier in this thesis, such as that of Lyness and Kropf (2005), have established the difficulty of achieving work-family balance and the specific effect of this difficulty upon women managers. This is likely related to the predominantly nuclear family model of Western culture wherein the mother has full responsibility for childcare, which might lead working mothers – particularly those in management – to experience work-family conflicts (ibid). Although mothers in the US between 1965 and 1975 moved from the large family sizes of baby boom households to an average of two children per family, the amount of time that the children of married mothers spent in childcare rose from 7.3 hours per week in 1975 to 13.7 hours in 2009/10 (Bianchi et al., 2012).

In contrast, many participants in my study reported that they experienced work-family balance and mentioned family support and housemaids as key factors in achieving this balance. The majority of participants stated that they lived with their in-laws. In Kuwait it is common for a wife to live with her husband's family for a long period of time (between 10 to 20 years); this also entitles them to a free house provided by the government. Such a living arrangement may involve three to four generations: the wife's parents-in-law, their children, and their children's families. What follows is an examination of the accounts of some participants regarding the advantages of living with their in-laws.

During interviews, I asked each interviewee how she achieved work-family balance in order to identify the means used to combine the highly demanding roles of family carer and manager. A number of participants stated that they did not experience any imbalance between career and family because they lived with their parents or those

of their husband, so that their mother or mother-in-law shared the responsibility of childcare. For example, Nadia had lived with her parents, helping her to create achieve work-life balance, because her mother took care of the children. Conversely, after moving to her own house, she admitted that she could not take care of her last child, so she left him with her mother for a year:

> *I used to live with my parents. My mother raised my first four children and after buying my own house and moving into it, I gave birth to the last of my children. However, I could not look after him, especially in the morning, because I had to go to work. I left him with my mother for a year.*

Similarly, Nora lived with her in-laws and relied on them to provide childcare, so she indicated that she did not feel significant work-family conflict:

> *I live in the family home of my husband and I rely heavily on my in-laws. My children spend the morning with my mother-in-law, and if one of them falls sick, she helps me look after them. This is why I don't think there's a major conflict between my family and my work.*

Wasan, Mariam and Dana also reported that they had received strong family support from their mothers, mothers-in-law and sisters in taking care of their children, which they saw as an important factor in attaining work-family balance (see the participants' demographic variables in Appendix D). This suggests that strong family support gives employed mothers a feeling of balance, a finding consistent with those of Poelmans et al. (2003) and Aycan and Eskin (2005), who identify family support as the most significant factor helping mothers to feel balanced.

Although no participants mentioned any disadvantages of living with their in-laws, these need to be discussed in order to highlight the problems facing Kuwaiti women who live in this kind of family structure. As mentioned in Chapter One, Kuwaiti families tend to be large, often with four or more sons (I focus on sons rather than daughters because sons frequently live with their families after marriage, whereas daughters live with their husbands' families). After getting married, a son brings his wife to live with his father and mother, where they remain even after having children. The main family lives in a single large house, while the smaller family units within the extended family live in small flats in this house. As a Kuwaiti mother living in this kind of family structure, I confirm that residing with in-laws raises significant difficulties for working mothers. For example, a mother may be hindered

in her efforts to raise her children as she wishes, as everyone in the family considers themselves to have authority over her children. To avoid criticism from the family, a mother is expected to always dress her children in smart clothes, teach them to speak and play well, and ensure that the domestic servants do not hold or touch any of her children in front of the family.

A mother-in-law has full authority in the house over her sons' wives. She has the power to delegate household tasks to each wife, which may include preparing food for the whole family; even if the family employs multiple domestic servants, tasking a wife with food preparation is an exercise of authority and a test of the wife's respect and subordination. A wife must remain in favour with her mother-in-law, for example by preparing sweets and coffee for her or chatting with her and her daughters. In some cases, a wife may need to spend considerable amounts of money to buy presents for her mother-in-law on a regular basis in order to remain in favour. A wife must always show respect, kindness and happiness when interacting with her in-laws (see Section 8.3.1 for a further discussion of these issues). The interdependent dynamic of the extended family means that a mother is responsible not only for her own individual actions, but for the behaviour of her children and husband. She takes collective credit for accomplishments and blame for failures.

In conclusion, I argue that the support provided to Kuwaiti working mothers by in-laws and extended family in terms of childcare may be outweighed by the increased responsibility placed upon them by their family members, which then causes feelings of work-family imbalance. I also argue that while the availability of domestic servants may reduce working mothers' childcare and domestic responsibilities, the presence of servants in the home raises its own issues. These are discussed in the following section.

### 6.2.2 Domestic servants

Kuwait has the highest proportion of domestic workers of any country in the world: 660,000 domestic workers in a population of 2.7 million – nearly a quarter of the population (International Human Rights Clinic, 2013). In Kuwait, not having a servant is a tacit sign that "you're not Kuwaiti'' (ibid). All of my participants indicated that the presence of housemaids had helped them to reduce their

responsibilities toward household chores such as cleaning and cooking. They admitted that having such domestic help reduced the tension they faced in combining family and career. For example, Safiya, a middle manager with five children, reported that she had never faced any work-family conflict in her life:

> *I have a housemaid who does all the work for me. She also sits at home with my children until I return home from work.*

Safiya's reliance on a housemaid for childcare and housework allows me to conclude that she would probably not be able to achieve a comfortable work-life balance as a mother of five without such a contribution.

Salwa provided valuable information about the significant roles of housemaids in Kuwaiti houses in general and in her home in particular. She said that she would not be able to create balance without the presence of housemaids, especially as she suffered from health problems and as a divorced woman whose siblings were all married, took full responsibility for her mother:

> *The presence of servants in Kuwaiti houses is essential because of the large size of the houses and the number of children in each family. For me, I cannot combine home and work commitments, purely for health reasons. So it's very important for me to have a servant, especially with my mother being an elderly woman whose poor health makes her a priority over any of us in the family... because all of my brothers are married with varying responsibilities and commitments...*

While recognising the contribution of domestic servants, many interviewees spoke in general terms about the negative influence of housemaids on children's language, but without directly relating their own experiences, as it would be seen as shameful in Kuwaiti culture to admit to tolerating a negative impact on one's own children.

However, one participant, Hajer, did speak in some detail about the negative attitude of some employed Kuwaiti mothers in relying on housemaids to raise their children, giving the example of her own daughter's neglect of her maternal role and the difficulty she faced when she travelled abroad without servants:

> *Kuwaiti mothers have been negligent towards their children because they are too busy focusing on their jobs and when they return home from work they cannot pay due attention to their children, because they are too exhausted. Instead of spending time with their children, they choose to have a siesta and*

*when they finally wake up they go out shopping or to a party or a wedding... This particular routine I can apply to my own daughter, who is employed with two children. She is either at work, asleep or out shopping or socialising. I always give her advice to keep an eye on her children, but she is often quick to find excuses. When she received a scholarship to study abroad, she travelled with her children but without a housemaid. She used to call me every day and cry over the phone, saying that she was not coping well because she hadn't learnt how to raise her children.*

In Kuwait, servants have long been a status symbol of the wealthy elite; hiring as many domestic workers as possible is a sign of affluence. I found that my participants proudly mentioned the number of servants they had and how this alleviated their household responsibilities, but they did not provide details of how Kuwaiti people perceive working mothers who rely on domestic servants for childcare and housekeeping. In Kuwait, working mothers who rely on servants are perceived as selfish for choosing to leave their children with foreign domestic workers (Shah and Al-Qudsi, 1990; Longva, 1993). This raises the question of why servants are employed at all, given that mothers are still expected to handle childcare and domestic duties themselves. Servants had clearly played key roles in helping most of my interviewees to feel a sense of work-family balance. At the same time, the presence of servants may have caused these women to be more sensitive to the tendency to view working mothers who rely on housemaids as being to blame for all family and household problems. In Kuwait, women must not openly discuss the roles of servants in their households, in order to maintain the facade of being the primary caregiver for their children and homes. As a result, my participants did not speak in depth about the roles of servants in the home or their impact on the family.

It is worth mentioning that the cost of hiring domestic employees is much lower in Kuwait than in Western countries, for example (International Human Rights Clinic, 2013). In the West, high costs may limit the feasibility of hiring domestic workers and in turn of obtaining support for childcare, which may impair working mothers' work-family balance. In the Kuwaiti context, working mothers are burdened not with lack of available time, but with cultural beliefs regarding the roles of mothers and domestic servants in the home.

### 6.2.3 Working days at the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education

The majority of participants stressed that working as managers in the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education was an important factor in helping them to achieve work-family balance. When comparing their previous and current employment situations in the education sector, interviewees noted that lower-level positions offered less flexibility with regard to work hours, whereas high-level positions offered more flexibility. For example, Manal, a senior manager with five children, stated that a lack of flexibility in her working life had negatively affected her children:

> *When I was a teacher, I had to stick to fixed starting and finishing times. Whenever I asked for time off from work, it was very hard to get it. I was often forced to take my children for a medical review or appointments, in addition to their regular parents' meetings in school where I could follow their educational achievement, but I always found it difficult to make it to such appointments, because I did not find my previous management very cooperative and flexible in letting me see to these family priorities... On various occasions, I found it extremely hard to attend school meetings where I could monitor the progress of my children because of the hard-line approach of the administration, leaving me to rely on my sister to attend such meetings. The result was that my children blamed me for not going with them.*

Similar experiences were described by Dana, a middle manager and mother of five, who felt that a lack of flexibility when she worked as a teacher had also affected her children negatively:

> *I couldn't attend regular parents' meetings in my children's schools, which was a source of concern for them... I was helpless, as I couldn't take leave more than once to attend these meetings.*

These participants both admitted that their situation had changed once they had assumed managerial roles, with the attendant privileges, flexibility and other benefits:

> *Work now is much lighter than before. I have total freedom coming to work and leaving home. Also, there is no attendance register to sign in or out. All I have to do is to write annual personal reports appraising employees' performance.* (Manal)

> *The workload is lighter than before. At present, I go to work and leave any time I want... When I was a teacher, I had to get to work on time from 7.30 am to 1.45 pm... There was no flexibility and I had to sort out a lot of the workload at home, which affected the lifestyle I was hoping for and reduced the amount of time I would normally spend with my children.* (Dana)

Nadia, Alia, Fatima and Jamila also stated that assuming managerial roles had reduced their responsibility towards work and increased the flexibility they enjoyed, compared with their low status when they had worked as teachers. It can be concluded that holding a lower position in the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education means less flexibility and greater responsibility at work, causing women to experience difficulties and conflicts in combining the roles of mother and worker, whereas performing managerial roles means more flexibility with less responsibility at work, allowing women to combine activities in the two spheres with relatively little conflict.

The working day at the Ministry of Education officially starts at 7.30 am and ends at 1.45 p.m., making 6.25 hours per day, which equates to 31.25 hours per five-day working week. However, as stated in Chapter Five, I observed during fieldwork that some women arrived at the workplace at 11 am, while others left at that time. Participants in my study explained that they were not required to sign in and out at work, and were thus able to arrive and leave at any time. This contrasts with the findings of Western studies, which show that managerial positions require working mothers to spend long periods of time in the workplace completing heavy workloads, often leading to work-family conflict (Hite and McDonald, 2003; Worrall and Cooper, 1999). Worrall and Cooper (1999) report that managers in the UK are reputed to work the longest hours in Europe and display high levels of stress, and that workloads have increased as a result of organisational downsizing. They further posit that there is a strong relationship between seniority and work hours, with 25 per cent of respondents in executive, high-level and mid-level positions working over 60 hours per week, compared with two per cent of respondents in junior managerial positions. Working in the evening is becoming the norm in many UK organisations, with 53 per cent of respondents stating that they often or always did so. These findings reveal that balancing home and work is very problematic for many managers in the UK, due to heavy time investments in work. In contrast to Worrall and Cooper's findings, however, the length of the working day was not problematic for my participants, as it was short and flexible.

This section has discussed several factors aiding Kuwaiti mothers in managerial roles to balance work and family. The following section gives an overview of the divorce

and marriage system in Kuwait, in order to provide further insight into the culture surrounding working mothers and work-family balance.

## 6.3 Divorce in Kuwait

Cooper (1984) argues that women aspiring to managerial roles are forced to choose between having a family or a career, meaning that pursuing a career comes at the expense of family life. Kuwaiti culture tends to make women reluctant to discuss certain aspects of family life; nevertheless, one participant in my study expressed the view that ambitious women who want to achieve managerial roles must choose between having a family and having a career. Salwa was a middle manager with one child; she had married at the age of 19 and divorced at the age of 21, remaining an employed single mother for more than 30 years. She referred to her divorce as the cost of pursuing her ambitions, but without going into detail:

> *I'm an ambitious person who wants to succeed and I knew that I wanted to achieve senior management positions... There is always a price to pay for success. In my case, the price I paid was my marriage, but I don't want to go into this.*

Similarly, Rema described her experience of divorce very briefly: she was married at the age of 18 and had her first child at 19. However, her husband refused to support her aspiration to study and work, so she divorced him after three years.

With regard to divorce, Kuwait applies Islamic law, allowing a husband to divorce his wife without cause and at any time simply by telling her, "I divorce you". This can be done three times before it is irrevocable. After the first two instances, the husband may nullify the divorce within 90 days; the third is final. He cannot then remarry the woman unless she first marries and is divorced by another man (Embassy of the United States, Kuwait City, 2015). A divorcee usually returns to her family; few remarry. Divorced women in Kuwait face a number of issues due to cultural beliefs surrounding women and divorce (see section 8.4.1 for a deeper discussion of these issues). Generally, Kuwaiti men prefer not to marry divorced women, favouring virgins, although divorced women who are very physically attractive and/or come from rich families may have greater chances of remarriage. Additionally, divorced women in Kuwait are more likely to marry men who are old, ill, widowers with many children, or seeking a second or third wife. As a result of the

stigma surrounding divorced women, a mother experiencing marital problems will typically remain with her husband to avoid social and familial ostracism (Longva, 1993).

It is important to mention that while Kuwaiti women have the right to divorce their husbands and that such divorces are final, the culture and legal system make this extremely difficult. To initiate a divorce, a woman must appear before a court of law to present valid reasons, such as mental or physical impairment of the husband, abuse, lack of performance of marital obligations, non-payment of financial maintenance or criminal activity (Embassy of the United States, Kuwait City, 2015). She must also pay the full amount of the dowry that her husband paid to her on marriage. Finally, she cannot divorce her husband solely for taking another wife unless this condition is set out in their marriage contract, as men can legally be married to up to four women at the same time.

Among my participants, only Salwa and Rema had experienced divorce, and they did not discuss the problem of divorce in Kuwait or how their social standing had been affected. The sensitivity of this topic led them to speak in general terms or to make only brief or indirect references to their present family circumstances.

Throughout the interviews I invited participants to share their thoughts on why, despite the spread of modernity and globalisation, Kuwaiti women still have large multi-child families which may hinder their ability to balance work and family. Badria and Nadia argued that government incentives paid to families for additional children encourage Kuwaiti men to pressurize their wives to have more and more children, so that the men can take advantage of these benefits, while it is the mothers who assume all the child-rearing duties. Thus, employed Kuwaiti mothers appear to be in the disadvantageous position of having to work to spend on the family while also producing children to satisfy their husbands' desire to claim child benefits. Salwa said:

> *Kuwaiti men want working wives to help them financially and always seek to have a large number of children without assuming any role in their education and upbringing.*

Some other participants believed that having many children would protected a woman from the risk that her husband would take a second wife, but another interviewee, Salma, argued that this was an unreliable strategy:

> *Kuwaiti women try to keep their partners by having as many children as they can, in order to stop them from marrying another. But this theory is wrong because today's men don't seem to be bothered about marrying a woman with several children. In fact, a lot of men marry two: one to have children and the other to relax with, which means that the first is left with the full responsibility for providing physical and moral care for the children, while the other is responsible for the happiness and comfort of the spouse.*

Marwa recounted her own experience of this situation:

> *I am the baby machine responsible for giving birth and raising the children. As for the new wife, her job is just to satisfy the sexual needs and desires of my husband, but with no plans to have children...*

It may be seen as contradictory that a Kuwaiti woman should strive to satisfy a husband who takes advantage of her in many ways, including domestically and economically (see section, 6.6.2), then marries another woman to satisfy his sexual needs. Thus, the woman's body is identified as a machine to produce children and to meet the sexual needs of such men.

To clarify the circumstances surrounding marriage in Kuwait, Islamic law allows a man to have up to four wives at the same time. Although the Qur'an qualifies the multiplicity of wives by stating that a man should not marry more than one unless he is able to treat them equally, he is able to choose whether or not to be polygamous (Abudabbeh, 1996). A non-Muslim man may not marry a Muslim woman unless he converts to Islam, whereas a Muslim man may marry a non-Muslim woman provided that she is of another "book'' faith (Judaism or Christianity).

Despite family support, the presence of domestic servants at home and short workdays, the majority of my participants indicated that they experienced work-family conflicts, as discussed in the followed section.

## 6.4 Work-family conflict

Along with a significant increase in women's participation in paid employment in modern Kuwait, Kuwaiti working mothers have experienced work-family conflicts.

This pattern is shared with Western employed women and my research supports much Western evidence discussed in chapter four. For example, research by Premeaux et al. (2007), Houle et al. (2009) and Coronel et al. (2010) shows that family factors such as marriage and children influence women's aspirations and achievement of goals, leading them to suffer work-family tension. Moen et al. (2008) report that women can encounter mental issues due to their dual roles in the family and workplace, which is confirmed by the present study. More importantly, this research has found that in spite of family-friendly government policies, some employed mothers still face negative attitudes and behaviour regarding work, as a result of beliefs regarding gender roles. However, it has also found that Western and Kuwaiti women have divergent experiences of work-life imbalance, resulting from differences in cultural values and gender roles between their respective societies, as will be analyzed in this chapter.

### 6.4.1 Experiences of work-family conflict

Two-thirds of the participants spoke about their experiences of pressure, stress and conflict associated with combining work and family responsibilities. For example, Maia, a mother of six children, spoke of her multiple responsibilities in the family and in the workplace, complaining of the excess professional workload which she was obliged to take home, which made it difficult for her to combine her two roles:

> *I often feel great stress as a result of the workload I have deal with at work, especially when I have to carry it home with me. I work very hard as it is and when I get home I have to perform my role as a housewife, by looking after my children and my husband. Then at night, I have to go back to my paperwork and finish it off.*

Like Maia, Asma, a middle manager with four children, spoke at length about her feelings of stress and tension between work and family and of the negative influence of paid employment on her family life:

> *I feel a burden and pressure in combining work and family life. I cannot find a balance between my work and my family, because my work requires me to focus so much, which makes me feel stressed. In the end, it started to reflect negatively on my family... At the end of the day, I am a human being and my devotion to my work and the efforts I exert have affected my relationship with my husband time and time again. I feel like a stranger in my own home. I also can't focus enough on my children, because my focus is limited to work. I feel*

*I am disconnected from my home in spite of my physical presence in the physical building.*

Asma then stated her intention to take early retirement soon, in response to the pressure of combining her conflicting responsibilities, especially as her workload seemed to increase with age:

*When a woman feels she is getting older, she feels the need for more rest... My workload increases every day and I'm getting old, which means I have to stop and take early retirement, because I cannot go on like this, with increased workload and less rest.*

In a similar vein, Fajer, a middle manager with five children, spoke of her increased workload and its negative impact on her family life:

*The workload at increases by the day, while I am getting older, which really makes it difficult for me to reconcile work and family life. That is why I have to retire.*

Later, when asked about her feelings about combining work and family responsibilities, Fajer spoke in more detail of her sense of guilt at leaving her children to attend training courses after working hours:

*I always return home from work exhausted and spent because of the pressures of work. Also, I often feel that I have consumed every ounce of energy, especially after the increased responsibilities placed on us. The Ministry of Education has implemented a quality system, which puts more pressure on members of staff. Employees now have to attend training courses after work ...*

*When I attended them, I would return home from work at two in the afternoon to have lunch and spend some time with my children, then get changed to attend the course at four o'clock. I would return at 8:30 and find that my children were asleep. This was really very upsetting for me, because I realised that while I was struggling to be successful and efficient for the sake of my job and in pursuit of self-development, this came at the expense of my children, who I only got to see for an hour...*

Marwa, a senior manager with six children, felt that the stress of combining work with family had negatively influenced her health:

*I feel extremely stressed because of this hectic lifestyle... The frequent pressure I have been under led to my chronic high blood pressure, which shoots up whenever I feel tense or out of control. I try to conceal my anger and stress so that my husband and children don't notice, especially my*

*husband, who doesn't expect me to complain about my inability to carry out my household duties singlehandedly.*

Fulfilling conflicting roles without complaining to one's husband is explored later in this chapter in relation to cultural beliefs. My data show that the consequences for employed Kuwaiti mothers of the imbalance between these conflicting roles included pressure, stress and poor mental health. This finding is consistent with the conclusion of Parasuraman and Greenhaus (1993) that many married women and working mothers often feel tired, stressful and guilty, owing to the conflict inherent in their attempts to fulfil simultaneously the roles of homemaker and employer. Similarly, Reynolds and Aletraris (2007) found in the Australian context that work-family conflicts were associated with dissatisfaction and stress at work and at home. From a different perspective, other participants spoke of the difficulty in separating their professional and family responsibilities in terms of time conflicts, which impacted negatively on both spheres of life, leading them to experience tension and wellbeing issues, as discussed in the following subsection.

### 6.4.2 Experience of conflicts between work and family time

Work and family conflicts are extensively debated in the Western literature on work-life balance, family-friendly policies and flexible workplaces (Salguero et al., 2012). There is a widely accepted view that limited resources of time and energy can severely affect employed mothers who have family and care duties. The literature on work and family indicates that demands on these resources at home and at work can converge to cause conflict and tension that are not simply resolved. Greenhaus et al. (2003) argue that work-family balance can in fact create an equal satisfaction with work and family time, but I think that this is very unlikely to happen in the real world, even if employed mothers have great flexibility.

A number of interviewees in high-level managerial roles, who had great flexibility, spoke about their experiences of time conflicts and how they needed to separate family and work time in order to satisfy their husbands and children on one hand and their line managers on the other. For example, Arwa, a senior supervisor with seven children, stated that she often received phone calls from colleagues on work matters outside working hours, which impacted her mental wellbeing and the quality of the time spent on family demands:

*I'm sometimes forced to respond to staff phone calls outside official working hours, especially if these employees are suffering from personal problems. These work-related phone conversations eat into my own family's quality time and make me think in a way that has a negative impact on my family.*

Another interviewee with the same problem was Safiya, a supervisor and mother of five children, who said that her position in the organization meant that she received a significant number of calls from colleagues who wanted to discuss work problems during what should have been family time, leading to family problems and arguments with her husband:

*My husband doesn't like this and he always reminds me that when I'm at home, I should stop getting involved with work-related activities. He always asks me not to answer any employees who call me at home to discuss work issues... He always reminds me that the quality time we spend at home should be exclusively used for the family and not to be spent thinking about work... My husband doesn't like the fact that I have to bring my work responsibilities home and he always makes an issue out of it.*

Safiya added that in response, she tended to apologise to her husband many times each day for this intrusion of work into family time. When I then asked her why she did not deal with this tension by stopping work to satisfy her family and husband, she surprisingly replied that her salary was important to her husband, to improve their quality of life, so he did not want her to end her career. This meant that while she often apologised for being a working mother in order to reduce the problems of work-family balance as perceived by her husband, she nevertheless did not have the option to stop working and stay at home. Thus, she felt that the importance of her salary to her husband led to a contradiction.

Rawan, a middle manager with one child, experienced time conflicts. In particular, her son had to be taken to his nursery at 8 am and collected at 12 noon, which conflicted with her working hours of 7:30 to 1:45. She therefore asked her manager to be allowed to work flexible hours, which impacted negatively on her formal appraisal. When I asked why her husband could not help to reduce her conflict by taking the child to and from nursery, she replied simply that he did "not want to be involved" in this way, because he believed the children to be her responsibility alone and one in which he did not intend to share (see section 6.6.2 for further interpretation).

Bodour, a middle manager with four children, also reported experiencing time conflicts between work and having to take three of the children to and from their three different schools, resulting in tiredness. As her husband, like Rawan's, did not want to be involved in this process, Bodour stated that she was obliged to move the children to private schools which offered a bus service for pupils:

> *I felt extremely exhausted, especially because my children go to different schools. This year, however, I have paid for them to use private school buses, because my work is relatively far from their schools and because I have had enough of doing it all alone.*

This shows that some participants reported suffering psychological effects such as worrying about work when at home, while others experienced time conflicts in connection with the transporting of their children to and from school, findings consistent with those of Emslie and Hunt (2009). It also shows that when an employed Kuwaiti mother asked for flexibility to meet her family responsibilities this would impact her appraisal negatively, as was the case for Rawan. Correspondingly, Western studies such as those of Hubbard and Datnow (2000) and Lautsch and Scully (2007) found that the likely consequences for an employed mother of asking for flexibility in the workplace to meet her family responsibilities were discrimination and negative attitudes on the part of colleagues. This suggests that employed mothers should separate the two worlds, which is impossible, especially for those who have young children.

Unlike Arwa, Safiya, Bodour and Rawan, Aisha claimed that she had never faced work-family conflicts, because she was able to manage her time by choosing to limit her social life:

> *I have never faced any conflicts affecting my family... However, I gave up my social life because I have always been busy with my family and work. So, I do not attend every single wedding and I seldom visit my friends.*

Samia and Hajer gave similar brief accounts of having sacrificed their social life in order to stay in control of their domestic and work spheres. On the other hand, Mounira spoke at length about her experience of having made this sacrifice when her children were young and of having resumed her social life and friendships once they were grown:

*I didn't leave the house except for one day a week to visit my mother. In fact, I spent all my time at work or with my children, especially when they were young. That's why I had no social life or friends... Thankfully, since my children became teenagers, I haven't felt the pressure I used to go through when they were young and I've got my social life back. I now have friends that I see on a regular basis on my social outings.*

Thus, some participants had adopted the strategy of sacrificing their social life when their children were young, to improve their work-family balance and to attain success. However, it is significant that none of them suggested the alternative strategy of delaying having children or reducing the number of children they would have in order to concentrate on work or to reduce work-family conflict, reflecting the cultural norm of the woman as child producer (Shah et al., 1998). This contrasts with the cultural context of the UK, for example, where women do have the strategic option to delay having children while focusing on their career, thus reducing such conflict (Hakim, 2006).

The following section explores participants' experience of the negative effects of family life on their attitudes and behaviour towards work.

## 6.5 The negative impact of family on the working life of mothers

"Work and non-work lives affect each other indirectly thought workers' attitudes, behaviors, and emotions", according to Premeaux et al. (2007, p. 707). Indeed, numerous Western contributors to the quantitative literature conclude that family life and children negatively affect the working lives of employed women via their attitudes and behaviour towards work (Salguero et al., 2012). In this study, a majority of participants spoke about their experience of how their children and domestic situations influenced their attitudes towards work, rather than about how work influenced their family life. This contrasts with the findings of a majority of Western researchers that employed mothers experience and report work-to-family conflicts more frequently than family-to-work conflicts (Mauno et al., 2006). Nevertheless, a few other participants explored their experiences and circumstances before and after marriage and having children, admitting that marriage and children had negatively influenced their careers. This is consistent with the quantitative finding of Premeaux et al. (2007) that a majority of respondents reported a negative effect of marriage and having children on women's careers.

Badria, a senior manager and mother of two children who had married at the age of 40, reviewed her experience of how marriage and children had affected her working life. She stated that she had faced no work-family conflict before being married and having children, so was able to concentrate on achieving career goals by working two shifts during the day, which led to her promotion to a very high position in the organization. After marrying and having children she found that her situation had completely changed, as she now had to combine two sets of responsibilities. Badria now chose not to work the afternoon shift, in order to reduce the tension between her work and family responsibilities by favouring the demands of her family life. She compared her life before and after marriage thus:

> *Before marriage, I did not have any problem affecting my work, but after getting married and giving birth to two children, in addition to the growing responsibilities and obligations towards my family and my home, I could feel the strain of all this on my efficiency at work... Before marriage, I had plenty of time to work, because I was working two shifts, in the morning and in the afternoon. Now things are different and the situation has become more difficult, especially after having children.*

In the Western context, Rapoport and Rapoport (1993) point out that working mothers have taken on "second shift[s]" of domestic work, the stress of which can lead them to transition from full-time to part-time work in order to reduce work-family imbalance. In my research, Badria sought to achieve work-family balance by working one shift rather than two shifts, despite the flexibility and light workload offered by the Ministry of Education to mothers, as discussed in section 6.2.3.

Rema gave a similar account of her experience, stating that being married and having children had affected her performance in the workplace negatively. She reported that after her marriage and having two more children, her attitude and behaviour towards work had changed radically, leading to problems with her manager:

> *I'm forced to request emergency leave when my small child falls ill, so that I can look after him. This has caused me to be absent quite often and done me no favours with my manager, who's started to think I'm not up to the job, but only because I pay more attention to my children than my job... After my late marriage and giving birth to my sons, I was thinking to myself, 'Is the manager not pleased with what I've done at work and my contribution for such a long time?'*

*At the moment, if I feel that if one of my children has a high temperature, I can't go into work, despite the fact that I used to love my job and always wanted to develop. But having children can have serious implications for a women's ability to balance and reconcile her family and work life...*

Jamila, a junior manager, was pregnant with her second child at the time of the interview, during which she recounted how the circumstances of her first pregnancy had affected her attitude to work. Her performance appraisals began to decline during her pregnancy and worsened after the birth of her first child:

*Pregnancy had a major effect on my job. I would often use it as an excuse to be late or to miss work altogether. This is because my regular pregnancy reviews at the state hospital had to be in the morning. I also had morning sickness and dizziness, which made me avoid going to work. This created problems with the manager, who started giving me a minimum score in the annual appraisal reports. I became the worst among my colleagues, after being the best. This was all because of pregnancy and childbirth, and having a young child in the family.*

Likewise, in a Western context, Gross and Pattison (2001) assert that pregnancy in the workplace is perceived as a signal that women are no longer such effective workers or as committed to their jobs as they were. They conclude that being pregnant in the workplace will give some colleagues and employers the opportunity to compound negative attitudes held more generally about working women due to their reproductive bodies and gender differences. In my context, it was clear that pregnancy and having young children negatively affected employed women's performance, attitude and behaviour towards work. The question of whether the number of children and their ages affected these women's ability to balance different roles, as Western studies have also found, will be explored later in this chapter.

Other participants did not mention their children and how they affected their work, but spoke instead about how their domestic circumstances had affected their careers. For example, when I asked Fatima, a mother of six, how having a large family had impacted her work, she did not refer to her children in her response, but said that her husband suffered from kidney disease, leading her to be late for work, which would impact negatively on her career:

*Take today. I had to come to work at eleven, because my husband was not well and wanted me by his side to keep an eye on him.*

So far, this section has examined the responses of Badria, Rema and Jamila, illustrating how having a family and young children can negatively affect women's attitudes to work. This finding is in keeping with studies by Anafarta and Kuruuzum (2012) and Allen et al. (2000), which found that work-family imbalance had a negative influence on employed mothers' behaviour and attitudes towards work, involving absenteeism, turnover and low performance, while also reducing marital and family satisfaction. Similarly, in Canada, Houle et al. (2009) found that professional mothers in managerial positions felt exhausted by combining work and family roles, which led them to be less committed to their jobs and to indicate that they were more likely to consider changing careers or opting out of the market to concentrate on their family activities.

The following two subsections explore in greater depth employed Kuwaiti mothers' experiences and accounts of how the number of children and their ages can influence the nature and extent of work-family conflict.

### 6.5.1 Work-family conflict and children's age

> *I've only had two hours' sleep since yesterday, because my baby kept me awake all night.* (Mariam)

The Western literature continually demonstrates that young children are at the heart of women's work-family imbalance. For example, Cinamon and Rich (2004) and Coronel et al. (2010) found that the age of children in a family affected work-family imbalance. Roughly half of my participants mentioned a negative impact of their young children on their careers. This finding is in keeping with those reported in the Western literature, whereby women in managerial roles reportedly believe that having young children increases the perception of work-life conflict.

Dana, Wasan, Basma and Arwa made the general point that having young children can have a major effect on working mothers and increase the feeling of work-family imbalance. They felt that having pre-school children could negatively affect women's performance in the workplace. Several other participants made the complementary observation that their lives seemed better balanced now than they had been when their children were young. For example, Nadia said:

*Now that my children have grown up and become self-dependent in almost everything, I feel more balanced.*

Similarly, Hajer, who had five children, reflected on how her life was more balanced now that her children were older:

*I have had great difficulty reconciling my family and my work, especially when my children were young, but thankfully as they are older now, this has made my responsibilities towards them much lighter.*

In contrast, Bodour expressed the view, based on her experience, that having young children did not affect women's working life negatively; for her, the real conflict arose when employed mothers had teenagers, who tend to need more attention:

*I feel that the older the children, the more responsibilities for me. When my children were young, I was only concerned about keeping them healthy, breastfed and clean, which was not an issue for me. Now, though, after they've grown up a little, I'm always following them up and keeping them under check... I'm more worried about my teenage son and daughter than the younger ones. To be honest, I'd rather look after young children than teenagers. I do actually feel concerned about the older children.*

A similar view was expressed by Maia, a mother of six children, of whom the youngest was aged ten:

*My children are grown up, and my responsibility towards them is even greater, so I have to keep monitoring their progress and following up their studies... When they were young, I only had to think about how to keep them healthy. In my view, these are normal responsibilities and don't cause me any stress.*

### 6.5.2 Work-family conflict and number of children

As stated in the first two chapters, the fertility rate among Kuwaiti women is very high, due to cultural and family beliefs. This study found that the average Kuwaiti woman in this small sample in a managerial position had five children. Surprisingly, all participants stated that the number of children they had did not have any negative effect on their career progression or increase their feeling of work-family conflict, as they were able to depend on maids or their extended family to reduce the impact of their children on their work. This finding contrasts sharply with reports in the Western literature (e.g. Premeaux et al., 2007; Cinamon and Rich, 2004; Coronel et

al., 2010) that the number of children is one of main factors causing employed women to suffer work-family conflicts which impact their career progression.

Aisha, a mother of five children, for example, argued in a general way that family size did not lead employed mothers to suffer conflicts. She felt that Kuwaiti women had the ability to have children and work at the same time. However, when asked whether she thought that having five, six or seven children would cause no problems whatsoever for her, she replied:

> *I really see that women in this modern age have the ability to have five or six children only, and the presence of housemaids and grandmothers can be seen as a strong factor in favour of working mothers... I am never on my own [laughs]...*

It is worth noting that Aisha reported never having faced conflicts between work and family, thanks to the flexibility she had as a manager, to her mother's support and to the assistance of housemaids who raised her children. The availability of family support meant that childcare was not a significant burden for many participants.

The rest of this chapter explores in depth participants' experiences of work-family balance in relation to Kuwaiti cultural values and beliefs, seeking to identify the contradictions and dilemmas that employed Kuwaiti mothers have faced due to gender role conflicts since the modernisation of the country and the increased participation of women in employment.

## 6.6 Work-family balance in the Kuwaiti context is different

Metcalfe (2008) suggests that the most significant roles of women in Arab society are those of wife, mother and producer of children, while the man's responsibilities are to support and protect his wife and family. Metcalfe points out that under pressure from religious and cultural traditions, Arab families oblige women to fulfil their duties at home. For my part, I argue that to understand the issues facing Arab women it is fundamentally necessary for research to be conducted by Arab females, to explore women's issues in depth. I also contend that the Arab world is culturally diverse, so that particular values and beliefs applicable to Lebanon or Egypt, for example, may not be directly relevant to the case of Kuwait, where people appear to be more conservative in their attitudes to women than in these other two countries.

Nevertheless, I admit that a person studying his or her own culture may not be aware of factors that seem obvious to others, as the ingrained effects of socialisation may make it difficult for a researcher to recognise these issues. Against this background of conservatism, this study has found that the roles of men and women in Kuwaiti society have changed with the modernization of the country and women's increasing participation in the workforce. Employed Kuwaiti mothers have reported experiencing tensions resulting from their assumption of the dual roles of men and women, finding themselves functioning as both homemakers and breadwinners in a patriarchal society.

### 6.6.1 Women's dual roles

All participants in this study spoke of their experiences of conflict arising from playing the roles of both men and women in modern Kuwaiti society. Nora, for example, spoke generally about the clash between past and present conceptions of gender roles:

> *In the past, women were responsible for the house, while men went out to work to provide the family with money. Roles were clear, but now with the development of society and women going out to work, our customs and traditions regarding women have not changed. Now, women are still primarily responsible for their homes and children, which has led to a clash between the ideas of the past and the present. Women at present work, give birth to children and are also responsible for their upbringing, in addition to assisting their partners financially, but the man still retains his role as a man, and does not see it as part of his responsibilities to help his wife at home or look after the children if need be.*

In another example, Marwa compared her life with that of her mother, whose generation she envied because for them, responsibilities were clearly divided between the genders:

> *Men these days have no role at all compared to men in previous generations, who were much better. When I visit my parents, I can still see that my father is the only breadwinner in the house and he still goes out to do all the shopping and anything my mother needs. Honestly, I envy my mother for the comfortable life she leads... To be honest, with this evolution that our society has witnessed, going out to work has become a curse for women.*

Marwa added that the conflicts of gender roles and the greater responsibilities that women had shouldered recently had put them in a difficult and critical situation,

allowing men to benefit from modernization while women suffered the concomitant disadvantages.

In common with Nora and Marwa, Rawan found it difficult to identify the role of Kuwaiti men in the family since modernization and women's participation in the workforce. When she spoke about the matter she asked many questions of herself and of the researcher, in an attempt to understand why Kuwaiti women's situation had not improved, in spite of modernity, and why Kuwaiti men still failed to offer any help to their wives, while the latter needed to work in order to support their families financially:

> *The role of men in our society is to work and spend on their families, but how many do that nowadays? None, I'd say! In my case, I spend the money I earn on my family, as well as doing the cleaning, washing, cooking and all other household chores if there is no housemaid to help me. I swear that sometimes I plead with my husband to carry the bin bag across to the refuse skip on the other side of the street, which is hardly any more than three metres from the kitchen, but he just refuses... He still asks me to serve coffee, tea and sweets to his friends every single day, though... I don't find my husband very helpful, as he's only good at giving orders... I come home completely exhausted, but there's no rest for the weary, because I still have to fulfil my duties towards my family and my home.*

When I asked Rawan why she did all of the housework, including cooking and cleaning, despite having two maids, she explained that her husband did not want the maids to fulfil her domestic responsibilities and did not like to eat food prepared by them. He wanted her to clean his room, wash and iron his clothes and prepare his food. Rawan was caught between making use of her employees' services and satisfying her husband and society. Her account illustrates the core of the conflicts imposed upon employed mothers by their husbands in Kuwaiti culture. Although modernity and national wealth have helped women to acquire education and join the workforce, social values remain largely unchanged (Tetreault, 1995). What little change there has been seems to benefit men by reducing their responsibilities towards the family while adding to those of women. Women must now be breadwinners in addition to being wives, mothers and homemakers.

### 6.6.2 Childcare and household chores are the responsibility of mothers alone

The issue of work-life balance affects women in Kuwait differently from those elsewhere, because of the country's cultural values and beliefs. In Kuwaiti culture,

the children and household chores are seen as the responsibility of women alone, a belief which helps men to withdraw from participating in family life and leaves women to suffer work-family conflicts alone. In Western countries, women can receive help from their husbands in caring for the children or helping with household responsibilities. For example, in Tang and Cousins' (2005) quantitative study of work-family balance in several European countries, a high number of respondents in Sweden reported that childcare was shared equally between the father and mother. In the UK, the Netherlands and Slovenia, around one-fifth to one-quarter of parents shared childcare equally. Very few respondents relied on other family members or a person from outside the household, or paid for daily childcare.

Yet other Western research shows how, among heterosexual couples, working mothers continue to take lead responsibility for the "domestic care agenda" even when fathers share some tasks (Burnett et al., 2010). In the Australian context, Craig (2006) states that as a consequence of women spending more time in paid employment, it was expected that men would spend more time on domestic labour. However, men in Australia have on average only slightly increased the time they spend doing housework, while women continue to spend two to three times as much time with children as men do. Additionally, the time women spend on childcare may be more demanding than the time spent by men on childcare. Therefore, even if Western fathers do spend more time with their children than they previously did, the gender inequality of family and domestic duties persists.

These findings contrast with those of my study in the Kuwaiti context, probably due to the nature of the cultural beliefs surrounding family and household activities. The majority of participants reported receiving no help at all from their husbands in childcare or household tasks, because despite the impact of modernisation, globalisation and women's participation in the workforce, these are seen by Kuwaiti society as solely the purview of women.

Mounira, for example, claimed that her husband had never helped her with the children during their 37 years of marriage: *"My husband is the master at home, so he does nothing"*. When I asked her to explain this in greater depth, she replied:

> *Because he was born a man, and childcare and home duties have to be the responsibility of females only... I am the mother and I am the only one held to*

*account for the children. If I'd asked my husband for help or said that I couldn't do it all alone, he would have told me to give up work and focus on raising my children... So, I was forced to keep quiet and not complain... To ensure that he didn't hamper my studies and professional career, I had to give up on him and do it all alone to achieve my personal ambitions... I had to avoid confrontational arguments or showing signs of discontent, because any complaints or pleas about needing help with childcare or household chores would be seen by my husband as failure and inability to assume my home responsibilities and would eventually mean that I would have been forced to stay at home.*

This illustrates the Kuwaiti social norm, where the power and the decisions are in the hands of the husband, who exercises the choice as to whether his wife takes paid work. Mounira tended to play all the roles without complaint, to avoid problems with her husband, whose innate privilege as a man was to enjoy a status superior to that of his wife.

Mariam also asserted that her husband never helped her to care for the children or to do housework, due to cultural beliefs regarding gender roles. She spoke about having to perform a variety roles alone, without any help from husband:

*My children are my responsibility alone. I would go out to work at seven in the morning and return home at three in the afternoon. I would then fetch my children from nursery, prepare lunch for the family, and then go about the rest of my duties. I was really spent. I would sometimes have to do my shopping at night to stock up on groceries, for example. Afterwards, I would help my daughter with her homework.*

Another participant, Nadia, spoke about her family responsibilities while her husband made little contribution:

*My husband never really contributes much to childcare or housework. The entire responsibility for the house and children falls on my shoulders alone. For example, I have to take the children to school and go to the supermarket. I also help them with their homework. Even when it comes to parents' evenings at school, I go because my husband always refuses to attend such meetings... I have to do it all alone... My husband's very spoiled, but he's not alone. All Kuwaiti men are the same.*

A few other participants seemed more accepting of the belief that childcare and housework are the responsibility of women alone, having learned this from their mothers and the wider society. These interviewees indicated that they did not ask their husbands to help with childcare or housework. Bodour, for example, said:

*I don't ask my husband to help me with housework, because he's not supposed to do any of that. I've never asked him to dress or undress any of the children or feed them.*

Manal also believed that she could not ask her husband to help with the family responsibilities, because of his gender:

*He's a man and I can't ask him for help. Even if he offered, I don't think I'd accept, because he's a man and has pride, which would be undermined if he had to do any of my housework.*

She then explained that her mother had advised that a woman should not belittle her husband by asking him to perform activities unbefitting of a man and that she now advised her own daughters to do the same. They should look after their future husbands and assume their full responsibilities without expecting any help from anybody, because of historical Kuwaiti cultural norms that place men above women, so that helping with household chores or child responsibilities would damage a man's standing in society. Women could not ask their husbands to help, for fear of appearing to undermine their superior social status, while for their part, men dare not offer to help their wives because they were also afraid of facing criticism from society. This issue is explored further in section 6.6.4.

Similarly, Aisha said that she could not ask her husband to help *"because he is a man"*. She clarified this by suggesting that men who helped out with women's duties would undermine their social status as men. Thus, women were expected to fulfil domestic and professional roles once associated with both gender identities, while men would not offer any help with household chores or childcare, in order to preserve their masculine identity, which was socially constructed as higher than women's identity.

Remarkably, only three participants—Alia, Asma and Basma—said that they had received help from their husbands with childcare. In Alia's case, she reported that this had happened only when she was ill, whereas Asma and Basma both said that their husbands had provided help because of their personalities: they were helpful with all people, not just with their wives.

The evidence presented in this subsection suggests that male dominance and patriarchy are largely responsible for work-family conflicts facing employed mothers in Kuwait. My data contrast with those of Western studies which stress that the timing, age and number of children are key causes of work-family imbalance. While some Western studies show that fathers are involved in childcare and willing to take on domestic responsibilities (Craig and Sawrikar, 2009), other Western literature reveals that work-life balance initiatives make little reference to domestic chores and fail to account for the relative number of hours spent by mothers and fathers respectively on housework. In particular, the extent to which mothers carry the burden of what Bianchi et al. (2000, p. 208) refer to as "core" housework duties, "cooking meals, meal clean up, housecleaning, laundry and ironing", remains anything but gender-neutral. Mothers in Western culture continue to be primarily responsible for direct childcare, regardless of their employment status. As Bianchi et al. (2000), Burnett et al. (2011) and others have consistently demonstrated, women also continue to carry the main burden of ancillary domestic labour within the majority of heterosexual partnerships, irrespective of their employment status and the number of hours they spend in paid work. Feminist writers have highlighted this relationship between motherhood and women's increased responsibility for housework for over a century. For example, Oakley (1981, p. 1), writing in the late twentieth century, observed how:

> Motherhood entails a great deal of domestic work – servicing the child, keeping its clothes and its body clean, preparing food. The demarcation lines between this and house-or-husband work blur. It is a crisis in the life of a woman, a point of no return.

In 2004, women in the UK were found to spend around ten hours per week more than men on household chores (Burnett et al., 2010). Surprisingly, even in Sweden, which in 1995 was described by the United Nations as "the most gender equal country in the world" (Evertsson, 2006), men spend on average nine hours less than women per week on housework. While men are seen to be doing more housework than before, their contribution is often limited to areas such as carpentry, which are less routine and more closely associated with traditional notions of masculinity (Crompton, 1997; cited in Burnett et al., 2010), and require much shorter amounts of time than the efforts of their partners. Therefore, I suggest that despite Western

men's increased involvement in the family, women are still seen as primarily responsible for the children and house. In Kuwait, responsibility for family matters also lies with women, with men unable to assume these duties due to the cultural beliefs that since women are solely responsible for childcare and housekeeping, their status as men would suffer if they shared responsibilities with women.

### 6.6.3 Feeling overburdened

Most of my participants said that they felt overburdened by having to do both paid work and domestic chores without any help from their husbands, because Kuwaiti culture treated a man who offered help to his wife as having reduced status. Amal, for example, said that in general, employed Kuwaiti mothers were overstretched by their husbands and by social attitudes to gender, which coincided with her own experience:

> *Kuwaiti mothers are overworked by their husbands and society as a whole. Nowadays, working Kuwait mothers have to assume all sorts of roles, as they play the roles of men, mothers and working women all in one... Take me – I've had to do everything myself, starting by carrying and giving birth to my children, in addition to bringing them up and their schooling, not to mention work, shopping and household duties. After a long day in and out of the house, once all the children are in bed, I have to prepare myself for my husband with a big smile and a whole stock of makeup to fulfil my marital duties as a wife...*

Similarly, Bodour said that she worked almost a 24-hour shift every day, assuming all her responsibilities as a worker, a wife, a mother and a homemaker, which left her feeling exhausted and overstretched:

> *I do almost a 24-hour shift between my house, my job, my children and my husband until I go to sleep... I feel that I am caught up in an endless spiral as I have to meet all the needs of those around me, but no one seems to respond to my needs.*

Although Bodour refers here to the unresponsiveness of others to her own needs, it seems surprising that the issue of women having no time to focus on themselves was not raised by participants. However, several did address the problem of loneliness engendered by having to remain silent rather than mention any conflict to their husbands. For example, Badria explained that employed mothers would generally

refrain from expressing their negative feelings about their situation in front of their husbands, in order to avoid the criticism:

> *The problem is that when working women feel pressurised at work or when they encounter a problem, they are forced to open up to their husbands about these issues. However, all they seem to gain from expressing their frustration is harsh criticism of either their mismanagement or lack of competence, which means that they can't be relied upon... Can you see the contradiction? Women assume all responsibilities, but when they face a problem or voice their concerns and worries, all they get is a wave of criticism that forces them to go into silence.*

Fatima also spoke in a general way about women's inability to raise issues openly with their husbands and the need to hide their feelings while offering their husbands service with a smile, *"all this without showing any signs of tiredness or resentment."* In Kuwaiti society, employed mothers are forced to remain silent, as if to show the people around them that they can balance their lives to the satisfaction of others. Women learn to be quiet and suffer alone, to avoid criticism and problems with husbands and other people around us. This may explain why many participants were indirect, speaking in a general and impersonal way about how work could influence family life negatively, rather than stating directly that their own lives had been affected in this way.

This shows how cultural norms cause women to suffer work-family conflict silently and alone, without complaining to anyone about their problems. Similarly, Srivastava (2007) found that traditional Arab wives do not discuss their career problems with their husbands or other family members, but tend to suffer in solitude, because as stated in Chapter Two, Arab culture holds that women's employment diminishes the quality of family life, so females are discouraged from complaining about matters related to their careers.

### 6.6.4 Kuwaiti society encourages men to withdraw from family life

During interviews, more than a few of my participants discussed ways in which cultural beliefs regarding gender roles had influenced men to withdraw from family life. Dana gave the example of such beliefs preventing men from helping their wives:

> *The customs and traditions of the community force the man to withdraw from family life for fear of being made a laughing stock or ridiculed by others if seen or judged to be helpful to his wife... My husband once saw someone he*

*did not know in person in the market carrying his wife's shopping bags... Do you know what my husband's reaction was? Surprisingly, he said in a disrespectful manner: 'I really thank God for what he has given me! Is this man crazy, carrying his wife's bags?'*

My own experience of Kuwaiti customs and tradition allows me to offer the following explanation of this response. Dana's husband had been brought up and socially acculturated to believe that a man should not carry bags for his wife. Offering help to one's wife in public in this way would bring shame and ridicule on a man, diminishing his social status. He would also be expected not to allow his wife to walk in front of him, but to remain well ahead of her when they are out together in public. Again, such behaviour is commonly seen and culturally learnt.

Another interviewee, Alia, offered a different example of how society prevents men from becoming too closely involved with raising the family:

*According to my husband's tribal customs, it is not allowed to hold a child in one's lap or arms. That's why I've never seen my husband playing with his children or carrying them... People in Kuwait teach their boy children to be manly and to believe that tasks around the house like carrying children and being sensitive and caring are reserved for female members of the family only...*

It is thus seen as shameful for a man to carry a woman's bags in public or for a father to be seen playing with his children, but there is no shame in a woman contributing a salary to the family finances. Carrying bags in the Kuwaiti context is about authority and male status, but it may be different elsewhere, because cultural norms also differ. These data suggest that the conflicts and work-family imbalance facing employed Kuwaiti mothers is due to Kuwaiti cultural values and beliefs regarding gender roles; more specifically, these contradictions in gender roles have arisen since the modernisation of the country. What has caused employed Kuwaiti mothers to experience more work-family conflicts? Could men's attitudes and feelings towards their wives' work cause employed Kuwaiti women to suffer contradictions? These questions are examined in the next subsection.

### 6.6.5 Husbands' attitudes towards women's work

As stated in Chapter Two, attitudes towards women's work tend to be negative in Arab culture generally and in Kuwait particularly, because the status of wife and

mother is primary to women within an Arab identity and place in the community (Rizzo et al., 2002; Hutching et al., 2010). Some of my participants commented that their spouses were responsible for their feelings of conflict, by repeatedly asking them to leave work and focus on the family, only to change their minds if the women agreed to do so, realising that their wives' income was important for the family finances. This would leave such women uncertain as to whether they should concentrate on raising and caring for the family or on working to support the family with money. Rema, for example, said that her husband had often pressurized her to leave work in order to stay at home with the children, but that when she agreed he had changed his mind because her salary was important to him:

> *He keeps pressurising me to apply for early retirement, but when I discuss it with him and mention meeting my financial commitments and debts, he changes the subject or becomes uninterested. My husband is far too self-contradictory. First, he criticises me for going out to work and for not paying enough attention to my family, for which I have to be made to pay with my own salary and be thankful to him for letting me work!*

Similarly, Mariam felt that the stance of her husband was contradictory. She said that he would complain about her focusing on work at the expense of the family, so she also decided to take early retirement in order to satisfy her husband. However, when she told him of her decision, he rejected it on the grounds that her salary was important to the family, leaving her feeling confused:

> *My husband doesn't really like the fact that I go out to work and has been complaining so much about my job that at one point I suggested to him that I would sit at home and retire once and for all... Can you believe that he rejected the idea because my salary was needed to improve the family's standard of living? Sometimes, I don't understand my husband and I don't know what he really wants...*

This suggests that some participants suffered conflict arising from their husbands' attitudes towards their work, which could negatively affect their decisions or even their attitudes to their careers, especially where the husband emphasised the needs of the family. The data show that women's collective identities tended to place them in a contradictory situation. This research has found that participants suffered many conflicts, dilemmas and contradictions arising from their social and gender identities.

## 6.7 Summary

This chapter has shown the negative impact of culturally determined gender roles on the involvement of husbands in family life. Employed mothers faced conflicts caused by their husbands' negative attitudes towards their work, although they did not want them to stop working, due to the importance of their salaries in improving the standard of living of the family, leading my participants to experience conflict. Patriarchy has been shown to affect women's freedom of choice as to whether to resign from work or not. Although modernisation has helped Kuwaiti women to participate in economic activity, it has not improved their status or widened their roles, because they are still seen as mothers and wives.

Overall, this chapter has clearly shown how the issues of work-life balance differ from one culture to another. In the Kuwaiti context, male dominance actually creates the work-family struggle, while in other places, family, children and working time are responsible for work-family tension. More importantly, my data suggest that holding a low position in the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education allows little flexibility and imposes heavy work responsibilities, causing women to experience difficulties and conflicts in combining the roles of mother and worker, whereas performing managerial roles means more flexibility with less responsibility, allowing women to combine activities in the two spheres with relatively little conflict. This contrasts strongly with Western research findings that managerial roles require strong commitment to work and that having children may affect women's ability to attend to their work (Hubbard and Datnow, 2000). Finally, women in managerial roles avoided asking for flexibility to meet their family needs, due to the importance of focusing on work and because if they did ask for flexibility they were more likely to encounter gender discrimination at work. From these findings I conclude that the issues of work-family balance in Kuwait are unique to that context, reflecting its particular cultural beliefs, norms and myths, and that mothers working as managers in the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education find it difficult to balance work and family due to gender identity issues in that context.

The following chapter presents further analysis of the data gathered from the 27 Kuwaiti mothers working as managers in the education sector, to specifically analyse women's identities at work in the Kuwaiti case. It thus makes a contribution to

understanding the issues of personal and professional identity facing employed Kuwaiti mothers.

# Chapter Seven

# Women's Identities at Work: the Case of Kuwait

## 7.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the complexity of the interrelation between culture, gender and management in the Kuwaiti context. It analyses the research participants' views and experiences of the barriers and constraints facing women in management, before going into explore self/professional identities of women managers in the workplace. The aim of this chapter is to contribute to addressing the current lack of literature that discusses the phenomenon of gender issues facing mothers employed in management in Kuwait. It extends the literature on how gender identity impacts women in management in the Middle East, particularly in Kuwait.

The main themes that emerge from the data are these: obstacles and barriers to management, gender as the central barrier to women's career progression, negative attitudes towards managerial women, family barriers to women's career advancement, women's identity at work, women acting like men, characteristics of the successful Kuwaiti female manager, characteristics of Kuwaiti managers, both male and female, from the viewpoints of the participants,[2] and the ways in which Kuwaiti women managers deal with other women.

## 7.2 Obstacles and barriers to management

### 7.2.1Gender as a central barrier to women's career progression

Many researchers who have studied women's working lives in the Arab region, such as Al-Lamki (1999), Elamin and Omair (2010) and Omair (2008), suggest that the greatest obstacles to women's career progress are patriarchal power relations and attitudes towards women. These studies found that Arab women faced stereotypical attitudes related to gender differences in the workplace. This research confirms these findings, since the majority of participants stressed that cultural beliefs concerning gender roles constitute the main barrier to women's career development. However, the findings contrast with those of other studies in the Arab region, such those of

[2] The demographic variables of the participants are listed in Appendix D.

Mostafa (2005) in the United Arab Emirates and Mostafa (2003) in Egypt, that attitudes towards women who work were tending to move away from the traditional stance.

More importantly, my research found that the majority of female managers interviewed had experienced overt or covert discrimination, showing consistency with research in developed (Brown and Ralph, 1996; Reay and Ball, 2000; Fernandes and Cardoso, 2003; Duehr and Bono, 2006; Prime et al., 2008) and developing countries (Sakalli-Ugurlu and Beydogan, 2002; Jamali et al., 2005). My finding is also consistent with those of recent studies conducted in Lebanon by Tlaiss and Kauser (2011a) and in Sri Lanka by Fernando (2012), that women encountered discriminatory attitudes and behaviour based on gender, especially by male counterparts. Likewise, research by Haynes and Fearfull (2008) in the UK found that women in managerial roles experienced stereotypical attitudes concerning gender roles. For this study, a possible clarification of such findings is that the key factors influencing overt discrimination were entrenched cultural beliefs, values and traditional ideologies regarding the roles and status of women in Kuwaiti society.

During the interviews I asked the participants about the barriers and obstacles to their attainment of managerial status. The majority of interviewees stated that social beliefs regarding gender roles formed the main barrier to women's career progression. For example, Mounira said:

> *The masculine nature of Kuwaiti society means that women are treated as useless and unfit beings who are not suitable for managerial positions. The commonly held belief is that a woman's place is the home and that men should be appointed as managers.*

Mariam also argued that the most serious obstacle facing women aspiring to managerial roles was that of traditional cultural beliefs regarding gender roles:

> *These annoying habits and traditions have undermined the role and status of women. There are many jobs out there that women cannot apply for, because they are not suitable for them. Also, the common belief is that women are weak and their primary role is to give birth and look after children.*

Marwa agreed that reaching senior managerial level represents a crucial challenge to Kuwaiti females. She spoke of stereotypical attitudes toward managerial women due

to their reproductive bodies, claiming that men dislike working under female managers because they learn from society that they are the leaders, while women are mothers and homemakers. Consequently, Marwa suggested that managerial females should avoid becoming pregnant to escape one type of discrimination that they face.

Based on these views, it could be argued that Kuwaiti women managers face discrimination in the workplace because of gender differences and their reproductive bodies. My finding is consistent with Western research such as that of Gatrell (2011a) and Acker (1990), who point out that pregnant females face discrimination when holding managerial positions at work, due to their maternity and gender. This data also shows that women are perceived by society as more suited to a supportive, nurturing role such as motherhood than to making management-level decisions. Thus, gender stereotyping has impacted negatively on women's career advancement.

Jamila is another participant who spoke about the role of gender in Kuwaiti culture as leading men to stereotype women in the workplace. She offered a general example of the gender discrimination facing young girls under Kuwaiti law:

> *Under the law, a female needs a higher mark than a male in order to obtain admission to a faculty of engineering, for example. There is no clear reason why a girl should achieve as high as 89% to gain admission to a college, while a male only needs to achieve 82% to gain immediate admission. Why does this practice take place? Is it because they are males? What is the purpose of this law? Is this not gender discrimination? I really do not know!*

These rhetorical questions and the final exclamation indicate this interviewee's conflicted view of why women face discrimination for being female. It is worth mentioning that Jamila reported that she had dreamed of becoming an engineer, but did not apply to an engineering college because she had obtained a final mark of only 88% in her high school.

Salma was the only participant who spoke explicitly about her own experience of gender discrimination. She described herself as hard working, rarely absent and highly productive, in contrast to a male colleague who was often late or absent, but who was promote while she was not. Salma said that she went to the (female) general manager to enquire why someone less hard-working and successful had been promoted in preference to her and to the five other applicants, all of whom were

female. She was surprised at the general manager's explanation: *"He is the only male in the administration and so being a young Kuwaiti man, he needs to be motivated and assisted to become a manager."*

In other words, in an organisation dominated by women, men were nevertheless given priority in promotion to senior roles, thus benefiting from their minority status. My finding is in keeping with a study by Coronel et al. (2010), which found that in spite of their overall numerical domination, females in the Spanish education sector simply did not tend to occupy high positions, which were dominated by men because of their gender. Similarly, in the USA context, Adams et al. (2010) argue that because of their gender, men are more likely than women to be promoted to management roles in female-dominated environments.

A few participants (Mariam, Rema, Alia, Nora and Bodour) shared the view that women faced gender issues in the workplace. They all noted that men had better promotion opportunities than women due to their gender. They also stated that Kuwaiti men reached management positions much more quickly and easily than women even if they were careless or had insufficient competence to be managers. When I asked Mariam, Rema, Alia and Bodour why they thought Kuwaiti men seemed to have better access than women to management in a female-dominated workforce, they all replied that they did not know.

In contrast, (Salwa, Safiya, Samia, Aisha, Dana, Basma, Arwa and Hajer) emphasized that they never faced any kind of gender discrimination in the Ministry of Education, asserting that there were no gender issues in the education sector, dominated as it is by females. For example, Salwa said: *"I have not faced any problem as a result of my sex, because I work at the Ministry of Education, where the majority of employees are female".* She added that employed Kuwaiti women could face gender discrimination in fields dominated by men, such as oil and banking, but not in education. Like Salwa, Safiya reported facing no problems due to her gender, in contrast to the gender discrimination that her daughter had encountered in the male-dominated medical field.

Similarly, Samia, Aisha, Dana, Basma, Arwa and Hajer claimed that women working for the Ministry of Education faced no gender stereotypical attitudes, because of their

majority status. They all argued that gender had nothing to do with management and that only strength of personality would decide who could or could not be a successful manager. Manal, Mounira and Fajer agreed that gender should not present an obstacle to women who aspired to managerial roles. They felt that the right person should be appointed to the right position, regardless of gender. Their view was that both males and females could be effective team managers.

This subsection has analyzed participants' general views of gender in the workplace. It found that cultural beliefs regarding gender roles are a key constraint to women's career progression. The following subsection explores participants' own experiences of employees' negative attitudes and behaviour towards them as women managers.

### 7.2.2 Attitudes towards women in managerial roles

All participants were asked if they had encountered any negative behaviour on the part of other employees related to their being female managers. Twenty-one out of twenty-seven of them replied that they had experienced negative attitudes from male employees arising from gender differences, while three participants had encountered negative attitudes from employed females as a result of their gender and family circumstances. Finally, three interviewees did not feel comfortable about saying that they had witnessed discriminatory behaviour from male or female colleagues based on gender. One of these three said: *"I was not exposed to negative behaviour, but I heard that others were. Sometimes it happens, but I cannot tell you what it is"*. Such reluctance may indicate that cultural socialization in a patriarchal society constrained those women from freely expressing their views and experiences of discrimination, ultimately silencing them. Shakeshaft (1989) argues that women's denial of discrimination is a survival mechanism in a male-dominated environment, because if it were acknowledged, the women would have to face it directly, with negative consequences for their careers.

Among the participants who said that they had faced negative attitudes from males was Mariam, who gave an explicit example of discrimination by a male employee who was very disrespectful of her status as a woman manager. She stated that the male employee came every day to work only to fall asleep at his desk in front of her. When I asked Mariam how she had reacted, her surprising response was: *"I called*

*one of the male employees and made the problem known to him. I told him to solve it his way."* Her explanation for not speaking to the employee herself was this:

> *I honestly felt scared and timid because he is a man. I was concerned that he would not accept criticism and react in a negative way that could make me cry or provoke me in front of other members of staff.*

This suggests that as a manager, Mariam felt afraid to use her power directly at work. Having been socialized early on to the supposedly appropriate gender roles, she perceived men as of higher status than women, so felt unable to criticise a male employee for his negative attitude to work. Conversely, he did not respect her as a manager because she is a woman.

Asma too spoke about the negative attitudes of men in the workplace due to her gender. She reported that it was hard for employed males in her department to have females as managers. She noted that employed men tended to complain to others that a women should not be giving them instructions or advice, so they adopted negative attitudes to her decisions in the organization. When asked how she addressed this negative attitude, Asma stated that she tended to remain calm and silent for a time, then complained of the behaviour of particular employees to the general manager, who was male.

Another example of the negative attitude of a male employee was offered by Safiya, who had noticed that a male supervisor was not doing his job properly. When she spoke to him about it, he responded by complaining loudly in front of the other employees that he did not want to be shouted at or told what to do by a woman. In contrast to the case of Asma, this interviewee stated that she had reacted to the employee's negative attitude by reminding him that she was the manager and insisting that he had to comply with her orders whether he liked it or not. She also complained to her superior and the employee was made to give her a public apology.

Alia, Nadia and Marwa reported similar experiences where male employees in their departments had taken their requests for leave or transfer to the general manager, a man, rather than asking their female line managers. These male employees did not want to ask permission of a woman, as this would have undermined their social

status as men. They saw themselves as leaders, giving orders and granting permission to women, not the reverse.

Fajer spoke in general about the negative attitudes of male employees towards female managers because of their gender:

> *Male employees not only look down on their female managers, but they also consider them inferior and unworthy of a managerial position... Such scornful attitudes often lead these men to refuse to carry out the required tasks simply because the boss happens to be a woman...*

Manal and Safiya reported similar experiences: each of them had had a male employee who had had a long absence from work following her promotion to her managerial position in the organization. The participants had each telephoned the employee in question to ask about his absence, to which the first employee told Manal that he was sleeping and that she should not contact him by phone again, while the other told Safiya that "*he did not want to work under the management of a woman.*"

Jamila also reported having often faced negative behaviour by male employees. She claimed that many refused to take her decisions seriously and that they would laugh at her because she was a woman, young and pregnant. Thus, Jamila appears to have experienced gender stereotypical attitudes due to her age, her gender and her reproductive body.

Arwa gave this example of a negative attitude that she had encountered to her being a female senior supervisor:

> *Male employees used to look at me in a negative way. They would also look down at me and not talk to me and when they did, it was not very friendly. This is all for just being a woman manager.*

Arwa added that men did not accept women managers in high positions, or any female manager who did not wear the traditional black costume; more importantly, they did not approve of a women giving orders. When I asked her to explain the problem with not wearing traditional dress, she replied *"I don't know, but they never respect women and this is based on personal experience"*. At the time of the interview, Arwa was wearing a formal dark jacket with skirt and no makeup.

Hajer and Marwa each offered an explicit interpretation of the difficulty for men of agreeing to be managed by a woman. Hajer said that the nature of Kuwaiti society prevented men from taking orders from women, as this would challenge their esteem in the eyes of society. Marwa's alternative interpretation was that Kuwaiti men might accept female managers, but only if they were past childbearing age, adding: *"It's really typical of men to oppress women because they carry children, give birth and breastfeed".* This may be seen as consistent with the experience of Badria, who alone among participants stated that she had never faced negative attitudes or behaviour by either male or female employees as a result of her being women manager, which she explained as being because of her age (40 years).

Interestingly, several participants reported having experienced negative attitudes and behaviour related to their gender and position in the organization, but on the part of female employees rather than males. For example, Basma said that many female employees considered her weak and easy to exploit. They refused to act upon her decisions because of her gender: *"They would tell me that being head of the guidance department does not make me any better than they are, because I am a woman manager".*

Salwa too reported that she had faced negative behaviour from women in the workplace due to her family circumstances. A female member of her staff had insulted her in front of other employees because she had not granted her extra time off. The employee accused Salwa of having no feeling for others because she was a divorced woman with only one child.

Like Salwa, Nora reported having faced negative attitudes from women employees due to her family circumstances. She complained that some female members of staff had tried to undermine her by saying that as a mother of only two children she was failing to exercise her full responsibilities towards her family. This had led the participant to feel upset by the conflict between success at work and the effort that she felt she should be making for the sake of her children and husband.

In this subsection, I have shown that women managers were perceived by both male and female employees in a negative way due to their gender. Their experience of such negative attitudes at work indicates that both genders were influenced similarly

by sex-role stereotypes. My findings are identical to those of Schein (1975) and Usher (1983) who suggest that men and women hold similar and often negative attitudes towards women managers and are prejudiced similarly by sex-role stereotypes. The next subsection examines family as a barrier to women's career advancement.

### 7.2.3 Family barriers to women's career advancement

A number of Western studies have indicated that combining a family and career can hinder a women's career progression (Milkie and Peltola, 1999; Kaul, 2009; Srivastava, 2007; McIntosh et al., 2012). In this research, a majority of participants said that they were able to balance family and a career in management because of the domestic help they received from their extended family and housemaids (chapter six). Elsewhere in the Middle East, participants in a study in Lebanon stated that they were receiving domestic help from their extended families and from housemaids, which was crucial to the progress of their managerial careers (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011a).

During the interviews, I found that twenty of the twenty-seven participants did not perceive their families as a burden or an obstacle to their career advancement, whereas four others did identify having a family with young children as a key barrier to their career progress. For instance, Nadia stated that when young, her children were the main obstacle to her progress at work. She stressed the difficulty of holding a managerial position while raising young children, because of the huge demands of the two worlds; however, when the children are older, women have more chance of combining the two roles:

> *I missed out on many promotional opportunities when my children were young because I was aware that my responsibilities would increase if I went for a senior position at the expense of my children. I was also aware that this would affect my ability to reconcile family and work commitments, but when my children grew older, I accepted the promotion.*

Similarly, Asma and Mariam reported that they had declined promotion because their children were young. They felt that women with young children could not succeed in management due to the demands of the two roles, so they had delayed accepting promotion until their children grew up.

Like Nadia, Asma and Mariam, Samia stated that having young children was the major barrier to her career progress. She considered that taking a high managerial position increased the responsibilities of the working mother, so she refused promotion until her children had grown up. Later during the interview, Samia suggested that women who aspired to senior positions should either postpone their marriage or refrain from having more than four children.

Hence, very few of the research participants considered having young children to be an obstacle to their career progression, because of the availability of domestic workers. Some of my findings are in line with those presented in the Western literature, especially regarding how beliefs about gender roles lead employees to discriminate against women managers. However, my findings diverge from those of many Western studies, such as those of Metz (2005) and Legault and Chasserio (2003), who found marriage and children to be key barriers to women's career development. More importantly, the present findings contrast with those of other studies conducted in the Gulf countries; for example, Neal et al. (2005) and Al-Qudsi (1998) suggest that marriage and children restrict women's ability to rise to managerial positions.

Marwa, considered that her spouse was an obstacle to her accepting promotion on several occasions:

> *When I was nominated for this post, I frankly did not want it... I was suffering from a major social handicap, which is my partner, who was too stubborn to allow me to progress professionally. He used to say that promotion would increase my responsibilities and it was not worth it.*

Nevertheless, she eventually accepted the promotion, despite the opposition of her husband, who was *"jealous and always angry. He shouts at me for being shameless because I work with men."*

Maia gave a similar account, asserting that her husband was the key barrier to her accepting promotion and that he had opposed her decision to be a supervisor because *"he did not want me to work in a mixed environment. However, I kept trying to convince him and after five years he finally gave in."*

Given the nature of traditional Kuwaiti culture, it is unsurprising that women cannot accept promotion without permission from their fathers, brothers or husbands. This subsection has highlighted fundamental challenges to Kuwaiti women arising from cultural attitudes to the family. The following subsection offers a brief analysis of how cultural beliefs concerning the systematic segregation of the sexes limits women's choice of where to study and work.

### 7.2.4 Cultural beliefs about gender segregation limit women's choice and agency

> *My elder brother is the one who chose my workplace because it allowed me to study and work without fear of mixing with men.*

I asked all interviewees whether it was their own choice to work in the education sector. Most participants indicated that they felt forced to work in this field by their families or partners, because there is no gender mixing. Safiya, for example, explained that her career and life choices were not in her own hands:

> *I did not choose my job and did not choose how to go about my own life… I wanted to be a doctor, and I could by now have completed my studies in Germany, but my mother refused. Therefore, my father enrolled me in the teachers' college.*

When invited to interpret her mother's refusal to let her study abroad, Safiya said that her mother strongly believed that the natural place for a woman was at home, not studying abroad. Consequently, her parents decided that she should study at the teachers' college in Kuwait and wait for a man to marry her.

Salma asserted that the advantages provided for females employed in the education sector, such as a high salary and long summer holiday, tended to lead Kuwaiti families to choose this career for their daughters, because it would be attractive to potential marriage partners:

> *Kuwaiti men choose their brides carefully. They only choose a teacher or a Ministry of Education employee because of the high salary and the relatively long summer vacations.*

These views could be interpreted as indicating that Kuwaiti families tend to force their daughters and sisters to work in education to encourage men outside the family to propose to them, responding to the advantages of having a wife who earns a good

salary, has long holidays and works in a gender-segregated environment. This suggests that women's career choices are in the hands of their families; they cannot direct their own lives as a result of cultural beliefs about gender differences.

Asma reported that she did not choose where to study or work. She had wanted to work in the Ministry of Media and Communication, but her father and brothers opposed the idea on the grounds that it was socially unacceptable for women to appear in the media, deciding instead that she should study and work at the Ministry of Education.

Badria spoke in more depth about how Kuwaiti habits and traditions prevent women from mixing with men. She offered examples from her experience, showing how customs and traditions gave men the authority to direct women's lives and how this authority impacted women at work. The interviewee reported that many female employees under her management refused to deal directly with male colleagues because their relatives would not allow them to work with men. Badria noted that the fathers or husbands of female employees might visit them several times in the workplace to ensure that it was a female-only environment, as they would expect it to be. When asked what they would do if they found that it was a mixed workplace, she replied that the women concerned would *"not be permitted to go to work until they were transferred into a department where intermixing is not allowed"*. I then asked her what was perceived to be wrong with women working with men. She replied:

> *Some people do not want their daughters to work in mixed workplaces because of a lack of confidence in their male and female co-workers. Another point is that some families are strongly influenced by customs and traditions... Kuwaiti working women are not self-dependent, but rather dominated by their husbands or families...*

Akpinar (2003, p. 430) describes virginity as "an asset not only for the individual woman but also for her family because it is an 'index' for masculine reputation". Family reputation and the protection of women and their virginity are of paramount importance in Kuwaiti culture. Therefore, to preserve female chastity and the reputation of the family, male relatives insist on their women working in closed female environments to make sure that their daughters or wives do not make any kind of inappropriate contact or relationship with men outside the family.

Finally, there were only three participants (Nadia, Samia and Hajer) who indicated that it was their own choice to work in the education sector, not their families'. They all expressed the view of education as the most suitable field for women to work in because there is no mixing between the sexes. This indicates simply that Nadia, Samia and Hajer were socialized to be segregated from men.

This subsection has analyzed cultural beliefs regarding separation between genders and its negative impact on women's choices as to where they study and work. Chapter Eight offers further examination of Kuwaiti women's choice and agency (their freedom to choose and to make decisions freely for themselves without the imposition of their families) with respect to marriage and children. The rest of this chapter explores paradoxes facing women at work due to their gender identity. In the search for a deeper understanding of issues encountered by women managers due to their gender identity, the remaining three sections address a number of questions, including these: Do Kuwaiti female managers need to act like men to earn the same recognition? Do they need to act like men to control employees? Do they need to hide their gender identity in the organization to avoid discrimination? What are the features of successful Kuwaiti female managers? Why do Kuwaiti female managers dislike working with women and prefer to work with men, in spite of the gender issues and the segregation system practiced in the country?

## 7.3 Women's identity at work

Some Western studies referred to in Chapters Two and Three, such as those by Reay and Ball (2000), Kyriakidou (2011), Powell et al. (2009) and Chugh and Sahgal (2007), have concluded that gender obstacles in management affect women's identity, causing them to abandon their femininity and to act like men in order to succeed in their managerial roles. Similarly, Forrest (1989) argues that to gain access to managerial positions, women must think, talk and dress like men. My findings differ from these in that all but twenty-four of the twenty-seven participants stressed that Kuwaiti culture forbids women to act or appear like men; therefore they do not act like men. Similarly, Jamali and Nejati (2009) claim that Arab women aspiring to managerial positions do not have the option to gain more power and authority by acting like men, as it is forbidden in Islam.

The data collected during this study is complex and contradictory insofar as many participants stated that it is forbidden to act like men, whereas nonetheless emphasizing that women managers need to be aggressive and strict in order to be successful. They also indicated that they covered their bodies to hide their differences by wearing formal, thick, dark clothes. To this extent, the findings are consistent with the Western studies mentioned above, while contrasting with Jamali and Nejati (2009). The following subsections explore various problematic aspects of Kuwaiti women's identities at work.

### 7.3.1 Acting like men

Most interviewees said that it was not right or legitimate for me, as a Kuwaiti woman, to ask them if they needed to act like men to earn the same recognition in the workplace. I therefore asked the question in different ways, to show the participants that I did not mean to ask them about their sexuality or appearance. It was extremely difficult for me to push participants into discussing how their gender identity impacted them at work. When I asked Maia, for instance, whether she needed to act like a man to earn the same recognition, I noted that the interviewee perceived my question in a negative way. She looked at me for nearly two minutes, before saying "*I did not expect such a question*", then answered it by saying simply: *"Never. I do not act like a man because I was created a female.*"

Marwa stated that she did not act like a man, but on the other hand she dealt with employees in a very formal and serious manner. She expressed a feeling of anxiety that being a female manager, male workers could perceive her in a negative way. Marwa stated that she acted aggressively with male workers to avoid their stereotypical attitude towards her: *"I don't give any of these employees the opportunity to exploit me because of my gender".*

Like Maia and Marwa, Samia stated that she did not act like a man or adopt the features of men, due to social and religious beliefs: *"No! In our culture as in our religion, it is not permissible for women to emulate men...*". On the other hand, Samia mentioned that she never wore makeup, as this would make her appear feminine in front of male workers. When I asked her to explain why revealing her femininity to male employees would be a problem, she refused to answer the question. I think that she was reluctant to say that appearing feminine could lead to

gender discrimination or sexual harassment. Nevertheless, Kuwaiti women cannot speak openly about sexual harassment, as social beliefs preclude openness on this matter.

Arwa too reported that she did not act like a man or adopt the features of men due to cultural beliefs. She also indicated that she wore formal, dark clothes and did not use makeup at work, being *"conscious of its impact on male employees"*. I asked Arwa what sort of impact she would expect from male colleagues if she appeared feminine. She indicated in a few words that appearing too feminine would reduce the respect she received from other employees. What is meant by 'too feminine' in the Kuwaiti context is wearing bright or tight clothes that reveal the topography of the female body, using makeup to appear more beautiful, wearing perfume or speaking softly and indulgently. Kuwaiti cultural norms require a woman to hide her body and femininity in public spaces and to be formal with men, in order to avoid problems with her family and with the community, which sees women who flaunt their femininity as bad women not deserving of respect.

Safiya was the only participant who spoke at length about her reasons for not wanting to appear feminine in the workplace:

> *I always respect myself and wear the abaya (traditional dress that covers the whole body). I do not wear makeup either and do not talk a lot so that I do not lose other employees' respect. Wearing decent traditional dress makes me feel confident and does not sell me to men looking for cheap gazes over my body, because I do not like to be looked at by men in an indecent manner.... Tight clothes and makeup usually draw the attention of men in the workplace, leading to endless and needless problems for women. For this reason, I neither put on clothes giving details of the shape of my body, nor do I wear makeup in front of male colleagues.*

In general terms, most of the interviewees said that they concealed their bodies and their gender differences in the workplace to avoid gender problems. Similarly, Trethewey (1999) found that women in managerial roles in the USA were judged in relation to their appearance and clothes. Her participants therefore stressed the importance of hiding their bodies by wearing formal dress, and speaking in a very formal way with employees, in order to feel confident and to reduce gender discrimination. In a study of women at work in the UK, Wajcman (1998, p. 111) also found that their clothing should

> ... avoid drawing attention to her body but not ape the male business suit either. She must not be seen leaving a business meeting to go to the toilet, nor should she be seen purchasing a sanitary tampon from the women's toilet, because this action reminds witnesses she may have menstrually related moods. She should be careful that the language she uses is not about bodies...

These are examples of conflict problems facing women in managerial roles due to their gender differences. Women are considered different as workers because of their relation to the domestic sphere and because their bodies are sexualized, which in the Western context may lead them to act or to dress like men in order to reduce gender-related problems (Fernando, 2012). However, women who display masculinity could be penalized for not being feminine enough, whereas if they behave in a feminine way they will be perceived as ineffective managers. In this way, female managers in Western organisations are in double bind as to whether they adopt masculinity to reduce gender issues or behave like women. This choice does not arise in the Kuwaiti context, where women cannot adopt the features of men to achieve success at work, because religion, culture and Kuwaiti law do not allow it. This examination of the ways in which women in managerial position can avoid the negative consequences of gender differences in the workplace and of how they might dress to succeed has not mentioned any prior Arab studies of these issues, because I was not able to find any such research literature, a gap which the present study addresses.

Before ending this subsection it is worth noting that only three participants, Jamila, Basma and Alia, said that it was not important to act like men to succeed in a managerial role. They believed that there were no problems for women being managers. They also suggested that female characteristics such as being caring, emotional and sensitive had helped them to interact usefully with employees, both male and female, and to earn their respect, thus promoting their success in management.

Remarkably, this research found that participants strongly rejected the notion that they might act like men, because they saw it as simply unacceptable for women in Kuwaiti society to say 'I act like a man to earn success'. On the other hand, the majority of interviewees described themselves as strict and aggressive managers. My participants explained that to be successful in the organization they had to adopt a style associated with male management. They stated that being strict reduced the

gender stereotyping that they might face, either from men or from other women in the organization. The following subsection examines the participants' characterization of a successful manager.

### 7.3.2 Characteristics of the successful Kuwaiti female manager

When I asked the interviewees to describe the distinctive features of a successful female manager, it was surprising that twenty-one of them mentioned the importance of being strict, strong and aggressive. For them, being a woman in Kuwait meant having little power, poor knowledge, low strength and high family orientation, which might affect how they were perceived as managers by their employees, who would be more likely to adopt negative behaviour at work because of their perception of female managers as weak. My participants believed that adopting a male managerial style, i.e. being inflexible, strict and aggressive, had helped them to reduce negative attitudes and behaviour towards work among their employees. Thus, being hard and aggressive was seen as effective management. This finding is inconsistent with those of Western researchers such as Carlson and Perrewe (1999), Mauno et al. (2006) and Eversole et al. (2012), who identify managerial support and flexibility in the workplace as significant characteristics which tend to increase employee commitment and to reduce negative attitudes and behaviour at work. It is also inconsistent with Eastern research such as that of Jamali and Nejati (2009) and Jamali et al. (2010), who found that successful women managers were characterised as independent, hard-working, persistent, ambitious, motivated, responsible and determined.

An example of the unexpected responses on this matter was that of Salwa, who listed the most characteristic personal traits that helped her to be a successful manager: *"I am very strict and demanding. For me, work is work*", adding that generally, *"female managers have to be strong and strict in order to be successful"*. She explained that being strict with both male and female employees was necessary to avoid gender issues such as negative attitudes from employees toward her as a female manager.

Like Salwa, Amal said *"I am very strict and hard with employees... but I can be flexible at times with outstanding workers"*. She asserted that women managers in general want to conceal the fact that they are women and weak, so they tend to act even more strictly and severely than male managers. Thus, women managers adopt

the characteristics of men in order to modify people's perceptions of them and so to survive and fit into the managerial role.

Similarly Samia, Fajer, Manal, Rema, Nora and Asma indicated that they were successful managers because they had an eye for detail and were very straightforward, strict in their decisions and sometimes aggressive. They believed that women managers need to be strict and aggressive in dealing with employees to control their negative workplace attitudes and behaviour, such as absenteeism and poor performance. It is notable that Samia, Fajer, Manal, Rema, Nora and Asma were all very reluctant to explain why presenting their feminine characteristics to their employees would lead to problems. I think that the participants were reticent in their responses because they wanted to preserve their image in front of the researcher, especially as they had presented themselves at the beginning of the interviews as powerful women. Thus, some of the participants found it difficult to discuss issues related to gender identity.

In contrast, there were only six participants who indicated that they were flexible, supportive, open and helpful and that this was the reason behind their success as managers. They reported that being supportive and flexible helped them to maximise their employees' commitment to the organization. For example, Fatima said:

> *I am helpful, open, demanding, meticulous, and disciplined... but I sometimes take the personal circumstances of staff on board because my theory is that whenever there is flexibility when dealing with employees, they will end up performing better.*

Wasan too stated that being a good listener, flexible and supportive made her a successful manager. She noted the importance of flexibility to increase employees' commitment to their work:

> *I have some golden rules which include saying the right things, using the right words and being flexible with employees. Doing this leads to increased achievement and job loyalty.*

These findings suggest that a majority of participants did believe that a successful manager needs to possess masculine traits, as Schein (1975) found in the USA. However, although most interviewees stated that they were strong, strict and aggressive as managers, they also reported that they would rather work under male

managers than female colleagues, precisely because women tended to be too strict and aggressive. To gain a better understanding of this apparent contradiction, the next subsection explores the interviewees' viewpoints and experiences of the general characteristics of Kuwaiti men and women managers. It then analyses the participants' interpretations of why Kuwaiti men in managerial roles support employed women and do not discriminate against them due to their reproductive bodies or their family circumstances, whereas they do discriminate against managerial women.

### 7.3.3 Characteristics of Kuwaiti male and female managers

Throughout the interview process, most participants stated that they preferred to work with male managers rather than females. They offered general comparisons between the characteristics of Kuwaiti men and women managers to explain this preference in spite of the segregation system imposed by Kuwaiti society. Additionally, they saw Kuwaiti male managers as flexible, kind, considerate, understanding, relaxed, soft and sympathetic, whereas their female counterparts were seen as inflexible, demanding, meticulous, strict, aggressive and arrogant with female employees. My findings are completely contrary to those of many Western researchers, such as Lahtinen and Wilson (1994), Duehr and Bono (2006), Sikdar and Mitra (2012) and Ely et al. (2011), who found men to be more aggressive, risk-taking, forceful, rational, decisive and autonomous, whereas women were relatively kind, caring, relational, understanding, modest and indecisive.

My findings are broadly in keeping with research conducted in China by Frank (2001), who found that Chinese women were less likely to prefer to work for women than for men. However, the participants in Frank's study described women managers as being more incompetent, slower, weaker, more lenient, more democratic, less active and more friendly than male managers, in contrast to the present study.

While participants in this study spoke about negative attitudes and behaviour by male employees towards them as female managers, they also described male managers as flexible and supportive, reporting that they did not stereotype or discriminate against female workers in lower positions in the organization. Several interviewees offered their interpretations of why managerial men seemed to support female employees. Asma, for instance, spoke of her experience when working with men and women

managers. She found Kuwaiti male managers more lenient with employed females and less likely to discriminate against them due to their maternal biology than Kuwaiti women managers. She explained that *"the nature of education in our society makes men empathise with women as weaker creatures"*.

However, there is an apparent contradiction in the finding that Kuwaiti men tend to express sympathy with female employees in the workplace but do not sympathise with their own sisters and spouses. Kuwaiti men play two different roles: one at home and the other at work. At home, they are imposing, demanding and strict with their sisters, wives and even mothers, whereas in the workplace they are relaxed, helpful and open with employed women, as if they were completely different people.

Like Asma, Safiya offered a comparison between the characteristics of Kuwaiti men and women managers, concluding that men were more supportive to female employees, because they *"feel sorry for women being vulnerable and because they are drained at home"*.

It is difficult to understand why Kuwaiti men exhibit different characteristics at home and at work when they deal with women, but this could be due to cultural beliefs that men should control their sisters', wives' and mothers' bodies, as the family might suffer shame and bad reputation if its women speak or establish friendly relationships with men outside the family. Therefore, a possible interpretation is that men discriminate against women relatives at home, as a way to control their sexuality, while in the workplace they do not need to control women's bodies, so they show more leeway toward them.

Similarly Nora, Amal, Arwa and Mounira all spoke at length about the characteristics of Kuwaiti men and women managers. They reported that men managers in their organizations did not discriminate against women employees because of their gender differences; indeed, they supported them because of their multiple responsibilities towards the family. For example, Nora said:

> *A man manager can be considerate of women's problems like menstrual cycle and pregnancy and family commitments, which makes them more lenient. For the duration of my work—nine years—in different departments, I have not come across a man who was not flexible with female employees.*

> *Men generally think that women should not be given a lot of responsibilities at work because of her family commitments.*

Amal made the same point:

> *Men managers understand the position of women, because of pregnancy, mothers' responsibilities, the menstrual cycle and childcare, which they take into account when they have to deal with female employees.*

This shows that many of the participants believed that Kuwaiti men in managerial roles do not discriminate against women because of their gender or their maternal biology. They found that male managers were more supportive than females and that this helped female employees to avoid excessive stress at work.

It is notable that Fatima was the only participant who said that she would rather work with women than men; her reason was that she wished to avoid any sort of contact with men because of her cultural beliefs and because her husband did not want her to intermix with men at work.

One kind of question I asked interviewees was about themselves as women managers and how they dealt with employees who were pregnant or mothers. I did so because I had noted that the participants had reported their experience of male managers as being more supportive of low-ranked females in the workplace than women managers were. Thus, it was logical to understand their style of management and how they treated other women in the organization. However, when interviewees were asked how they treated female employees under their management, most of them appeared nervous and either did not answer the question or in a few cases responded in a general way. A few women managers did reply directly and all of these appeared to have negative attitudes towards pregnant employees. For example, when I asked Mariam how she treated pregnant workers, she said:

> *Pregnant women do not deserve my respect, because I also fall pregnant and still come to work even in the worst possible scenarios and against all odds.*

Alia gave a similar response regarding pregnant employees who asked her for flexibility or time off:

*If an employee is pregnant and she pretends to be sick, I would say 'I fell pregnant myself'... so pregnancy is not an excuse to be off work or to give flexibility.*

Maia also said that women know and understand well the type of circumstances they face and what they can and cannot do. She considered that pregnancy could not be classified as a disease. Thus, she stated that she would not offer pregnant employees special flexibility or support. Finally she remarked that *"a woman cannot fool another woman"*.

It was surprising to me as a woman that Mariam, Alia and Maia appeared to take no account of individual differences regarding these women's abilities and health circumstances. They seemed to forget that some pregnant women suffer from high blood pressure or diabetes, while others risk miscarriage if they work too hard.

In contrast, Salma spoke about her own experience of being pregnant: "*I became physically and psychologically exhausted and couldn't come to work, so I took long-term leave.*" When asked why she had not asked the manager for flexibility instead of taking extended leave, she described how her manager would deal with her:

*If I were to say that I am pregnant and feeling tired, she would say that she also went through the same and was once pregnant herself. If there were any family issues, she would say that she has family issues herself. So you see, there is no flexibility from female managers to female workers at all.*

Similarly, Dana described her experience of being pregnant when she occupied a low position in the organization and how other women managers treated pregnant employees.

*Pregnancy was very tiring for me, because the pressure of work did not ease off at all. On the contrary, it was increasing by the day. Whenever I complained about pressure and not being able to keep going, my manager would reply by saying it was my decision to work and so I had to keep up with the whole workload... All-female departments in Kuwait seem to have a complex against pregnant women. When I was head of department in two different schools, I discovered that administrators were very oppressive and resentful towards pregnant employees, including the principal, who used to undermine pregnant women in such a provocative and negative manner...*

The last participant to describe her interactions with employed mothers was Safiya:

*For me, if an employee complained to me about her struggle with her children... I would simply say that I was also drained and struggled with my own children, but it did not deter me from working to the best of my ability and did not make me complain all the time about my family commitments... I am a woman and I understand the psychology of women and their character...*

Safiya appeared to ignore the differences between women's situations and that there are employed mothers who have eight children, or disabled children, or divorced women with children, or widows with children, who need much more support and flexibility in fulfilling their responsibilities.

This last section has revealed some contradictory findings: the participants preferred to work under male managers because women were inflexible, strict and hard, but when I asked them how they themselves treated other women in the organization, especially those who were pregnant or mothers, their responses suggested that they were neither flexible nor supportive, because they saw pregnancy and motherhood as no good reasons to expect flexibility. Significantly, this indicates how women managers discipline other women at work in the Kuwaiti context.

## 7.4 Summary

The findings discusses here are complicated and one unexpected finding is that women in managerial roles appeared to stereotype other women, while male managers did not, according to the women managers I interviewed. This chapter has nevertheless revealed much evidence of gender stereotypes and negative attitudes from both men and women towards women managers, whereas the participants saw having a family and children as not harmful to their own career progression.

Some of the most significant findings concern women's self and professional identities. It was clear that women in Kuwait were unable to adopt overtly male characteristics or wear men's clothes, because of religious, cultural and legal prohibitions on adopting the features of the opposite gender, but they did adopt some characteristics of male managers, in that they tended to appear as strong, aggressive and inflexible as possible. In other words, the participants adopted a middle way, neither acting like women, because they wanted to avoid stereotypes and negative attitudes, nor acting like men or fully adopting male features, for the above reasons. Instead, they were aggressive and strict while preserving their feminine identity and

women's clothes, in order to fit in at work and to avoid problems. This finding makes my study novel because no previous researcher has reported it in Kuwait. This is the first study to suggest that to avoid gender problems at work and to achieve success, women choose to act neither like men nor like women, but to create a new identity by adopting a position between the two.

Another fascinating aspect of the study is the relationships between women; the reason why Kuwaiti women managers stereotype other women is an open question, but one explanation could be that they are brought up in a culture where much more attention is given to males than to females. This may perhaps lead women to disrespect other women and even to hate being woman. Chapter Eight, which follows, explores further how Kuwaiti women make sense of their world, their bodies and their feelings about their gender.

Interviewing women in managerial roles has allowed me to make general observations and to identify general patterns in the barriers facing women in Kuwaiti society due to their gender and bodily differences. I collected more data using a life history methodology in order to further analyse the issues facing women due to their gender roles in the Kuwaiti space. In the following chapter, I present the findings of the life history interviews with four women, eliciting in-depth information on their experiences and feelings about their gender with respect to their pregnant bodies, the experience of childbirth, shape and space.

# Chapter Eight

# Choice, Agency and the Pregnant Body in the Kuwaiti Space

## 8.1 Introduction

Longhurst (2001) suggests that focusing on the topic of women's self-image, for example, their relationship with their own bodies, offers a way of prompting a new understanding of power, knowledge and social relationships between women and their environment. Bailey (2001) argues that the physical experience of pregnancy and childbirth can offer a fascinating opportunity to explore the relationship between the body and the self, particularly the gendered aspects of that self. Fingerson (2005) and Warren and Brewis (2004) put forward the idea that experiences of pregnancy both shed light on and fundamentally affect a woman's relationship with her body. They state that there is increasing scholarly literature which focuses on the female body in its social context because the body's power is negotiated through relationships, language and disciplinary practices, rather than being an essentialist element that a person, group or gender does or does not possess.

In addition, there is a vast amount of Western literature on women's bodies in relation to pregnancy, childbirth and sexuality; for instance, Gatrell (2013) explores how pregnancy negotiates the borders between the private world of reproduction and the public context of the workplace for managerial women in the UK context. On the other hand, Warren and Brewis (2004) examine female body image in general terms of size and shape during pregnancy. Moreover, Bryant and Schofield (2007) studied the way in which the body is implicated and makes use of feminine sexual identity. However, despite the extensive research on women's bodies in the Western context, published studies on women's body image are almost non-existent in Middle Eastern culture overall, especially in the Kuwaiti context.

My own interpretation of why there is no literature in the Middle East about women's experiences of the body during, for example, pregnancy is that this is due to religious beliefs and cultural norms, which perceive and distinguish the female body as a private thing which should be covered and hidden. It is therefore considered inappropriate in this context to talk about, write about, or describe it in

public. Nevertheless, my study aims to contribute to this under-researched topic in the Middle East. This chapter is consequently concerned with the experiences of four Kuwaiti women of pregnancy and childbirth, to explore the relationship between the body and self within the material context, family, marriage, gender and social space, using life history methodology to advance knowledge produced by the Arab world, in a field hitherto dominated by Western knowledge producers.

Bearing such issues in mind, I argued throughout this research that women's experiences are socially constructed in ways that differ from one culture to another and body is just one area where these cultural differences may be expressed. Inside the Kuwaiti context there is little known about Kuwaiti women's lives. Thus, my objective in this chapter is to explore in depth the life history of four Kuwaiti women, to build an understanding of their way of life. This exploration is informed by my own experiences as a Kuwaiti woman and by my desire to explore the complexities of my own self-identity, in relation to those which are inherent in women similar to myself.

The chapter will therefore begin with an overview of the personal details of the participants. I will then explore their experiences of pregnancy and childbirth, their perceptions of their own bodies and also of how their pregnant bodies influence the Kuwaiti space. Taking this further to include the intervention of the wider society, I will examine these women's freedom of choice, specifically their ability to make decisions freely for themselves without the imposition of their families, concerning such matters as whether or not to marry, have children, or wear the veil.

## 8.2 Biographical details of the participants

For the purpose of preserving their anonymity, the names of participants have been changed here to Sara, Aseel, Omaima and Lulwah. The women I interviewed are not representative of a large group because of my intention to deeply analyse the personal experiences of being a woman in a male-dominated culture.

### 8.2.1 Sara

I interviewed Sara at her mother's house. She was 27 years old, married and worked as a teacher. She had two children: a daughter two years old and a son of six months. Before the interview began, she introduced me to her children and other members of

her family, being her father, mother, two sisters and one brother. She was raised in a conservative environment, her father and brother being very reserved. She was married at 24 years old to a man more than ten years older than her, whom she described as conservative, uncommunicative, dominant and aggressive. Sara talked at length about her life before and after being married and what discrimination she faced at the hands of her husband because of her gender. She also spoke in great detail about her experiences and feelings concerning marriage, the female body, pregnancy, giving birth, her family, husband and children, and the prospects for her future.

### 8.2.2 Aseel

I interviewed Aseel, a 25-year-old teacher, at my family's house. She was married with two daughters and in her fourth month of pregnancy with her third child. Aseel described her life before marriage, stating that her traditionally minded parents had treated her and her five sisters as inferior because of their gender. She also spoke in great detail about the violence she had experienced at the hands of her father at the age of 13, when he discovered she had made telephone contact with a boy. Her father then forced her to marry at the age of 18 and Aseel spoke in depth of her negative feelings regarding her marriage, husband and children, as well as her wish to be divorced. Finally, this participant described her experiences of pregnancy and childbirth, her feelings about her body shape and how having children had adversely affected her life.

### 8.2.3 Omaima

Like Aseel, Omaima came to my home to be interviewed. Aged 24 and working as a teacher, she had been married for six years and had three daughters, aged from three to six years. Her family, whom she described as very conservative and patriarchal, consisted of her elderly father, three stepmothers and 26 brothers and sisters. Her own mother had died when she was nine years old. This interviewee told me about her life after the death of her mother and how her brothers had directed her life. She then spoke of her married life: her problems and both her negative and positive experiences of pregnancy and childbirth, highlighting the discrimination she had faced from society for having given birth to three girls. Finally, Omaima recounted her feelings about her gender and future aspirations.

### 8.2.4 Lulwah

Lulwah was 33 years old married and also a teacher. She had three sons and a daughter and her family included her father, mother, three sisters and four brothers. Her mother was described in the interview as a strong woman, interested in education, who had raised her brothers to be domineering and authoritarian in their treatment of the four sisters. Lulwah stated that her father took no interest in raising children and did not believe in educating girls. Her mother and brothers were also highly conservative and kept her in a closed environment, deciding what she should wear, when she could go out and with whom. Lulwah had been married twice: once at 18 and again at the age of 27, her first husband being just 19 years old when they married, and the second, 15 years older than her. She spoke of the problems faced in both marriages due to the ages of her husbands and the differences between her outlook on life and theirs. This had even manifested in violence at the hands of her first husband. Lulwah also referred to the difficulties of being a divorced woman in Kuwaiti society and her experiences and feelings regarding pregnancy and childbirth.

The above section justifies my choice of sample size and gives a brief overview of the life history interviewees and the topics addressed. In the following sections, I examine my participants' stories in greater detail, I start with experiences of pregnancy and childbirth.

## 8.3 Experiences of pregnancy and childbirth

As mentioned previously in the introduction to this chapter, a woman's perceptions of her own body infer a great deal about her own self-identity and this is particularly significant in the physical experience of pregnancy and childbirth, especially where gendered aspects of that self are concerned (Bailey 2001; Longhurst 2001). Throughout the interviews, I therefore encouraged the participants to reflect on such experiences and found that pregnancy was commonly perceived by the participants as resulting in negative experiences, e.g. a loss of firmness in the breasts, with accompanying obesity and stretch marks transforming the female body and making it less feminine. In fact, all four women spoke at length about their experiences of pregnancy in relation to married life, which is the first topic to be addressed in this section.

### 8.3.1 Pregnancy, married life and the extended family

When I asked Sara to describe her experience of pregnancy, she initially spoke briefly of looking forward with happiness to becoming a mother. However, her tone soon changed dramatically as she recounted how her husband had been angry and uncomfortable about her first pregnancy, especially after discovering she was carrying a baby girl. He repeatedly told others not to congratulate them about their pending parenthood, because the child was female. He then left her at her family's house and did not contact her for a month, purely due to the fact she was about to produce a daughter for him. After the birth of her daughter, Sara immediately tried for another child, in the desire to give her husband a son. Consequently, she fell pregnant again within six months, terrified that this baby would be another baby girl. Nevertheless, four months into the pregnancy, she was relieved to discover her second baby was a boy.

Later in the interview, I invited Sara to compare the attitudes of her husband to her two different pregnancies. She took a deep breath, interrupted me forcefully and said she believed her husband had discriminated between their children on the grounds of gender, even before they were born. This interviewee noted that during her first pregnancy, on discovering she was carrying a girl, her husband was angry and uncomfortable; he did not touch her belly, take her to medical appointments or give her any money to buy clothes for their daughter. In contrast, he was delighted about her second pregnancy: helpful and supportive, giving her money to buy baby clothes and paying for the birth at a private hospital.

I also asked Sara about the treatment she had received from other people around her during her pregnancy and following the birth. She replied that her family had not taken care of her when she was pregnant and this was considered to be quite a normal reaction and only what would one expect in the Kuwaiti context, where pregnancy was not seen as anything special. The same even applied after the birth, which made her depressed.

This last response from Sara was in stark contrast to Aseel's experience, who reported that her family had treated her like a queen and were happy to help her in any way. Her mother and sisters were delighted she was pregnant and her father was

happy because she was carrying his first grandchild. However, Aseel's response to my request to speak about her feelings regarding her first pregnancy was unexpected:

> *I was very scared and prayed all the time to God not to let me fall pregnant and give my husband a child, because I never loved him... My period was late, so I told my mother and we went together to the clinic where I took a pregnancy test. The doctor congratulated me and looked very happy for me, but I was crying my heart out. I was desperate...*

When I enquired how her husband had treated her during pregnancy, Aseel smiled and said he had insisted she spend the entire duration at her parents' house. This seemed strange to me, so I repeated the question: had she actually spent the whole nine months at her family's house? Smiling again, Aseel confirmed this, stating that she had not returned to her husband's house, until he had sent for her. This participant went on to describe how she had not actually lived with her husband very much during the marriage as he only fetched her from her family home when he wanted her to fall pregnant and would then take her back once she discovered she was pregnant. Aseel therefore revealed that sex was very limited in her life, with her husband restricting their sex life to specific times in the month, in order to ensure conception. His aim in their sex life was therefore nothing to do with their pleasure, but purely to produce children.

Aseel was very nervous while giving me this information, providing a frank and somewhat heart-rending account of her experiences, which sometimes brought her to the verge of tears and which I found moving. While talking about her experiences, the thread of the narrative would move from her father to the subject of her husband and then later, reflecting on her narrative, she asked me what she could do to change her life.

When I invited Aseel to tell me about her experiences of childbirth and her attitude to her first daughter, she replied that after 41 weeks of pregnancy, there were no signs of impending childbirth. The doctor discovered that her cervix was blocked and she was advised to walk a great deal, which she did, but to no avail. With no change after several days, this interviewee went back to her doctor, who advised her to have sexual intercourse to facilitate the onset of labour. However, her husband refused to let her return to their home and would not have sex with her, which meant she had to

have a spinal injection to open the cervix within 24 hours. Despite this, her baby still did not emerge and she was left exhausted, resulting in a Caesarean section.

Aseel then described how her husband had been unsupportive, even on the final day of her pregnancy:

> *My husband was not by my side at the hospital, but asleep at home. He asked my mother to let him know once everything was over. I was struggling all that time at hospital and the suffering continued with a Caesarean section, but my husband was nowhere to be seen, either during my pregnancy or my time in hospital. He virtually missed out on my suffering. He only came to the hospital after the delivery... He was very happy with his daughter, but he never looked at me...*

Aseel also spoke frankly about her second experience of pregnancy and childbirth. She had stayed at her parents' house for a year after the birth of her first daughter, until her husband ordered her to return to the marital home, which she did. I asked her to explain why she had gone back to him, despite not wanting to be with him (see section 8.4.1). Aseel explained that her father and mother had insisted she leave their home and go to him. She added that she and her husband then had sex seven times in two months, as a result of which she became pregnant. At this, her husband sent her to live with her parents again.

Aseel spoke of being exhausted during her second pregnancy and of other changes she endured, including morning sickness, headaches and mood swings. She expressed her negative feelings towards her second pregnancy, especially after discovering she was carrying a second girl, which "was sad news for me because I wanted a baby boy". Her negative feelings led her to neglect her health: omitting to take vitamins or check her health during the entire pregnancy. Her second baby, like her first, was born by Caesarean section. Aseel described in detail her physical and emotional feelings after the delivery:

> *I was exhausted after the operation. I could not do anything or even sit down. I felt a lot of pain in my cervix. I did not like my baby... I cried so much and my body was aching everywhere... I felt helpless... I wished that all I was going through would turn out to be a dream, but it was reality... My baby cried all the time, which made matters worse for me...*

Aseel admitted she had not felt any love for her daughter when she was pregnant or after giving birth, but her feelings changed 24 days after the delivery, because the

baby was found to be suffering due to a life-threatening lack of oxygen. Aseel was afraid she might lose her, especially after the baby had been in an incubator for 15 days:

> *I never wanted to have the child when I was pregnant, but this feeling suddenly changed after seeing my baby suffering from a lack of oxygen. I felt as if I was going to lose her at any time. I stopped hating her and replaced that feeling with unstoppable affection... Thank God, after a period of treatment, my daughter recovered and we returned to my parents' house...*

Aseel stayed with her parents for another year, finally asking her husband to take her back. There were two reasons for this request: she wanted her daughters to live a normal life with two parents and she also felt the need to escape from her father, who had insisted on keeping her in a very closed environment. Nevertheless, her husband refused to take her back, because he was in a relationship with another woman, which made her extremely upset and angry. Aseel argued with him over this, but he slapped her and told her that as a man, he could do whatever he wanted. She then asked for a divorce, but her parents intervened and rejected this suggestion, telling her it was her fault and she should not have said a word or complained about his actions:

> *It was not a problem for them if he had affairs with other women, because all men did, but if I did the same as him, they'd kill me as a punishment, because I am a woman... My father took me to my husband's house and when my husband came in and realised that my father had brought me to him, he started laughing and asked why I had bothered to come back to him. I felt utterly humiliated, but what could I do?... I had to swallow it and move on, but I wish I had never done so, because he seemed to push his luck even further... After 12 days of not talking to each other, he came back for sexual intercourse... I had to respond to his whims, because my father would not want to see me divorced.*

I have quoted Aseel at length, because her words have a strong emotional resonance for me, although I cannot pinpoint exactly why. Her narrative revealed her conflicts and the serious problems she faced. She could not divorce her husband, because her family did not want her to be a divorced woman. She did not like her husband, but was forced by her family to live with him in a marriage which was not often a marriage, as she spent so much time living with her parents. However, it was impossible for her to leave and rent a house to live in alone, because this is unacceptable in Kuwaiti culture. Moreover, she was denied a sex life, because her

husband was in a relationship with another woman. In addition, despite her antipathy to having more children, she was obliged to by her husband (see 8.4.2). All these conflicts facing Aseel made it difficult to imagine what she could do to resolve them and live in peace, or indeed how the cultural beliefs that diminish women's rights, belittle their status and demean their lives could ever change.

Different problems related to cultural beliefs were faced by the third participant, Omaima, who became pregnant during the first months of her marriage at the age 17. She spoke about the negative changes experienced during pregnancy, which in her case involved lethargy, tiredness and the appearance of many wrinkles, while her belly became large and lost its shape, and her face looked tired and pale. She then expressed what she felt when the baby began to move: "My baby was wiggling inside me... It was such a thrill to feel it moving... I was counting the number of movements the baby made every single day...".

When I asked Omaima about the support she had received from her husband during the pregnancy, she replied that although he was a supportive person, she had noted changes in him: he became angry, stopped talking to her and showed no interest in her or the baby inside her. While he gave no reason for this, she believed he was repelled by her appearance and did not like the shape of her belly.

I then enquired whether the people around her supported her or showed any kind of encouragement during the pregnancy or after the birth. Like Sara, Omaima said that the people around her did not pay any attention to her pregnancy and no one was there for her, because in the eyes of society, being pregnant was merely a commonplace occurrence: all women were expected to get pregnant at some point.

Omaima also explained how she had an ultrasound scan in the fifth month and learned she was carrying a baby girl, which made her happy, but elicited no reaction from her husband. She then spoke about the childbirth experience, stating that she had not known what to expect or do, except that it would involve considerable pain in her abdomen and back. In fact, it was during the 35th week of the pregnancy and while revising hard for an exam that she felt some intermittent pain in her belly, which came and went every three hours. This was normal and tolerable at first, but late into the night it became impossible to bear, so she called her sister and described her symptoms. On her sister's advice, Omaima's husband took her to hospital,

where, after a brief examination, a doctor told her that her cervix was open and she was ready to deliver.

Omaima spoke explicitly about the positive feelings she and her husband experienced during the birth, emphasising that her husband was very supportive and happy, unlike Sara and Aseel's husbands. After 23 hours of agonising pain, she gave birth to a daughter, whom she described to me as being "very beautiful and as white as snow".

Omaima became pregnant again six months after the birth of her first baby, because her husband was against her taking oral contraceptives. She deeply resented her second pregnancy because she was studying and needed to use the chemistry labs at college, where the policy prohibited pregnant students from entering.

> *I cried because I could not proceed with my studies and because the administrators did not want me to use the chemistry labs, fearing for my health.*

As a result of these negative feelings about her second pregnancy, Omaima did not bother going to hospital for regular check-ups, neglecting her health and omitting to take vitamins, because she was not as excited or enthusiastic as she had been about her first pregnancy.

When an ultrasound scan revealed that her second child was to be female, this interviewee and her husband were happy, in contrast to the experiences of Sara and Aseel. However, she found that other people in their respective families began to heap criticism on her as soon as they received this news, because the prospect of her having another daughter was unacceptable to them. Omaima therefore faced many attacks from the women around her, who appeared to believe the gender of the baby was somehow her responsibility. The worst attacks came from her mother-in-law, who threatened to have her son marry another woman if she failed to produce a son for him. Omaima was only 19 years old when she faced all these problems, but reported in the interview that thankfully, her husband was supportive and educated; he had stood up to the people around her, declaring he was happy with his baby girl and would not mind having several daughters.

Despite the above, Omaima still dreamed of having a son. However, two years after the birth of her second daughter, she became pregnant for a third time, again with a girl. Although her husband did not react negatively, Omaima was extremely upset, especially because her mother-in-law reprimanded her cruelly for failing yet again to produce a male grandchild. In her view, Omaima deserved to be punished and the best way to do this was to have her husband marry another woman. The mother-in-law became an obstacle to the stability and unity of Omaima's family and caused her repeated problems, sometimes by threatening to bring in a second wife and sometimes by calling her names for failing to give birth to a male child.

Lastly, Omaima reported being made to feel uncomfortable by many of the people around her, who repeatedly asked her if and when she planned to have another child. This made her feel she had no control over her own life:

> *The community where I live sees a woman's main function as giving birth. We are baby-making machines... Everywhere I go, the only concern for people is to see me carrying a boy... I don't like the way people try to control and interfere with my life.*

Omaima's narrative clearly illustrates how women discriminate against other women as a result of the strong cultural belief that a mother should produce baby boys. If she fails to do so, she is seen as failing to fulfil her duty to her husband and his family, which in turn can lead to problems for her, such as her husband being encouraged to marry another woman who can provide him with a son. This means that a woman is seen purely as a device for producing children – particularly male children. I see the prevailing belief that boys are superior to girls as leading women to hate their baby girls even before they are born. Gender discrimination in Kuwait therefore appears to be complicated by many factors, including cultural beliefs regarding gender roles, the differing status of men and women and the idea that girls will bring shame on the family, ruining their reputation. All of these factors work together to envelop women with discrimination.

The fourth interviewee, Lulwah, reported a different experience and a different set of problems related to Kuwaiti cultural beliefs, being the only one of the four who had experienced divorce. At the beginning of her interview, I noted that she was rather reserved and unwilling to share her experience openly, so I tried hard to engage with her empathically. Hence, rather than pushing her to tell me things she did not want to

talk about, I talked about myself and my own problems, so as to reduce her nervousness. After a while, I saw her relax more and was ultimately surprised to find that she talked more than me.

I asked her to tell me about her experience of becoming a mother, to which she replied that she had been happy about her first experience of pregnancy, but had not bothered about medical check-ups or taking care of her health, as she was having problems with her husband. Lulwah spoke about the violence she had suffered at his hands, saying he was dangerous and would beat her constantly, even when she was pregnant, so her family had actually encouraged her to seek a divorce after two years of marriage.

When I invited Lulwah to describe her life as a divorced woman, she said it was worse than before, because everyone in her family treated her as if she had damaged their reputation in the community. They kept her under constant surveillance for fear she might have a sexual relationship with someone. They prevented her from having a mobile phone, because they thought she might try to make contact with men and they refused to let her drive a car, so that they could control her movements. They always insisted that one of her sisters accompany as a chaperone, wherever she went. Even though she was prepared to forego a sex life, Lulwah reacted to these many restrictions by agreeing to marry the first man who asked her, simply to escape from the prison to which her own family had confined her.

Later in the interview, I asked Lulwah about life with her second husband, but I noted that she was not interested in talking about him or her life with him. She simply stated that he was over 15 years older than her, that he suffered from ill health and that he had divorced four other women before marrying her. This interviewee admitted to not liking her husband, but strove to live with him anyway because she did not want to experience another divorce. She then moved on to speak passionately about pregnancy and how it had affected her health:

> *My teeth have decayed and really hurt... I had to have one out after each birth... I also began to become anaemic... My bones were giving me so much pain...*

I understood she wanted to change the subject, so I did not ask her again about her life with her second husband.

The analysis of data presented in this subsection indicates that women's experiences of the same life events can differ, even within the same culture. Three of the four participants indicated that being pregnant in Kuwait did not mean that people close to them would surround them with love, because being pregnant is perceived as something unremarkable. I also found that these women's negative relationships with their husbands had caused them to neglect their health and the wellbeing of their unborn children. These findings contrast, for example, with those of Longhurst (2001), who found that pregnant women in Hamilton, New Zealand tended to be viewed by lovers, husbands, partners, friends, family members, health workers and even strangers or themselves as being in a 'condition' where they had to take special care in order to protect the wellbeing of the foetus.

In the next section, I will analyse women's self-reporting of their body image during and after pregnancy because the body emerges as central to the life histories told to me. It seems that the body can be readily discussed as a means of making sense of the cultural self, especially during pregnancy, when it should not be neglected. This analysis will be followed by a personal reflection on my own experience of body image during pregnancy.

### 8.3.2 Narratives relating to body image during pregnancy

All four interviewees talked about the unpleasant physical changes which took place in their bodies during pregnancy and after childbirth. This is in keeping with Longhurst's findings (2001). For instance, Sara claimed:

> *My body changed so much during pregnancy... It became very dark... my hair started falling out and my face became pale... My eyes had deep black halos and some spots appeared on my face and red lines on my stomach, chest and upper thighs... I didn't like looking at myself in the mirror... I really hated myself... I do lose my sense of femininity during pregnancy and birth and I always say I wish I was a man...*

Sara explained that she felt uncomfortable with these changes and so tried to hide her body with loose clothes to avoid exposing its flaws to the people around her. She especially tried to hide her flaws from her husband, who thrived on criticising her and described in-depth the unpleasant changes experienced in her body after giving birth. Sara reported that she did not willingly breastfeed her children because she

"felt like a cow" and did not want anyone to see her doing so. Again, this particularly applied to her husband, who called her names and likened her to an animal.

Similarly, Aseel stated that after pregnancy, she tended to wear outfits which hid the more clearly visible features of her body, because she felt she was out of shape and the sight of her stomach or other contours of her body accentuated by close-fitting clothes, disgusted her. The interviewee then expressed how she felt after the birth, trying to come to terms with her belief that her body would no longer be beautiful, because of the changes it had undergone.

Like both Sara and Aseel, Omaima commented that during pregnancy:

> *I didn't wear clothes that would reveal my body... I didn't wear silky clothes or tight clothes... because I didn't like the shape of my large belly... even when I went to bed, I would wear loose clothes. It wasn't a good thing seeing my big ugly belly... If I looked in the mirror, I could only see my stomach... I didn't like the sight of my face either. I wanted it all to be over with as quickly as possible in order to resume my normal life.*

She then talked about her physical appearance after childbirth:

> *My body turned black... My belly stuck out and my skin went saggy... My pregnancy lines and marks did not disappear and my chest grew bigger and hurt a lot... It never appealed to me with milk flowing out all the time... My body was leaking all over the place. After childbirth, I was no longer in control of my body so I stopped breastfeeding straight away... I wanted to be leaking from one place and not in all directions!*

When I asked Omaima if she had really stopped breastfeeding in order to feel more in control of her body, she insisted that she really did not want to breastfeed her three daughters, but was forced to do so for the first few days of their lives, in order to relieve her breast pain.

Lulwah also reported that she did not like her breasts after giving birth, because they were very large and leaked, which made her feel "like a cow". Interestingly, this interviewee nevertheless produced a narrative of the importance of breastfeeding and stated that she did in fact breastfeed all of her children, making her the only one of the four life history interviewees to do so.

This focus on the participants' narratives concerning their pregnancy and childbirth experiences led me to reflect on my own experience of pregnancy. I remember how

happy I was about my first pregnancy, because it showed people I was a real woman. Kuwaiti culture views an infertile woman as a male tree that cannot produce fruit. Having been afraid I might be infertile, I was initially relieved to find out I was pregnant for the first time. However, after a few months, I noticed that I was tired, putting on weight and feeling stressed. In common with the interviewees, I found myself avoiding tight clothes that would show the shape of my body, which I saw as ugly and unfeminine. People around me, especially other women, offered no support. I once remember complaining to my family that pregnancy made me tired; to which they responded that all females fall pregnant, even cats in the street, so I had no grounds for complaint. I learned to remain silent. I did not breastfeed my baby and found that I hated my body after giving birth, because I felt like an animal. My body was leaking everywhere and I could not control it. Even though I was studying abroad, I gave birth to three children to fulfil society's expectations of my role as a child producer. Then, during my most recent pregnancy, I stood in front of the mirror and saw myself differently: I looked older than my actual age and felt I was not enjoying life. Indeed, I could not enjoy life to the full, because I was totally responsible for three children and society still expected me to produce even more, because it was considered to be my role as a female.

Malacrida and Boulton (2012) found in their study on childless women in the US that they viewed the female body in terms of animal behaviour, with the leakiness of the birth, described as 'icky', 'not pretty', 'gross' and a 'messy process'. Turner, (2003) found that childbirth, breast milk and menstrual blood are all seen as being associated with women's bodies and are considered disgusting by many people. Furthermore, Moore (2007) and Bryan (2003) discovered that the female body is frequently seen as a source of pollution. Therefore, in order to avoid 'polluting' public spaces, pregnant women, for example, needed to remain in a private space. Gatrell (2013) states that maternal 'leakage', such as bleeding, breast milk, amniotic fluids/breaking waters, vomiting and tears are regarded as inappropriate in the workplace (public spaces). Furthermore, pregnant women in public spaces are often seen as out of control of their bodies. The maternal body itself may even be treated as something abject at work, since it transgresses social norms through its propensity to 'leak', bringing the private world of reproduction into the public setting.

These previous studies, regardless that they were conducted in the West, reflect the way women might negatively perceive their bodies during pregnancy or when giving birth. It might be that neither my participants nor myself like our bodies and that we feel embarrassed and disgusting when it comes to breastfeeding children purely due to the reactions of the people around us and how they perceive women's leaking bodies. The literature mentioned above suggests that there are social constrictions which lead to a woman's body being perceived as leaking, disgusting, animal, a source of pollution and even dangerous. This can affect women's perceptions of their own leaking bodies, with accompanying embarrassment. It reveals the social construction that stresses the need for control over the female body in a series of double binds, suggesting that there is something inherently wrong with women, no matter what they do. For example there is stigma to both pregnancy and infertility; therefore there are negative attitudes to mothers as well as childless women.

In the last subsection, I presented some female perceptions of their bodies during pregnancy. Western literature demonstrates the prevailing desire for leaking bodies to remain in private spaces during pregnancy, to prevent them from occupying public spaces. In the next subsection, I will explore whether or not pregnant bodies in the Kuwaiti context are distributed in public spaces.

### 8.3.3 Pregnant bodies in the Kuwaiti space

Pregnant women in the public space are often construed as "matter out of place", according to Longhurst (2001, p. 33). Longhurst argues that pregnant women are often seen as threatening and disrupting a social system that requires them to remain largely confined to private space during pregnancy. She found that the majority of the pregnant women who participated in her study in New Zealand indicated that they increasingly withdrew from public space, the more visibly pregnant they became. Having stopped drinking alcohol, they no longer went out to nightclubs or parties, but mostly stayed at home, feeling that they could not walk along a beach in a bikini when nine months pregnant and had no confidence in their physical appearance. In Kuwaiti culture, pregnant or not, women are not allowed to wear bikinis, go to nightclubs, smoke, or drink alcohol, so in this respect, their lives are unchanged by pregnancy. Therefore, I propose that pregnant bodies in the Kuwaiti space are not 'matter out of place' in the sense of Longhurst's remarks. However, I

present this short subsection to allow the reader to compare the experiences of women in Kuwaiti culture with those reported in Western studies.

Throughout the interviews, I questioned the participants about the difference pregnancy had made to their routine activities and how it impacted on the places they would go: the activities they continued to perform, reduced or refrained from, and the places they continued to visit, visited less often, or stopped going to altogether. Participants indicated that there were no restrictions on their movements; for example, Sara said:

> *I go everywhere. I go to the local markets and to the department stores... There are no places a pregnant woman cannot go to in Kuwait.*

Similarly, Omaima said:

> *All the places I had frequented before pregnancy, I still visited afterwards... I only go to the market or to visit friends or to the shopping centres. There are no places that I have not been to or could not go to after falling pregnant.*

Omaima added that being pregnant in public spaces was not an issue and that no one paid special attention to her:

> *It's quite normal to see pregnant women everywhere. I see more pregnant women than non-pregnant ones in public places.*

Conversely, Lulwah reported that she had withdrawn from the public space in her ninth month of pregnancy, because she felt afraid she might not be able to control her body:

> *I'd have to go to the toilet quite often and was worried that if I went out I would not be able to find a toilet... This could be very embarrassing, especially if there were no public toilets around... I was concerned about my waters breaking in a public place.*

However, when I asked the interviewees how pregnancy affected their work, they all reported withdrawing from work during the first three months of pregnancy because of morning sickness. For example, Sara said:

> *I was on sick leave for most of the time because I would get very tired and was always feeling dizzy and sick, especially in the morning... I spent most of the time sleeping...*

Like Sara and Aseel, Omaima and Lulwah explained how they often felt nauseous and suffered from dizziness and morning sickness during the first trimester, so opted not to go to work.

My own experience also involved withdrawal from public space. On each occasion, I suffered nausea during the first three months of pregnancy and therefore, withdrew from the workplace, as well as from my parents' home and from restaurants. I felt uncomfortable about not being able to hide my need to vomit, so I remained in my private space. My withdrawal from public space also reflected my embarrassment about displaying my pregnancy, which might be perceived as a sign of my sexuality. I remember that I did not tell my family about my pregnancy, but rather left this to my husband and sister. I was also embarrassed in the company of my brothers, especially when my pregnancy was visible, so I hid my body with loose, dark clothing.

This section has examined experiences of pregnancy, childbirth, body shape and space. The rest of the chapter will explore women's freedom to choose, control and make decisions on private matters, such as whether to marry, when to have children and how to dress, without the imposition of the family.

## 8.4 Women's freedom of choice

### 8.4.1 When and whom to marry

Throughout the interviews, I asked the participants if they were happy to talk about their own experiences as women: their problems, bodies, gender, culture and lives before and after marriage. All four went into great depth about their personal lives. One topic they gave attention to was the negative effect of cultural beliefs pertaining to gender on the extent to which they were free to choose when and whom to marry. Their explicit accounts revealed how they were all forced by their families to marry for one reason or another, including customs and traditional beliefs which ignored women's opinions in such matters, as well as family anxiety regarding a daughter's potential sexual activity, and the fear that an unmarried daughter who was unattractive, or else over the age of 20, might never get the chance to marry.

Thus, Sara stated that she did not choose to marry her husband, but it was him who chose to marry her, first sending his mother to visit Sara's family and meet her; then

visiting her at home himself, to examine her as if she were an item for sale. Sara reported feeling afraid she would not attract a marriage proposal because she was already 23 years old and did not consider herself to be 'pretty'. She was therefore surprised and happy that her suitor agreed to marry her:

> *Despite what he saw, he gave his approval to my father – and my father was happy and quickly agreed the marriage simply because he was concerned that I might not get married...*

Sara's self-deprecating judgement that she was 'not pretty' led me to consider her appearance and give her my own opinion, which was that she was indeed pretty, to which she replied: "but I have dark skin". It should be explained that in Kuwaiti society, a woman is seen as attractive if she has a slim body, white skin, long thick hair, a round face, a small nose and large eyes. Anyone who does not possess these features is considered 'not pretty'.

Sara's engagement, in line with local customs and traditions, lasted for seven months, so that she could prepare herself for the wedding day. During the whole of that time, she did not see or speak to her husband, because some Kuwaiti families consider it morally inappropriate for a girl to speak to her fiancé until they are officially married.

When I asked Sara to describe how she found her husband after marriage, she replied with obvious regret that she had discovered from the very first day that he was not the right match for her, but had decided to carry on her life with him because she could not ask for a divorce:

> *Every day I discover something I do not like about my husband. But I try to persevere and carry on with my life... I'm afraid of divorce and that people would point their finger to me because I was divorced... If I get divorced, I think that my life will end... And my children will suffer, even as grown-ups, because their mother is divorced...*

For a woman in Kuwaiti culture, being divorced means that she is not a good wife; that she is in the wrong, and that she has incited problems with her husband, who is assigned none of the blame. More importantly, the Kuwaiti community sees a divorced woman as bringing shame to her family and to any children she has; she might not marry again because she is a divorcee. As a consequence of these cultural

beliefs, a woman such as Sara is likely to remain in an unhappy marriage, despite having realised from the outset that her husband is unsuitable.

In contrast to Sara's experience, Aseel reported that she had tried hard to obtain a divorce, despite the above-mentioned cultural beliefs regarding divorced women, because she did not like her husband. However, her parents had forced her to remain with him. This interviewee began her account of her marriage by saying that a man had made a proposal and her father had agreed without consulting her. Indeed, she believed her father had accepted the man's proposal before she was even aware he had sought her hand in marriage. Aseel was engaged for a whole year to prepare for the wedding and throughout this time, never saw or spoke to her fiancé – as was the custom in her family. The first time she saw him in the flesh was on their wedding day and in the marital bed, which evoked negative feelings in her:

> *I felt very uncomfortable and utterly disgusted because I was with a complete stranger that I'd never known... For me, to be his wife and to agree to all he was doing while I kept silent and obedient...*

Aseel said that she had expected a better life with her husband than with her family, but realised on the third day of the marriage that her relationship with him was merely sexual. Therefore, after three weeks, she returned to her family home to ask for a divorce. Nevertheless, her parents took her back to him, telling her to do whatever he told her to and not to think of coming back to them again, because they would "never take back a divorced daughter". She reflected on her experience, saying:

> *It was not my choice... My father chose my husband for me and I do not want him... My relationship with him is only sexual...*

Aseel then put a question to me: what should she do to stop her father making all the important decisions in her life? I did not reply, because I knew there was nothing she could do to stop her father, as we both lived in a conservative and patriarchal society.

Similarly, Omaima admitted she had not chosen to marry her husband and that she had been forced by her brother to do so when she was only 17 years old:

> *I did not choose my husband... My husband got instant approval from my brothers, who never asked my permission... I was very scared of marriage, especially because the man who came to get married to me had been married*

*before and had divorced his wife. I told my brother that I did not want to get married, but he said that it was not up to me.... As usual, the decision was not mine to take... I had to marry him against my will.*

Omaima never saw or spoke to her husband before the wedding. However, unlike Sara and Aseel, she reported that her feelings for him became more positive once they were married and that she was happy, especially as her husband was relaxed, supportive, good looking and fit. This participant compared her life before and after marriage, concluding that it was much better with her husband than with her brothers.

Lulwah too, stated that her father and brothers had decided for her as regards when and whom to marry. The only one of the four who blamed the social belief that a woman's opinion about whether or not to marry should be ignored, this participant began by telling me about her first marriage, explaining that she too, had neither seen nor spoken to her first husband before their wedding day, which marked a crisis in her life. She found that her spouse was very young at 19 years old and that he acted rather childishly:

*His behaviour was abnormal... He showed no emotions and treated me like a toy that he only played with when he wished... He was violent, very aggressive... he raped, hit and slapped me many times...*

As a consequence of the violence suffered at the hands of her husband, Omaima was divorced after two years. When I asked her to describe her experience as a divorced woman, she stated that her life after the divorce was even worse than with her husband:

*Everyone in the family was looking at me as if I was there to ruin their reputation in the community... They kept me under constant check for fear that I might have a sexual relationship with someone... In their eyes, a divorced woman has nothing to worry about, like keeping her virginity... My brothers were worried that I would be seeking sexual pleasure as I was no longer with my ex-husband...*

Faced with this discrimination on the part of her family, Omaima was willing to marry anyone to escape from the prison her family confined her to day after day. She also found that her family wanted her to marry because they were afraid of further damage to their reputation, so they consented to the first man who proposed, despite

his being more than 15 years older than her and having previously divorced four other women.

The above narratives show that these four women were granted no right to control their own lives, but were obliged to submit to the authority of their families. This section has demonstrated the dramatic impact that cultural beliefs can have on women's lives, forcing them to live in ways they neither choose nor want, in order to avoid discrimination on the part of the family and community. Other problems faced by these four women as a result of their gender and the prevailing cultural beliefs appear gradually throughout this chapter. The following subsection explores the question of whether it is possible for Kuwaiti women to decide for themselves to delay having children.

### 8.4.2 Whether and when to have children

During the interviews, I asked the participants when they had had their first child and as I expected from Kuwaiti women, three reported becoming pregnant directly after marriage, while the fourth cited medical issues which prevented her from conceiving for a year. Sara, Aseel and Omaima frankly expressed their feelings of annoyance and upset about the respective cultural beliefs, which did not give them the option to delay having children. Instead, their husbands had full authority over their bodies, so that each man was able to decide when and how many children his wife would have.

For example, Sara indicated she had conceived within two months of her wedding, because her husband would not allow her to take oral contraceptives. From the first day of their marriage, he had insisted that he wanted her to have seven children. Sara added that she conceived her second child six months after giving birth to her first. This interview talked about feeling tired after her fist pregnancy and wanting a break from having children for a while, but her husband did not agree:

> *He said that he married me in order to have children, and if I stopped having children, then what benefit would there be for him? I am only a birth-giving machine to satisfy his sexual desires... but now I take the contraceptive pill without his knowledge. It'll be the death of me if he finds out...*

It is worth noting that Sara laughed when she spoke about her experience and then requested that I stop my recorder. She went into another room and then returned holding a six-month-old baby boy, followed by a crying daughter. Presenting her

children to me, Sara asked me to imagine her situation if she were to become pregnant again now. She then listed her everyday responsibilities to her children, her husband, her home, her work and her extended family, adding that she was exhausted by her multiple responsibilities, whereas her husband did nothing to help her.

Similarly, Aseel told me she had become pregnant during the first month of her marriage. Despite not liking her husband, this interviewee could not take the contraceptive pill, because of the Kuwaiti customs and traditions which insist on a woman falling pregnant immediately after marriage. She was therefore obliged to fulfil her societal role and show the people around her that she had no medical problems that might limit her ability to bear children.

> *Falling pregnant is necessary, especially in the early days of a married relationship, so that people realise that the woman can carry children and does not suffer from problems preventing her from doing so.*

Aseel reported that she had conceived her second daughter a year after giving birth to the first, because her husband insisted on her having another baby. Later, she found that her mother and sisters-in-law had strongly influenced her husband's decision to have a third child. His family had repeatedly questioned him about why Aseel had not become pregnant for two years and whether she would ever have a baby boy. At that time, this interviewee was taking the contraceptive pill without her husband's knowledge or consent, so when he eventually discovered this, he became very angry and warned her he would send her back to her parents and divorce her if he ever caught her taking it again, so she was obliged to stop taking the pill.

During her interview with me, Aseel repeatedly stated her fervent hope of having a baby boy. She invited me to look at her belly shape and try to ascertain whether I thought she would have a boy or a girl. Comparing this pregnancy at length with her previous two, Aseel concluded that she felt she was expecting a boy. I wondered what she would do if it turned out that her baby was a girl and she replied sadly that she would keep trying until she had a boy.

Omaima also stated that she had conceived during the first month of her married life and that she was not permitted to use contraceptives, because "we get married to have children". In her view, any woman taking the pill early on in her marriage would face problems from society, as people would perceive her as not wanting her

husband and might suspect her of having an illicit relationship with another man. This participant added that giving birth to three girls had led her to face discrimination from her mother-in-law, who insistently urged her husband to have more children, hoping they would eventually be blessed with a boy.

Finally, Lulwah talked about the discrimination and criticism she had faced from her husband, his family and others due to medical issues which prevented her from having a child for a year at the beginning of her marriage. She had felt disempowered and unfeminine due to not being able to conceive and so, after five months of marriage, sought medical treatment, eventually becoming pregnant with her first child.

One interpretation of the above accounts is that adherence to cultural norms and practices associated with a preference for male children, discrimination against daughters, and the oppressive exercise of authority by mothers-in-law over their daughters-in-law are examples of behaviour whereby women's internalisation of their own lower societal status leads them to discriminate against other women. It shows that boys are still seen as more valuable than girls, which leads one to think about the continued process of discrimination against females by both males and females in Kuwaiti society. Lastly, it shows how the above-mentioned women's bodies had been controlled by society, their husbands and their families.

Similarly, Kabeer (1999), in her study, noted that gender issues are complicated and are actually perpetuated by the women themselves in the South Asian context in general. She states that the problem of gender in these countries is supported by women because they accept and adopt behaviour that assigns them a lower social value than men. This acceptance of their secondary and lower status in the family could even lead them to agree to violence at the hands of their husbands and a willingness to bear children, in order to satisfy their husbands' preference for boys. Moreover, their adherence to social norms and practices could cause these women to favour sons and discriminate against daughters. They may even discriminate against and stereotype each other in society, without comparing themselves to men, as in their eyes, men have a higher status.

In my cultural context, it is clear that the way in which women are socialised and have learnt to remain at a low status has impacted negatively on relationships

between them. For example, in organisations, as the first part of my study demonstrates, women in managerial roles discriminate against other women at low levels in the workplace, whereas in the second part of my study, I found that the participants experienced discrimination from their mothers-in-law. This discrimination between women leads the women in my study to report that they hate being women and to state that they prefer having sons, because girls have a lower status than boys (this will be discussed later in this chapter).

The last subsection here examines participants' freedom of choice regarding their clothing and the related issue of permission to leave the house alone. It explores notions of control and regulation of women's behaviour and of the veil as a disciplinary tool which targets the body.

### 8.4.3 Restrictions on clothing and travel

Throughout the interviews, I encouraged the interviewees to speak about restrictions on their clothing. They all indicated that their fathers, brothers and husbands controlled every aspect of their clothing; forbidding them, for example, to wear high-heeled shoes, make-up, nail varnish and bright, tight, or striking attire in public. They interpreted this as an attempt by their families to protect their reputation, insisting that they hide their bodies to prevent them from attracting men. Thus, Sara stated:

> *They control every aspect of my clothing... These are all traditional black clothes that do not have anything to suggest that I am a female. My brother and my husband do not want me to show my femininity through the clothes I wear, because they are worried that I might attract attention...*

She added that she was very uncomfortable with the restrictive rules imposed by the males in her family. These men were described as very conservative because they would not allow her to go out, for fear she would be subjected to sexual harassment. Sara listed some of the words her brother or husband would use if she expressed a desire to go out or to wear clothes of her own choosing:

> *All I hear is... 'You are not allowed'... 'This is not permissible'... 'That's prohibited'... 'This is immoral'... 'We are afraid of getting a bad reputation because you are girls... You must not go out'...*

Another participant who described such imposition from the family was Aseel, who said that her father used to treat her very badly before her marriage and would not

allow her to leave the house unless she wore a black *abaya*, which is a long loose-fitting uniform that disguises the shape of the body, coupled with a scarf to cover the hair. Once she was married, Aseel's husband also ordered her to wear a *niqab:* a thick black cloth that covers the face. She refused at first, but he insisted and forced her to do so.

Similarly, Omaima told me that after the death of her mother when she was nine years old, her brothers became much more domineering, as they were worried that she would deviate. They ordered her to cover her head when she was ten years old and forced her to wear the *niqab* when she was 15. Omaima felt that despite not wanting to wear the *niqab,* she had to obey her brothers due to the fear they would punish her.

> *I was scared stiff of my brothers, especially as they told me that they would give me up to a week to make up my mind. They threatened that if I went out without the full face cover, they would make me pay for it... They meant that they would beat me up... I was really worried about their punishment, so I had no choice but to comply and carry out their orders...*

Like Sara and Aseel, Omaima said that her brothers were very strict, as they were distrustful and suspicious of her behaviour and worried about what people would say, fearing she would tarnish their reputation by following an immoral path. I asked her what part her father played in this, as he had not been mentioned once in her narrative. Unexpectedly, she said she "considered him non-existent".

Lulwah reported wearing a headscarf by the age of 13 and covering her face by the age of 15, in her case voluntarily, but when she grew up she came to hate the *niqab.* This participant now questioned the benefit of covering her face and told me she wanted with all her heart to remove the veil; however, as her husband would not allow her to do so, for cultural rather than religious reasons, she continued to wear it, albeit reluctantly.

This evidence shows that Kuwaiti society expects the female body to be kept under control at all times and stresses perpetual consumption to maintain a veneer of sexual attractiveness to men. I think that the construction of women as sexual creatures, aimed at trapping the female body within a complex grid of disciplinary and regulating power, as it is in Kuwait, conceptualises the female body in terms of

shame, secrecy and sin. In Kuwaiti society, the female body has been inscribed as a source of danger to the family's reputation. To protect their reputation, Kuwaiti families therefore seek to regulate sexuality by separating boys from girls; they stress the importance of hiding the bodies of their sisters, daughters and wives with clothes that cover their shape, seeing the female body as 'safe' only when it is hidden.

Additionally, I noted that when discussing the restrictions imposed by families on daughters' and wives' clothing, the interviewees also spoke about limitations on their freedom to leave the house or travel. They indicated that they needed permission from their fathers, brothers, or husbands to go out, even if only to visit female friends. The participants stressed that their families imposed such restrictions because they were afraid of their sexuality. For instance, Sara explained how she sometimes needed to ask her husband's permission to go out as much as a month in advance and that she had faced many other such difficulties.

To avoid these restrictions, Sara described having begun to go out secretly without asking her husband. When he discovered this on one occasion, he beat her and sent her to her parents' house for two weeks as a means of disciplining her. Nevertheless, Sara also confided in me that she had continued to leave the house without his permission, having learnt how to use lies and deception to avoid detection and thus, get on with her life. She then expressed her feelings about her gender preventing her from exercising free choice and directing her own life:

> *I get very annoyed by the fact that I cannot decide for myself or that I cannot live my life because I am only a woman... I've been going through a lot of problems that are the result of being a woman and when I say that I have the right to do things my way, my husband laughs at me and says sarcastically that I am only a woman.*

In quite straightforward terms, this presents the discrimination that Sara faces from her husband on the grounds of her gender. Being 'only a woman' excludes her from many things, such as expressing her feelings openly in front of her husband, who repeatedly taunts her for having female genitalia, while he does not. He constantly undermines her status by using very offensive, slang and obscene words that people do not use in front of others in Kuwaiti culture. It is important to mention that during the interview, this participant whispered when recounting these instances of

discrimination from her husband, because she was afraid her mother or sisters, who were in an adjoining room, would overhear.

Aseel also reported she could not go out without permission from the men in her family. Her father and husband kept her isolated and forbade her to mix because they were very worried she might deviate or have relationships with men. This interviewee spoke explicitly of her life before and after marriage, describing how she had lived and was still living in a closed environment, because her father and husband were anxious to protect her sexuality and their reputation:

> *When I was young, my father's main concern was my virginity, and as soon as I reached the age of puberty, he started going on about me getting married as quickly as possible in order to finally bury that feeling of possible shame that he thought I might cause to the family... But the surprising thing is that my husband has also joined in the intention judging campaign, fearing that I might ruin his reputation if I were to go out on my own.*

In contrast, Omaima claimed her life had improved after marriage, especially as her husband was much more merciful and lenient than her brothers, who had not allowed her to go out on her own. She stated that she still needed her husband's permission before doing anything, but he always consented to what she wanted, whereas her brothers were the opposite.

Like Omaima, Lulwah compared her life before and after marriage and told me that before she was married, it was her mother and brothers, not her father, who imposed strict rules preventing her from going out freely for leisure pursuits or to visit friends, so that she would sometimes remain trapped indoors for months, except for going to school. When I asked her why her mother did not allow her to go out freely, she replied that her mother believed a girl who did not go out so much would usually grow stronger in her moral status, while girls who had a habit of going out often would bring disgrace upon their families.

Lulwah told me her husband was sometimes liberal about her going out, but she wished he would not apply double standards in his decisions. For example, if he was angry one day, he would refuse to let her go out, but if she sought his permission to go to the same place the following day, he would agree to it. This inconsistency made her feel insecure, because she was subject to his whims and moody behaviour.

Based on the participants' narratives, I could see that both males and females in families could potentially impose strict rules on their daughters, because they were afraid of their sexuality. Hence they obliged their daughters to stay indoors, controlled what they wore, pushed them into early marriage and imposed a system of segregation onto both genders in society.

Before I ended each interview I asked the interviewee about her feelings towards her gender, because I noted that my participants hated being women due to their low status in the family. My aim of asking such a question was to gain an in-depth and clear understanding of how the gender problems women face can lead them to hate their own identity. Two women said they did not enjoy the fact of having been born female, because this diminished their role and status in society, whereas another stated that she did not like being a woman because she found the female body 'dirty'. Sara emphasised:

> *I don't like being female and I don't like my body. Because of it, I become this wretched person... I wish I had been created a man, because the man in our society lives his life to the full and no one dares to hold him accountable for his actions, unlike us women...*

Aseel also expressed her wish to be male, "or that I could decide for myself..." and Lulwah asserted that she did not like being female, but cited an unexpected reason:

> *A woman's body makes me feel disgusted, especially pregnant women... I feel like they can be dirty and unable to get a good cleaning when they have a shower, because they cannot reach their legs, for example...*

Omaima claimed that she loved being a woman, but at the same time expressed the hope that Kuwaiti customs would change in this respect:

> *Men assume total control of women's lives and decide for them... They only want us to go in the direction they choose for us... Women can't go out or travel... They can only marry or go out to work with the permission of men...*

In addition to the above, I asked the interviewees about their future aspirations because the life history interviews had sought to understand and make sense of the participants' narratives and how the past and present could impact the future. Sara expressed the hope that her married life would improve, that her husband would

cooperate and allow her to make decisions freely, and that he would put some effort into raising their children.

Given that Aseel had insisted throughout the interview that she did not like her husband and wanted a divorce, she surprised me at the end of the interview by saying she would keep trying to have a baby boy, which meant staying with her husband:

> *I'll dedicate my life to pregnancy and childbirth until I am blessed with a male child.*

Omaima, who had previously reported how supportive and helpful her husband was, in contrast to her brothers, nevertheless ended with a wish for change:

> *I hope I'll be able to live differently... I wish I had not got married until I'd been able to finish my studies... I wish I hadn't given birth when I was 18 years old... I wish I had the final say to accept or turn down things related to my life... I wish I could chose absolute divorce, because our social life is difficult and I see it as much harder than the life of the virgin girl... I wish I was able to choose whether to divorce...*

Lastly, Lulwah told me she did not want to express her aspirations, because she did not believe any of her secret wishes would ever be implemented in reality.

## 8.5 Summary

This chapter has analysed the life histories of four Kuwaiti women. It has explored their bodily experiences of pregnancy and childbirth in relation to the self and specific gendered aspects of that self. Through the interviews, I show the dilemmas facing women as a result of their gender identity and the interpretation of their position as females in Kuwaiti society. Above all, this chapter recognises that women cannot control their own bodies because these bodies are socially constructed by men. I found that the women participating in this part of the research did not appreciate the fact they were female because of the restrictions imposed on them due to their gender roles in society. However, the participants also revealed through their stories that, unlike what was been found in the Western context, their pregnant bodies do not disturb the Kuwaiti space and that being pregnant in public in Kuwait is not a matter of place. In summary, the life history data suggest that there is a reciprocal interaction between cultural beliefs and gender issues. It shows how cultural norms and how women are socialised can impact their relationships with

each other and how the preference for having a son can lead to women disliking and even discriminating against their daughters, or preferring not to have them. It demonstrates how women strive to make their 'husbands' happy by producing children, even if this impacts negatively on their wellbeing.

My findings paint a picture of how a patriarchal society can negatively affect a woman, inasmuch as they cannot direct their own lives. For example, they cannot decide when or whether to have children, or who to marry and whether to divorce; what to wear, or when and where to study and work. I clearly found that when my participants spoke about their bodies, pregnancy and childbirth, they were more focussed on speaking about these topics in relation to their extended families and husbands. Nevertheless, they were not interested in discussing how pregnancy and the leaking body impact them in public spaces, for example, the workplace. This is because they were socialised to believe that work has a lower priority in their lives. In terms of Western literature, it would simply be a case of identifying how pregnant bodies and gender differences have been intensively researched in relation to organisations.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the key findings of this research in the light of relevant literature to enrich and add to the body of work which focuses on women in developing countries, especially within the Kuwaiti context. I will also offer some self-reflection of my journey in this PhD, as this could help future feminist researchers in the Kuwaiti context to anticipate problems they may face when interviewing other women.

# Chapter Nine

# Discussion and Conclusion

## 9.1 Introduction

This thesis set out to explore the issues of work-family balance facing Kuwaiti mothers employed in managerial roles in the education sector and the complex relationship between culture, gender and management. To achieve these objectives, I used in-depth semi-structured interviews with twenty-seven mothers employed at various levels of management in the Ministry of Education in Kuwait. I then conducted life history interviews with four women to investigate the impact of Kuwaiti cultural beliefs on women's agency regarding their lives and bodies. The findings of the interviews revealed that despite the incentives and family-friendly policies provided by the country to aid working mothers in balancing work and family responsibilities, women in higher levels of management found it difficult to juggle work and family life, due to cultural identity crises shaped by the Kuwaiti context. Kuwaiti women appeared to experience significantly more problems in this regard than women in many other parts of the world, where time management, lack of family-friendly policies and the ages and number of children were at the heart of work-family imbalance (Eversole et al., 2012; Coronel et al., 2010; Choi and Chen, 2006; Choi, 2008). In my context, it was patriarchy and male dominance which were central to this issue. Additionally, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education is particularly problematic for women in management roles because religious and social beliefs about female identities, roles and status lead women to reject certain inherently feminine qualities in themselves and other women, while simultaneously preserving an outward display of traditional femininity. I am the first researcher to introduce the problem of this unresolved gender identity crisis among women working for the Ministry of Education in Kuwait, and the first to find that in order to succeed in their careers, working women in Kuwait create a new identity that stands between the conventional constructions of masculinity and femininity.

My research did not seek to determine the sources of the cultural beliefs that lead to these gender identity issues, but rather to understand the experiences and realities of Kuwaiti women both in the workplace and in society as a whole. The issue of work-

family balance in the Kuwaiti context needs to be addressed in further studies and through structural and institutional improvements in relation to work-family balance to support women in employment.

This thesis contributes to a range of related fields of knowledge: cultural, feminist and women's studies; and equality, gender and management studies. As a Kuwaiti woman and mother formerly employed in the educational sector, I have enjoyed the benefit of insider knowledge, applying my own and participants' experiences to give voice to long-discredited and ignored emotions, views and experiences, thus introducing Kuwaiti women's perspectives into feminist scholarship in the Global South (Petersen and Gravett, 2000; Twombly, 1998) and the Islamic world (Mir-Hosseini, 2005; Keddie, 2006; Thompson, 2003). My study adds to the literature regarding women's social positions in the Kuwaiti context (Shah and Al-Qudsi, 1990; Tetreault, 1993, 1995 and 2001) and creates new feminist avenues of exploration for existing research on women in management by exploring, for example, the conflictual relationships between women in the workplace and in society due to gender beliefs.

Furthermore, the qualitative approach adopted adds to the body of knowledge regarding work-family balance in the Eastern context as a whole and in the Kuwaiti context in particular. The life histories in the second part of my study address methodological bias in this area of research. Life histories have rarely been used in management studies in any context, and no previous research in Kuwait has used life history interviews to explore women's experiences. Using this approach advances knowledge production in the Arab world – within a field dominated by Western knowledge producers – by exploring women's bodily experiences and providing firsthand descriptions of the social lives of Kuwaiti women (Smart, 2009). By investigating these issues, the study also challenges the Arab worldview of women's bodies as private objects which should not be exhibited or discussed.

As argued in Chapter Four, my study is the first to examine the issue of work-family balance for working mothers in Kuwait, and thus the first to indicate that work-family imbalance is caused by the patriarchal structure of Kuwaiti culture. It is also the first to reveal how women in management in Kuwait navigate gender roles at work. Additionally, it illustrates the state of feminism in contemporary Kuwait by

highlighting the contradictions between its promotion of female agency and its ideological adherence to and perpetuation of a patriarchal social model. Finally, by problematising fundamental conceptions of personal and professional identity, women's roles and the cultural expectations placed upon women, my study adds to, challenges and seeks to change the body of existing research in the Arab context.

This final chapter discusses the key findings of the research and compares them with those of previous research within the field. It then highlights the implications of these findings, reviews the limitations of the study and offers recommendations for future research. The chapter ends by offering reflections on my PhD journey.

## 9.2 Primary findings of the research

This section is divided into three subsections. The first discusses the findings related to issues of work-family balance in the Kuwaiti context and how these differ from the handling of such issues in other cultures. In the second subsection, I discuss the self-images and professional identities of Kuwaiti working mothers and the problems they face due to their gender identity in Kuwaiti culture. The final subsection considers women's choice and agency with regard to their bodies and the questions of whether to marry, have children and wear the veil.

### 9.2.1 Work-family balance in the Kuwaiti context

The findings of this study suggest that the issues involved in work-family balance in Kuwait are specific to the culture. In most Arab regions, such as Saudi Arabia, the roles of men and women are distinctly divided:

> The husbands are employed and provide the living for the family, no need for wives to work as that may deflect them from doing their original job [child-rearing]... Saudi Arabian society is very patriarchal in nature, where woman's primary roles are those of mother, wife and daughter, whereas man's primary role is that of breadwinner. (Elamin and Omair, 2010, p. 759)

Although Kuwait is a Middle Eastern country, the gender roles it prescribes for women are not clear-cut; the effects of modernisation mean that women now fulfil the traditionally male role of financial provider as well as the traditionally female roles of mother, wife and housekeeper. My study is the first to reveal that it is male dominance and patriarchy, rather than child-rearing responsibilities or marriage *per*

*se*, which are largely responsible for the work-family conflicts facing Kuwaiti mothers in management positions. Many of my participants stated that the presence of housemaids and family support sometimes helped them to feel balanced. However, cultural beliefs regarding women's roles, the negative effects of housemaids on children and male authority over women led most participants to feel work-family imbalance. In other words, childcare duties and housework were not found to be the key causes of work-family conflicts, which were instead cultural constructs of gender identities, wherein women are homemakers and family carers while men are breadwinners. Participants stated that their husbands wanted them to focus on childcare and family responsibilities at the expense of their jobs. When they asked their husbands to do the same, they refused because they wished to maintain their roles as financial providers. Some participants added that their husbands had insisted that they should not receive phone calls from work colleagues while at home, in order to separate their work lives from their family lives; this increased the tension that they already felt.

The literature reviewed in Chapter Four suggests that work-family balance is the most significant issue faced by working mothers, especially those in managerial roles (Lyness and Kropf, 2005; McIntosh et al., 2012). My findings contrast with these studies, since nine of the mothers I interviewed stated that work-family balance was not problematic for them. They explained that relying on the extended family to raise children, employing domestic workers and sacrificing their social lives during their children's early years actually aided them in achieving such a balance. These findings are in accordance with those of Poelmans et al. (2003) and Aycan and Eskin (2005) that argue that family support is the primary factor in creating a sense of work-family balance for working mothers. In contrast, they conflict with those of a study by Kargwell (2008) who found that in Sudan, despite assistance from extended family and domestic workers, mothers employed as managers still faced work-family conflicts, being hindered in their career progression and representation in positions of seniority because they gave priority to their families.

In my study, health emerged as a significant concern, with two-thirds of participants explicitly associating work-life imbalance with health issues including stress, fatigue and high blood pressure, although these were not dominant themes within the

narratives. Nevertheless, a study of employed mothers in Scotland with primary school-aged children (Cunningham-Burley et al., 2006) found that while paid employment was generally perceived as beneficial for health, the participants reported feeling stressed and "shattered" (p. 402) by the overload of their work and domestic responsibilities. Likewise, Moen et al. (2008), Emslie and Hunt (2009) and Parasuraman and Greenhaus (1993) state that employed mothers can face issues of both physical and mental health, such as fatigue, stress and guilt, and that these result from the conflict inherent in their attempts to simultaneously fulfil their roles as homemakers and employees.

Chapter Four's review of the Western literature also noted the conclusion of certain scholars that the age and number of children can have major impacts on women's work-family conflicts (Voydanoff, 1988; Cinnamon and Rich, 2004; Coronel et al., 2010; Erickson et al., 2010). Roughly half of the participants in the current study mentioned that having young children had negatively affected their careers, indicating that the age of the children was an issue. However, all twenty-seven of the mothers interviewed stressed that it was not the number of children which contributed to work-family tensions, as they were able to depend on domestic help or their extended families to aid them with child-rearing duties. Neither did they perceive that their large families were an obstacle to career progression, due to having internalised their social roles as family-focused child producers rather than as career-driven individuals (Shah et al., 1998). Although many Western scholars, such as Metz (2005) in Australia and Houle et al. (2009) in Canada, have concluded that the conflict caused by combining motherhood with employment sometimes forces working mothers to choose between the two worlds, these choices are less challenging in Middle Eastern countries, where marriage and child-bearing are perceived as social necessities for women (Jamali et al., 2005; Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011a). This may explain why the women in my study did not view large families as a barrier to career development.

What actually proved to be primary hindrances to career progression for the women in my study were the patriarchal society in which they lived and the dominance of male power in their decision making. The participants stressed the importance of deferring to their husbands, fathers and brothers before deciding to accept managerial roles at work, explaining that in Kuwaiti society, men are responsible for women and

therefore wives cannot unilaterally make significant decisions regarding their own lives. Furthermore, some participants stated that their husbands refused to allow them to attain senior positions at work for fear they would invest much more time in their careers than in their family. This lack of agency was also detrimental to their job satisfaction.

In addition to the above, the participants reported that they did not like working in education and/or that they would welcome the opportunity to explore other career paths, but were prevented from doing so by social expectations. They stated that Kuwaiti society considers the educational sector to be the most appropriate and respectable profession for women, as it is a gender-segregated field. Several women recounted how they had abandoned their preferred courses of study or careers in deference to their father's or husband's wishes. The data analysis thus implies that Kuwaiti women tend to sacrifice agency regarding their studies or career for the sake of conforming to social and familial expectations, as failure to do so could condemn them to remain at home (El-Sanabary, 1998). Studies in both Western and Eastern contexts note the obstacles to women's careers posed by marriage, children and gender roles, but they do not specifically emphasise the influence of such patriarchal ideals and practices as are highlighted by the participants in my study (Reay and Ball, 2000; McCrate, 2003; Watts, 2007; Denissen, 2010; Kyriakidou, 2011; El-Ghannam, 2002; Mostafa, 2003; Jamali et al., 2005; Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011a; Rehman and Roomi, 2012).

Chapter Six highlighted the difference between issues of work-family balance for Kuwaiti women and those in other cultures, particularly Western women. The majority of participants in my study lived with their extended families and all of them employed domestic servants. However, as I discussed, living with extended family and cultural perception of domestic staff increased work-family imbalance. Working mothers need to maintain good relationships with their mothers-in-law and although it is permissible for them to employ maids, they are discouraged from openly relying on servants to fulfil child-rearing duties. By comparison, women in Western societies live in nuclear families and tend not to employ domestic staff (Bianchi et al., 2012). They also typically work much longer days than women in Kuwait. Many studies in the Western context stress that work hours are a key cause of work-family imbalance facing mothers in managerial positions (Worrall and

Cooper, 1999). Worrall and Cooper report a strong correlation between seniority and hours worked: a quarter of their respondents in higher level positions worked over 60 hours per week, compared with very few of those in junior managerial positions. In contrast, participants in my study noted that the average working day at the Ministry of Education started at 7.30 am and ended at 1.45 pm. They also indicated that they were able to arrive and leave at any time, as their managerial status meant that they were not required to sign in or out to verify their working hours.

Overall, the data analysis in Chapter Six show that Kuwaiti women in managerial positions experience conflict and uncertainty about their roles in Kuwait's modernised society. Participants appeared to feel they that were fulfilling both feminine and masculine social roles as wives, mothers, child-producers and income-earning members of the workforce, and that men did not reciprocate this role-sharing by carrying out domestic or familial duties. Although modernisation has enabled Kuwaiti women to shape the country's economy and infrastructure and to lead less secluded lives (Sonbol, 1996), traditional definitions of their roles in society remain firmly in place:

> Women moving out of their traditional role in the home and into the workforce have brought about significant economic and socio-psychological changes on more than one level [...] many of the older traditions, however, continue to be obstacles to the advancement of women in Kuwait. The progress of women has not changed the views of large segments of society about women's independence and their evolving roles. (Ghabra, 1997, p. 369)

In Kuwaiti society, it is unacceptable for men to assume responsibility for child-rearing and domestic chores. If a husband does carry out domestic duties, this is perceived as a sign of disrespect on his wife's part. A Kuwaiti man who performs household chores may be labelled a 'woman', in other words a social subordinate or inferior, which may compromise his social standing. In either case, a woman whose husband takes up domestic and familial responsibility may be criticised by both his and her family for allowing him to do 'women's work', and may be seen by both families as a figure of shame. Kuwaiti working mothers are therefore expected to continue to be wholly responsible for domestic duties as well as their workplace tasks. These findings are in agreement with other studies in developing countries, which argue that traditional patriarchal societies leave no room for the negotiation of

dual responsibilities with spouses in domestic spheres (Brown et al., 1996; Sanal, 2008).

This lack of spousal support was underscored by thirteen of my participants, who commented that their husbands were responsible for increasing their work-family conflicts. These women's husbands repeatedly asked them to leave work and focus on the family; when the participants agreed to do so, their husbands would realise that the wife's income was necessary to maintain the family finances and would change their minds. These women were therefore uncertain as to whether they should concentrate on raising and caring for the family or on working to support their families financially.

Research shows that a more equal division of familial responsibility between wives and husbands may be beneficial for men, but this is dependent on support from the government and from employers. For instance, Craig and Sawrikar (2009) found that fathers in Australia reported higher levels of satisfaction with their work-family balance and felt more supported by their employers' family-related policies when they participated in childcare. In the UK, Braun et al. (2011) and Fox et al. (2009) report that fathers are entitled to access paternity leave in order to spend time taking care of their children. In Kuwait, by contrast, since the culture completely excludes men from participating in childcare or domestic responsibilities, the Kuwaiti government and individual employers are unlikely to provide paternity leave or other family-friendly policies for male employees in the near future.

Whereas the existing literature argues that work-family balance decreases as seniority increases (Hite and McDonald, 2003; Hubbard and Datnow, 2000), my study is the first to find that for Kuwaiti women, holding managerial roles is actually conducive to achieving work-family balance. Such roles are associated with high flexibility and low commitment, enabling mothers to devote more time to their families. Lower-level positions require strong commitment and are fairly inflexible, which causes greater conflict between family and career responsibilities.

The influence of and interaction between these social factors create issues around work-family balance that are unique to Kuwaiti culture. The highly patriarchal ideals governing women's social roles have created conflicts and destabilised women's

self-perceptions in ways which are not evident in non-Eastern contexts or even in other Middle Eastern countries.

### 9.2.2 Women's identities at work

One of the key objectives of my research was to examine the complex relationship between culture, gender and management in the Kuwaiti context. Chapter Seven explored working mothers' experiences of gender issues and barriers in the education sector and how these affect their identities at work. Participants described Kuwait's workforce as male-dominated, with senior managerial positions across the country being held mainly by men. Similarly, a study by Shah and Al-Qudsi (1990) concluded that female managers in Kuwait do not reach senior positions as easily as male managers.

Most participants in my study reported experiencing discrimination, stereotyping and negative attitudes on the part of male employees, due to entrenched traditional perceptions of women's roles and status in Kuwaiti society. This phenomenon is not exclusive to Kuwait, but rather occurs in the Arab world as a whole and in both developed and developing countries worldwide. As noted earlier, existing studies contend that gender stereotypes constitute the primary barrier to women's career progression in Arab countries (Al-Lamki, 1999; Omair, 2008). More broadly, Tlaiss and Kauser's (2011a) study in the Lebanese context, Fernando's (2012) research in Sri Lanka, and Sakalli-Ugurlu and Beydogan's (2002) research in Turkey found that women encountered discriminatory attitudes and behaviour based on gender, especially from male counterparts. Likewise, in the UK, Haynes and Fearfull (2008) found that women in managerial roles faced similarly stereotypical attitudes at work.

In addition to facing discrimination from men, employed Kuwaiti mothers also claimed to have experienced negative attitudes from female colleagues due to their capacity for pregnancy. As Usher (1983) and Noe (1988) note, men and women hold similar and often negative attitudes towards women in management, based on gender role stereotypes. For example, these shared negative attitudes are to be found in countries as diverse as the US, the UK, Germany and Asian countries such as Japan and China (Schein et al., 1996). However, the women involved in my study emphasised that they had experienced discrimination related to their reproductive bodies only from female colleagues, not from men. They stated that male managers

believe a woman's primary role is to produce children and to focus on the family, which leads them to offer more flexibility and support to female employees with children; in contrast, other women in managerial roles do not believe that pregnancy or childcare obligations are valid reasons for working flexible hours. Moreover, data analysis has shown that mothers in management perpetuate this discrimination towards female subordinates after reaching more senior positions.

When participants in high-level roles were asked about their treatment of female subordinates, twenty-three of them appeared nervous and either did not answer the question or, in a few cases, gave vague and general responses. Four other participants explicitly stated that pregnancy or family responsibilities were insufficient justification for female employees to request flexible hours or extra support, as working mothers needed to separate their working lives from their family lives. Although they did not elaborate on the reasoning behind these statements, they did note that male managers offered female employees flexibility at work due to perceiving women as the primary caregivers within household and family environments. It can be concluded that participants in high-level managerial positions did not share these patriarchal views regarding other women and thus did not make concessions to the demands placed upon their female subordinates by family or domestic responsibilities.

An element of competition may also have contributed to this phenomenon. In a Western context, Warning and Buchanan (2009) and Camussi and Leccardi (2005) use the term 'queen bee syndrome' to describe women who have been individually successful in male-dominated environments and who treat female subordinates negatively. A 'queen bee' is a woman in a high-level role who exhibits traditionally masculine characteristics, such as assertiveness, in order to meet the expectations associated with her position. Queen bees are not supportive of female subordinates, because they fear that other women's success may challenge their own power in the workplace. In addition, even women who are only peripherally involved in a predominantly male work group must be willing to ignore other women being disparaged and to contribute to derogating them (Mavin, 2006), while "women are still more likely than men to be disloyal to their same-sex colleagues" (Greer, 2000, cited in Mavin, 2006, p. 267).

An older study in the Western context argues that when women encounter women at work, their normative expectations of one another illustrate gender role spill-over at its worst (O'Leary and Ryan, 1994). Its authors claim that when working for female managers, women tend to react to them primarily as other women and secondarily as managers; for instance, women expect female managers to be more understanding, nurturing, generous and forgiving than men. Gini (2001) points out that as women in management attain their positions "by playing hardball and working hard, they expect the same from others" (pp. 99-100). With regard to the women in my study, though, it is not clear whether their attitudes towards female subordinates was influenced by this element of same-sex rivalry, whether they held higher expectations than men of their female employees, or whether other as yet unidentified factors were at work.

Adding to the complexity of the gender dynamics in the workplace, all but one of the participants in my study reported that they would rather have male managers than male subordinates. When working in low-level roles, these women did not generally face negative attitudes from male managers, as the latter were in a position of power over them. Once the women in my study entered into managerial roles, however, their male subordinates refused to accept orders from them, due to the traditional belief that men should hold authority over women. This finding underscores the conclusion that the gender-related problems facing Kuwaiti women at work are greatly dependent upon cultural beliefs regarding the status of men and women.

My research also found, in opposition to the Western view of women in management as adopting masculine characteristics in order to advance in the workplace, that Kuwaiti women consider it unacceptable to do so, regardless of the context. Twenty-four of the present participants stressed that Kuwaiti culture prohibits women from behaving like men. As Jamali and Nejati (2009) note, women in the Arab world do not have the option of gaining more power and authority in work environments by exhibiting masculine behaviour, as Islam forbids women from adopting the appearance or behaviour of men – which in both Western and Kuwaiti context refers to aggressiveness, strength, risk-taking and assertiveness (Sikdar and Mitra, 2012; Ely et al., 2011).

Nonetheless, participants in my study emphasised the need for women managers to be aggressive and strict in order to be successful. In fact, twenty-one of them stated that a successful manager must possess masculine traits. I conclude that Kuwaiti women in management reject aspects of femininity by acting 'like men' and stereotyping other women for their maternal bodies, while simultaneously preserving their femininity via their clothes and the outward denial of any masculine behaviour. In other words, Kuwaiti mothers employed in managerial positions experience an identity crisis that has not yet been resolved.

To end this subsection, the gender-related issues that employed Kuwaiti mothers face in the workplace are generally similar to those encountered by women in Western and Eastern contexts. However, the influence that traditional Kuwaiti beliefs and values continue to exert creates unresolved conflicts in the sense of identity amongst these women and between women in management and their subordinates. Whereas women in Kuwait face religious, cultural and legal prohibitions against adopting overtly male characteristics, such as wearing men's clothes to work, they tend to appear as strong, aggressive and as inflexible as possible – that is, they do not act entirely 'like women' or 'like men', as far as these are construed in the Kuwaiti context. No previous research has reported such findings. My study is therefore the first to find evidence that in order to achieve success in their careers, working women in Kuwait create a new identity that stands between the conventional constructions of masculinity and femininity.

My findings also differ from those of other studies with respect to the interaction between women in management and female subordinates, as the data from my study show that women, but not men, perceive other women's maternal bodies as a basis for discrimination. No other study in a similar context (for example, in the Arab world) has reported corresponding findings, due to the uniqueness of this study's cultural context and research sample.

### 9.2.3 Choice, agency and pregnant bodies in Kuwaiti spaces

The first part of my study concluded that Kuwait's patriarchal tradition is the primary factor in work-family tension for working mothers in Kuwait. The second part used these findings to explore the relationship between the body and self within the material contexts of the family, marriage, gender and social spaces. In this

exploration, I used life history methodology and my aim was to offer an in-depth understanding of how social beliefs restrict women's freedom to make decisions for themselves concerning such matters as whether or not to marry, have children, or wear the veil without the imposition of their families.

A data analysis of the life history interviews showed that the participants suffered from a lack of choice and agency regarding their own bodies. However, Chapter Eight illustrated how being pregnant in Kuwaiti social spaces, unlike pregnancy in Western contexts, is not a matter of disruption, since women in Kuwait are taught that their primary roles in society revolve around childbearing.

As the maternal body has the potential to change shape and produce fluids (Gatrell, 2013), socio-cultural feminist theory articulates these changes in the pregnant or newly maternal body as forms of metaphorical and literal 'leakage', whether of unpredictable emotional behaviour or physical effluvia. Pregnant women are often restricted to "the private realm" because their "leaking, seeping bod[ies]" threaten the "rational [i.e. male] public world" (Longhurst, 2001, p. 41) and they sometimes fear being regarded as abject within public spaces, such as the workplace.

While the participants in my study did not report being confined to the private sphere as a result of pregnancy, they did feel that it was embarrassing and disgusting to have to breastfeed children in public, purely due to the reactions of the people around them and their (assumed) perceptions of mothers' leaking bodies. In this respect, my findings were in keeping with the view of maternal bodies as disruptive or inappropriate in public settings. Overall, my data analysis suggests that attitudes toward women's leaking bodies have restricted and harmed women's perceptions of their own bodies, revealing the social constructs that stress the need for control over the female body and suggesting that there is something inherently wrong with women. For instance, there is stigma attached to both pregnancy and infertility, which are thus attached to women regardless of whether they have children.

This ultimate self-hatred of femaleness persists through the act of child-bearing, influenced by the patriarchal valuing of boys over girls. The participants in my study who had daughters reported that they hated being women and discriminated against their unborn baby girls. They explained that their husbands, mothers-in-law and the general community expressed negative attitudes when informed that they were

pregnant with girls. The women I spoke to had internalised this disparagement and come to resent their pregnancies and unborn daughters. Other studies have reported that boys are more valued than girls in the Arab world because they are seen as potential economic providers for the family (El-Ghannam, 2002), but I have been unable to find any studies that discussed the effect of these values on pregnant women and mothers.

Just as in the workplace, my data analysis in this portion of the study revealed that women often discriminate against other women in the Kuwaiti domestic sphere. In her life history interview, one participant, referred to as Omaima, related how her mother-in-law threatened the stability of her family because of her anxiety regarding the birth of sons versus daughters. Omaima's mother-in-law insisted that she needed to give her husband a baby boy and warned that in the event of failure, Omaima's husband would be pushed to marry another woman who could conceive a son. This preference for male children, discrimination against daughters and oppressive exercise of authority by mothers-in-law over their daughters-in-law illustrate how women's internalisation of their own lower societal status leads them to discriminate against other women. In addition, the fact that boys are valued more than girls even before birth casts a sobering light on the continued process of discrimination against women, both by men and other women in Kuwaiti society. As Kabeer's (1999) study in the South Asian context points out, this internalisation and perpetuation of anti-female ideals by women can lead them to accept violence at the hands of their husbands and to devalue their daughters in order to satisfy their husbands' preference for sons.

Marriage was another problematic issue for the women in my study. All participants highlighted the restrictions placed upon their freedom of choice in marriage by Kuwaiti constructions of gender. Their accounts revealed they had all been forced to marry by their families for a variety of reasons, including the devaluation of their personal opinions (as they were women), their families' anxiety regarding their active sexuality and the fear that an unmarried daughter who was not attractive or who was over the age of twenty might never marry. This lack of agency carried over into the matter of divorce. The participant referred to as Aseel stressed that she did not like her husband but could not ask for a divorce, lest she be seen as a "bad woman"; her family also pressured her to remain in the marriage despite its many

problems. Another participant, Lulwah, who was actually divorced, reported that divorced women are viewed with suspicion in Kuwaiti society because they are able to have sexual relationships with men without the issue of compromised virginity. Thus, male family members tend to try and confine divorced daughters to the home and/or insist on them remarrying in order to preserve their reputation.

Furthermore, my data revealed that women in Kuwait do not have the option to delay having children, but must instead fulfil the social expectation to produce as many children as their husbands want. For example, the women I interviewed had, on average, four children each. The participants openly expressed their frustration with these cultural beliefs and how these granted their husbands full authority over their bodies, to the point where their husbands were able to decide how many children they would have and when these children would be conceived.

My data analysis also highlighted the absence of choice in Kuwaiti women's dress. According to some Muslim feminists, the veil is an expression of solidarity and is central to women's rights, because it is at the very heart of what Islam represents: the Koranic sovereign right to self-determination for both women and men, which covers the choice of whether or not to wear the veil (Afshar, 2007). Outside of Muslim culture, the veil is sometimes perceived as a symbol of religious oppression of women; for instance, Rinaldo (2014), working in the Indonesian context, argues that women are denied agency by the enforcement of religious beliefs. Although my study did find that Kuwaiti women tend to wear the veil out of obligation, not by choice, this obligation was placed upon them by patriarchal cultural norms, rather than religious authority. All four women involved in the life history interviews indicated that their fathers, brothers and husbands controlled every aspect of their clothing, forbidding them, for example, to wear high-heeled shoes, make-up, nail varnish or bright, tight or otherwise striking attire in public. The women interpreted this as an attempt by their families to protect their reputations and insisted that they were made to hide their bodies to prevent them from attracting men. In Kuwaiti culture, therefore, wearing the veil does not appear to be a matter of women's faith or identity, or an act of political solidarity, but rather represents a disciplinary tool through which male family members can control the female body.

When discussing the restrictions imposed by families on their clothing, the interviewees also spoke about limitations on their freedom to leave the house or travel. They indicated that they needed permission from their fathers, brothers or husbands to go out, even to visit female friends, and stressed that these restrictions were imposed out of fear of their sexuality. My data analysis suggested that male power in these environments is collaborative, with fathers, husbands and brothers co-operating to control women's behaviour. In the absence of husbands or fathers, brothers have authority over women (and in the absence of any male family members, this authority passes to mothers and older sisters). These accounts correspond to Gallagher's (2007) findings that women in Damascus are threatened with divorce, disownment and/or physical violence if they leave the house against their male relatives' orders.

From these analyses, it can be concluded that Kuwaiti society expects the female body to be kept under male control at all times and constructs it in terms of its sexuality and sexual attractiveness to men. This traps the female body within a complex framework of disciplinary and regulating power and conceptualises it in terms of shame, secrecy and danger to family reputation; women's bodies must be hidden to be 'safe'. Kuwaiti families therefore seek to regulate women's sexuality by separating boys from girls and valuing them above girls even before birth, requiring sisters, daughters and wives to wear clothes that conceal their bodies. Women are also prevented from exercising agency in matters of marriage, divorce and child-bearing, as well as in their freedom of movement outside the domestic sphere. Nevertheless, these restrictions did not appear to add any support or security to the lives of the women interviewed, who felt ignored, criticised and confined.

In addition to these pressures, Kuwaiti women must also navigate the problems of the workplace in a modernised, industrialised society. However, even their interactions within this seemingly modern environment are regulated by patriarchal norms of behaviour and gender roles. The specific pressures faced by working mothers in Kuwait are therefore extremely difficult to classify in terms of previous research.

To conclude, my research sought to fill the gap in the existing literature by determining how the unique cultural, economic and religious circumstances of

women in the Kuwaiti context affects issues of work-family balance. I aimed to achieve this by exploring the experiences of 27 Kuwaiti mothers employed in managerial positions in the education sector in the first phase of the study, then in the second by exploring the life histories of four Kuwaiti women about cultural beliefs regarding gender roles and how these affected their lives. Through foregrounding and analysing these accounts, I intended to provide insight into how the situations of Kuwaiti women differ from those of women in the West and other Middle Eastern societies. My findings reveal that despite family support, relatively short work days and the presence of domestic workers, the slow rate at which gender roles in Kuwait are changing results in Kuwaiti women continuing to suffer from the double burden of combining work and family.

## 9.3 Implications and recommendations

The findings of my study have significant implications for government policy and practices in the workplace. With regard to public policy and planning, the findings of the study show that an open discourse supporting women's economic participation in various sectors and at various levels is needed in order to change traditional patriarchal attitudes toward working women, particularly those in management. The Kuwaiti government has already launched initiatives to encourage women to enter the workforce, which has increased the number of women in employment. However, these initiatives will not succeed in the long term without additional government efforts to educate people regarding the importance of women contributing to Kuwait's workforce in all professional fields and support for women in their career pursuits. Such efforts could take the form of awareness programmes. At the outset, these programmes should steer women towards enrolling in tertiary education, providing career counselling and training, with support for the professional development of women in management.

In order to alter the perception of women as child producers first and workers second, the government could also discourage the creation of large families by withholding funds normally granted to fathers for the birth of each new baby. Public campaigns could also be launched via the media to increase general awareness of how giving birth to and rearing large families can be detrimental to a mother's health and wellbeing. In order to encourage men to take responsibility for childcare, the

government could offer paternity leave to men and equal childcare-related benefits to both genders. Work-life balance would moreover be improved by policies allowing employees of both genders to take emergency leave whenever necessary.

Besides issues surrounding childcare, managers and human resource directors need to be aware of the problems facing ambitious women in the workplace, and legislation is required to open up recruitment and opportunities for promotion at all levels to both women and men. Human resource departments must enforce equal opportunities in order to create an organisational culture that fully supports women. In addition, women in management should receive training to enhance their capacity for self-evaluation, while employed mothers could be offered regular workshops or seminars on how to achieve work-family balance, reduce stress and increase productivity.

With respect to the Ministry of Education, there needs to be less focus on the differences between men's and women's managerial styles and more priority given to exploring how these differences can improve employees' morale, productivity and overall performance. Both male and female managers should be provided with training courses on how best to exert their authority in the workplace. If Kuwait's education sector fails to implement these changes, it risks losing talented female employees and therefore opportunities to improve.

More broadly, as the problems detailed in this study stem from a fundamental inequality in gender roles for women and men in Kuwait, programmes and workshops are required for employees of both genders about the importance of men supporting women in every aspect of life. New curriculum units covering similar topics could also be introduced into schools for both genders, so that Kuwait's future workforce has an understanding of gender equality.

The following section highlights the limitations of the study and outlines topics for future research, giving consideration to how this might overcome the said limitations and build upon my findings within Middle Eastern and Kuwaiti contexts.

## 9.4 Limitations and future research

As with any research, my study has a number of limitations that need to be acknowledged. Focusing on mothers in managerial roles has meant studying well educated and highly paid women. I have performed a middle-class analysis of the ways in which such women strive to progress their professional careers. By excluding women in lower-level jobs, who would be paid less and possibly less well educated. Future research should therefore examine issues experienced by working mothers of lower socio-economic status. Additionally, exploring the experiences of women working in a female-dominated field, I have not addressed issues of work-family balance or gender-stereotyping in male-dominated environments. I suggest that future studies might explore the problems facing Kuwaiti working mothers in male dominated professions and cultures such as engineering or accountancy, for example.

The challenges of translating interviews from Arabic to English and of writing in a Western academic style also represent possible limitations of my study. In certain instances, I was unable to discuss problems facing women in Kuwait to the depth I desired, due to the limits of my English vocabulary. Furthermore, the style of writing required for this feminist research is markedly different from any I have previously used; I therefore initially found it difficult to actively engage my voice and to refer to myself as 'I' in my writing.[3]

Nevertheless, despite the small sample size of this study, which prevents it from being generalizable to Kuwait's female population, its findings are relevant to how the population of Kuwait's working mothers address work-family balance or imbalance and the complex relationships between culture, gender and management in their everyday lives. These findings also build upon knowledge of Kuwaiti cultural traditions to form a greater understanding of the unique contexts surrounding women in contemporary Kuwait.

Being relatively young and dealing with a sensitive topic proved to be a hindrance to building a rapport with the participants. Women employed in high-level managerial positions tend to be older and in positions of greater social power than me, which

[3] I have addressed this linguistic weakness in part by employing the services of a professional English proof-reader.

increased their reluctance to share their family and work-related problems. However, the aforementioned limitations and obstacles, as well as the apparently contradictory data emerging from the first study, actually constitute the primary strength of my thesis. The constraints of my study and the obstacles I faced when interacting with the participants created a productive space for reflecting on the relationships between Kuwaiti women in the workplace and in domestic life. This led me to conduct the rich analysis in the second part of the study.

For future studies I suggest that it would be instructive to carry out a comparative study of how patriarchies in other Islamic countries in the Middle East affect women's sense of self, especially of those employed in managerial roles. This kind of comparison between the Kuwaiti context and that of other Islamic countries, whether secular (such as Turkey) or non-secular, could provide more insight into the impact of the Islamic world's dominant normative and regulatory literature on working women. Future research could also aim to explore the effect of specific national cultures, traditions and economic and institutional issues on the career paths of Arab women, as well as the extent to which women in management in the Arab world face common obstacles in their careers.

The identification of female managerial dominance being related to women's preferential treatment of male colleagues may serve as a basis for further research into how female managers are perceived by their subordinates. Such research already exists in Western and some Eastern contexts, but very little is known about the response of female subordinates to female managers in the Arab world and in the Kuwaiti context.

My research findings highlight the impact of the interaction between Kuwaiti cultural norms, gender identity and management on female managers' self-perceptions and management styles. The similarities and differences between men's and women's managerial styles in Kuwait would thus be a useful topic for future research, as would the phenomenon of cross-cultural female management and its influence on management styles in Arab countries.

My study also underscores the need to understand the hierarchical dynamics of women in the workplace and the sources of bias against female managers. Future research could investigate the relationships between women in management and in

lower-level positions within a single organisation, in order to investigate how female managers treat other women in the workplace, the influence of these relationships on the work environment, and how these relationships could be improved. Research could also be conducted into the experiences of women in low-level positions with first-hand knowledge of the supervisory styles and behaviour of multiple managers. Such research would support and improve manager-subordinate dynamics for both men and women.

The issue of women's relationships outside the workplace in Kuwaiti society is likewise in need of further exploration. Future studies of these issues might benefit from the inclusion of men in their investigations, in order to provide a clearer sense of the patriarchal norms that govern these relationships. Additionally, more research into social perceptions of the female body in the Arab context is greatly needed, given that my study is the first to use women's experiences of pregnancy and childbirth as a basis for making sense of their realities and agency in relation to their bodies in this socio-cultural context.

With regard to methodology, although using in-depth semi-structured interviews and life history interviews proved indispensable to my study, future research could also observe the culture of a single organisation and draw upon the diaries of its female employees in order to gain greater insight into how the intersections of culture, gender identity and work affect women's lives. My study highlights the need for additional exploration of the power dynamics between researchers and participants from a feminist standpoint, particularly in the Kuwaiti and general Arab context. In these settings, it is essential that such research be undertaken by Arab Muslim women. When both researcher and researched are women, the commonalities of experience that result from their shared gender can help to resolve problems (Reinzetti and Lee, 1993; Oakley, 1981). As Hamid (2006) argues, Western scholars operating in the Middle East often view Muslim women as passive, sexless beings whose passivity and sexlessness are evidenced by their covered-up mode of dress. To avoid such preconceptions, women's studies in the Arab world should ideally be conducted by researchers from the same background.

Finally, my study identifies discrepancies between feminism in Kuwait, wherein activist women desire protected spaces and the enforcement of tradition rather than

equality, and feminism in other countries (especially Western ones). Future studies on the nature of feminism in Kuwait and its common ground with, or differences from, feminism in Eastern and Western countries would be extremely beneficial for building the respective body of knowledge.

In the next section, I conclude this chapter and the thesis by offering a self-reflection on my study journey.

## 9.5 My PhD journey

This thesis is the end product of a doctoral journey which in itself has been a source of tremendous learning for me. My horizons have expanded in many ways that I would like to share by narrating the course of the journey. Until a few years ago, I never imagined that I would study for a PhD, because of my responsibilities to my family. I came to the UK to research how women can balance work and family and succeed in both spheres. Reading about work-family balance in relation to gender issues prompted me to think deeply about my own life and that of my mother and my friends. Without intention, I found myself comparing the societies of my native Kuwait and the UK, where I was studying. In the street, in the supermarket and in restaurants, I noted that in the UK, men were culturally permitted to hold their babies in front of people. I observed them helping their wives to carry shopping bags. In Kuwait, men cannot hold their babies or help their wives in front of people because this would undermine their social status. This simple observation pushed me to investigate how social beliefs and norms regarding gender roles can impact women's ability to balance work and family in the Kuwaiti cultural context. It became clear to me that I wanted to present the realities, voices and experiences of women, rather than answering questions as to the responsibilities of women in modern Kuwaiti society.

In the second year of study, I moved from reviewing the literature to building my methodology chapter. I was rather disheartened when I first encountered some of the technical terms applied to research, such as ontology and epistemology. It was surprising that I had passed my MA without writing about research paradigms; I could not find any courses that would help me to understand the concept of research paradigms or the meaning of ontology and epistemology. So I repeatedly asked my

supervisors about the research paradigm. I read intensively on methodology, until I finally became clear about my position as researcher. While writing the first draft of my methodology chapter, I felt that my gender, my nationality and my experience as a Kuwaiti mother employed in the education sector would help me to reduce problems I might face and to gain in-depth knowledge by interviewing managerial mothers. I thought that conducting interviews would be the most enjoyable experience in the whole of my course of study, because it would be just a matter of two people chatting together.

On the contrary, what I faced in the real fieldwork was unexpectedly traumatic. From the first day of conducting the interviews I encountered many negative attitudes on the part of managerial women towards my personality, my family background and my traditional clothes. I was unable to find women who were willing to participate in one-hour interviews. Several potential interviewees told me to come back the next day, but when I did so, they laughed and said again, "Come tomorrow". I found myself going to the same people four or five times, but again and again I saw their smiling faces and heard their laughing voices repeating the same two words: "Come tomorrow".

At that time, I was pregnant with my third child and was worried about the effects on the baby's health of the negative attitudes, pressure, tiredness and exhaustion. I told myself that I should perhaps stop for while: "I'm tired. I should focus on my family and my pregnancy. It's not the end of the world if I don't complete my PhD". One night, unable to sleep, I said to myself: "I have never experienced failure. Is it hard to accept failure?" It became clear to me that I did not want to fail, so when the sun rose, I summoned up my courage and went again to my fieldwork, determined to pursue the women who had agreed to participate in the interviews. The challenges of finding participants and the negative attitudes I met inspired me to conduct a deep analysis. It made me reflect on how women treat other women in society and in the workplace, and pushed me to add a second part to my study, where I explored my own and other women's views and bodily experience of pregnancy and childbirth. My aim was to investigate women's reality and how they lived their lives.

The final year of the study was the most difficult. I could not balance my academic work with caring for my children. It became clear to me that I could not succeed in

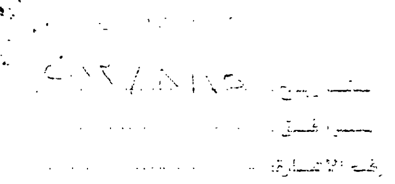
both roles. I felt stress, tension and guilt at leaving my ten-month-old daughter full time in a nursery. I felt guilt towards my eight-year-old daughter, who wanted me to spend time playing and chatting with her, and towards my seven-year-old son, who wanted me to take him back home. My nerves were frayed, I could not hide my stress, I felt that I was going to lose my mind and I kept forgetting things and ideas very easily. I was struggling to keep up with multiple tasks and duties. My husband and friends suggested that I should stop, but I replied that I could not: "I cannot stop something once I've started it."

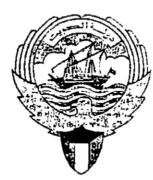
Within a few months I shall complete my PhD and I am proud to state that researching and writing my thesis is the most powerful experience I have gone through. I shall travel back to Kuwait as soon as possible after completing this thesis, to start a new academic career in the Public Authority of Applied and Training Education. I am looking to teach women about changing the status quo. I believe that I have a responsibility to take with me to the Kuwaiti educational setting all the positive aspects and methods I have learnt during my research in the UK. I have the intention of continuing my work and publishing in the area of feminist methodology, particularly the power dynamics between the interviewee and interviewer, and the relationship between women in the workplace and in society. Consequently, this study is only a start.

# Appendices

# Appendix A

# Sample of approval to interview managerial mothers: Al Ahmad and Mubarak Al Kabeer Education Districts





وزارة التربية
الإدارة العامة لمنطقة الأحمدي التعليمية
مكتب المدير العام

**السادة الأفاضل / مديري المنطقة التعليمية**

**تحية طيبة ،،،**

**الموضوع : تسهيل مهمة**

**بالإشارة إلى الموضوع أعلاه وإلى كتاب إدارة البحوث والتطوير التربوي رقم (١٠٢٢ ) بتاريخ ٢٠١٣/٧/٢٩.**

**نفيدكم بأنه لا مانع من تسهيل مهمة الباحثة / مي غنام الصويلح المسجلة على درجة الدكتوراه بجامعه سوانزي بالمملكة المتحدة بإجراء بحث ميداني بعنوان " تحقيق التوازن بين العمل والأسرة للأمهات الكويتيات الموظفات في قطاع التعليم العام لإجراء مقابلات شخصية مع موظفات المنطقة ٢٠١٢/٢٠١٣م .**

**مع خالص التحية ،،،**

**مدير عام منطقة الأحمدي التعليمية**

٢٠١٢/٨/١٤م

وزارة التربية
منطقة الأحمدي التعليمية

منى خالد الصالح
مدير عام منطقة الأحمدي التعليمية

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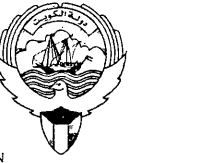

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إدارة البحوث والتطوير التربوي

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
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الموافق / / 201م

**السيد/ طلق صقر الهيم المحترم**

**مدير عام منطقة مبارك الكبير التعليمية**

**تحية طيبة وبعد،،،**

**الموضوع/ تسهيل مهمة**

تقوم الباحثة/ **مي غنام الصويلح** المسجلة على درجة الدكتوراه بجامعة سوانزي بالمملكة المتحدة بإجراء بحث ميداني بعنوان " **تحقيق التوازن بين العمل والأسرة للأمهات الكويتيات الموظفات في قطاع التعليم** ".

فيرجى تسهيل مهمة المذكور أعلاه وذلك **من خلال إجراء مقابلات شخصية مع موظفات المناطق التعليمية 2013/2012.**

**مع خالص الشكر والتقدير**

**مدير إدارة البحوث التربوية**

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مدير إدارة البحوث التربوية

وزارة التربية
إدارة البحوث التربوية

- نسخة للملف

Noura/2013

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وزارة التربية
-مكتب سكرتارية المدير العام
منطقة مبارك الكبير

**(استمارة متابعة)**

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رقم الوارد : 201308603
الموظف المختص : ريم الموسى
الرقم العام : 201300233872

اسم الجهة : سكرتاريه إدارة البحوث التربوية رقم الكتاب : تاريخ الكتاب : 2013/08/12
الاسـم : مي غنام الصويلح
الموضوع : تسهيل مهمة

الملاحظات : ريم الموسى

د. ماضي / لإجراء المقابلات

١٢ / ٨

وزارة التربية
منطقة مبارك الكبير التعليمية
مدير عام منطقة مبارك الكبير التعليمية

# Appendix B

# Consent and Debriefing Forms

# CONSENT FORM

**Dear participant,**

I am conducting a study under the title 'Work-life balance for Kuwaiti mothers employed in managerial positions in the education sector'. This research requires me to conduct interviews, which need to be completed by Kuwaiti mothers who hold high and middle managerial positions in the Ministry of Education. I hope that you will be able to take part in the study and kindly spare me an hour of your time in order to reply to the interview questions. Your participation will benefit me greatly, as I will gain an understanding from your personal experiences of combing motherhood and managerial roles in the Kuwaiti context.

**Background information**

The principal purpose of the present research is to undertake an in-depth analysis of the experiences of Kuwaiti mothers working as managers regarding their work and family lives, and noting ways in which these are different and unique due to culture, beliefs and gender roles in Kuwaiti society. It also aims to explore work-life balance in the Kuwaiti context. Since the research deals with personal experiences I have noted the terms and how I will minimize any associated risks for the participants:

- There is no compulsion for you to participate in this research project and, if you do choose to participate, you have the right at any stage to withdraw your participation.
- You have the right to refuse answering any questions you are not comfortable with.
- You have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about you.
- The information you give will be used solely for the purpose of this research project, which may include publication.
- All information you give will be treated as confidential.
- The researcher will make every effort to preserve your anonymity.

.......................................... ..........................

(Signature of participant) (Date)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact me via the details below.

Researcher's name: Mai Al- Suwaileh
Contact phone number of researcher: [illegible], Email: [illegible]
Supervisor: Professor Pullen, A, Email: a. Pullen@Swansea.ac.uk

# Debriefing form

**Study title:** Work-life balance for Kuwaiti mothers employed in managerial positions in the education sector

Dear participant,
The purpose of the interview you just completed is to analyse the experiences and perception of Kuwaiti mothers working as managers regarding their work and family lives, and noting ways in which these are different and unique due to culture, beliefs and gender roles in Kuwaiti society. Most of the previous research conducted on women in Arab countries has shown contradictory information about women's position and status. Some have stated that cultural believes is the first reason for Arab women having a low status while others have shown that Islam is the first reason. This study seeks to understand employed Kuwaiti mothers roles, status and the barriers faced by them when combining managerial positions and motherhood in Kuwaiti culture.

You have been asked to take part in this study because this study is interested in your experiences of combining both family and managerial roles. To help conclude the interview could you kindly spend a few minutes to answer the following questions please;

How did you find the experience of participating in this interview?
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Which part of the interview did you feel was most important and needed more discussion?
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Did you find the interview stressful, or caused you any embarrassment due to the sensitive topic?
.....................................................................................................
.....................................................................................................

Do you think that the researcher had given you a clear picture of the study aims and how your identity and anonymity will be protected?
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.....................................................................................................

Do you have any concerns about participating in the study after the interview took place?
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.....................................................................................................

Would you like the findings of this study given to you?
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.....................................................................................................

Thank you for participating in my study.

# Appendix C1: Interview Schedule, First Draft

**Participant's background**

- Name (not necessary)
- Age (not necessary)
- Marital status
- Number and age of children
- Number of servants
- Educational level
- Years of work experience
- Title of position currently held
- Work responsibilities

**Culture, gender and family barriers**

1. There are many problems that face Kuwaiti mothers due to cultural beliefs about different gender roles? What are these barriers and how you minimise the impact of these issues in your career and family life?
2. From your experience, as both a mother and manager do you think that combining the two roles creates a conflict for you personally?
3. How do you combine family and managerial roles? Does your husband help you with household and childcare responsibilities?
4. Do you need to 'act like a man' in order to be accepted in a managerial position? Please explain.
5. Why do you think that Kuwaiti women prefer to work under male managers rather than female managers?
6. Please explain how you feel towards your work. What are the factors that make you happy/sad? (Male/women attitude, advantages, disadvantages of being a mother working as a manager in Kuwaiti context)
7. From your experience, what is the most important thing that the government needs to provide employed mothers with to support them in combining their work and family responsibilities? (Recommendation, to help employed mother reduce the conflict and create balance).

# Appendix C2: Interview Schedule, Second Draft

**Kuwaiti women's roles before and after modernization/ government incenti·es**

1. Why do you think that the government has encouraged families to have nore children and at the same time encouraged mothers to work?
2. Could you tell me what incentives the Kuwaiti government provids to employed Kuwaiti mothers to encourage them to participate in the workorce and do you feel this is enough?

**Cultural beliefs/values**

1. Could you tell me about the problems that you face due to cultural bdiefs about different gender roles?
2. Do you think that Kuwaiti culture restricts mothers from certain typs of work? Why?

**Beliefs about different gender roles and their impact on Kuwaiti motiers employed in managerial positions**

- **Career and Family Life**

1. Do you think that family responsibilities affect ambitious mothers who vant to make progress in their careers?
2. Does your husband support your profession and help you with householc and childcare responsibilities?

**How does identity affect Kuwaiti mothers employed by the Ministr: of Education?**

1. Do you think it is necessary to 'act like a man' in order to be acceptedin a managerial position? Please explain.
2. Please explain how you feel towards your work. What are the factorsthat make you happy/ sad?

**Work-life balance**

1. Could you tell me about the advantages and disadvantages faced by Kuvaiti mothers employed as managers?
2. From your experience, what is the most important thing that the governnent needs to provide employed mothers with to support them in combining heir work and family responsibilities?

# Appendix D: Demographics of Managers Interviewed

| Name | Age | Age at marriage | Age at birth giving | Status | Number of children | Youngest child's age | Number of domestic servants | Education level | Years at work | Position |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Samia | 58 | - | - | Married | 5 | 15 | 2 | (BA) | 37 | Senior supervisor |
| Salwa | 52 | 19 | 21 | Divorced | 1 | Old | 2 | Diploma | 32 | Senior supervisor |
| Amal | 33 | 25 | 26 | Married | 4 | 1 | 2 | (BA) | 10 | Head of department |
| Nora | 30 | 20 | 25 | Married | 2 | 3 | 1 | (BA) | 9 | Head of department |
| Fatima | 50 | 20 | 21 | Married | 6 | 7 | 3 | MA | 28 | Educational observer |
| Salma | 39 | 18 | 20 | Married | 5 | 3 | 2 | (BA) | 17 | Head of department |
| Mariam | 43 | 27 | 28 | Married | 5 | 4 | 2 | (BA) | 21 | Head of department |
| Alia | 37 | 19 | 20 | Married | 5 | 12 | 2 | Diploma | 15 | Head of department |
| Rema | 39 | 18 | 20 | Married | 3 | 2 | 2 | (BA) | 14 | Head of department |
| Basma | 62 | 35 | 36 | Married | 3 | - | 1 | (BA) | 35 | Senior observer |
| Badria | 50 | 40 | 41 | Married | 2 | 5 | 2 | (BA) | 30 | Senior manager |
| Aisha | 49 | 21 | 23 | Married | 5 | 10 | 2 | (BA) | 27 | General manager |
| Manal | 50 | 15 | 16 | Married | 5 | 7 | 1 | (BA) | 27 | Senior manager |
| Asma | 44 | 24 | 25 | Married | 4 | 6 | 3 | (BA) | 18 | Supervisor |
| Jamila | 28 | 27 | 28 | Married | 1+ Pregnant | 2 | 1 | (BA) | 6 | Head of department |
| Nadia | 46 | 21 | 24 | Married | 5 | 9 | 1 | (BA) | 22 | Head of department |
| Wasan | 40 | 18 | 20 | Married | 3 | 7 | 2 | (BA) | 18 | Supervisor |
| Safiya | 48 | 18 | 20 | Married | 5 | 7 | 1 | (BA) | 26 | Observer |
| Marwa | 41 | 22 | 23 | Married | 6 | 3 | 1 | (BA) | 18 | Senior manager |
| Arwa | 49 | 16 | 17 | Married | 7 | 9 | 2 | MA | 21 | Senior supervisor |
| Maia | 53 | 17 | 18 | Married | 6 | 10 | 2 | (BA) | 28 | Supervisor |
| Bodour | 39 | 23 | 24 | Married | 4 | 3 | 1 | (BA) | 16 | Supervisor |
| Rawan | 52 | 19 | 20 | Married | 1 | Old | 2 | (BA) | 30 | Senior Supervisor |
| Dana | 36 | 18 | 19 | Married | 5 | 2 | 2 | (BA) | 14 | Supervisor |
| Hajer | 57 | 22 | 23 | Married | 5 | 12 | 3 | Diploma | 30 | Supervisor |
| Mounira | 51 | 14 | 18 | Married | 5 | 9 | 1 | (BA) | 29 | Supervisor |
| Fajer | 54 | 19 | 20 | Married | 5 | 11 | 1 | (BA) | 32 | Supervisor |

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