

***THE MULTIPLE ROLE COMBINATION OF  
EGYPTIAN WORKING WOMEN:  
BALANCING BETWEEN TRADITION AND  
MODERNITY***



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## Research Summary

*“Did you know that nobody ever asked me about my opinion or how I experience this situation? Because everybody considers this as normal.”* -Amany-

This qualitative study aims to gather insights on how higher educated working women in Cairo manage to combine their working role with their family-related roles. This idea arose after reading the Arab Human Development Reports (AHDR) of the United Nations. The development and empowerment of women in Arab regions is one of the main issues in this series of reports. The United Nations (2002-2006, AHDR) identified the economic participation of Arab women as one of the millennium goals in order to help develop Arab states into more prosperous and stable regions with social equality.

An impressive increase in the educational levels of Arab women has led to Arab women gaining viable potential as a workforce. Recently, an increasing amount of Arab women are increasingly entering the labour market but their labour participation remain low when compared to international levels. Causes for this can be found in cultural, religious and economical factors. In Arab societies, the women’s primary role is still commonly perceived as one where she is committed to the household and care of children. This traditional role of women represents a source of conflict for the educated women, who are highly conscious in keeping a balance between the modern world of work and traditional influences about family life. Within this context it will be interesting to formulate the following research thesis:

*How do university graduated upper- and upper-middle class Egyptian working women in prestigious or well-paid jobs manage to combine their working role with their family-related roles?*

This subject of study has attracted interest only since recently. Few articles, books or documents can be found relating to this subject. Even the specialized library of the National Council of Women in Cairo, is poor in its collection illustrating the understudied nature of this subject. Therefore, this study will be a modest attempt in exploring the meaning and consequences of economical progress for women within a society that values the roles of women within the boundaries of the family. The confrontations of women within existing social structures, ideological role expectations and their daily experiences in Egyptian society are the central approaches of this study. The ‘perception versus experience’ theory unveils the difference between the way women *perceive* their own roles within the existing structure of existing role expectations and the *experience* of these roles in their every day lives. Though a small minority of women is able to remove themselves from existing ideological role expectations and social structures, because of exclusive family situations, the majority of women choose for moderate role changes in line with existing Egyptian social structures and role expectations. Women do make slight and modest shifts with regard to their multiple roles. Women simultaneously reject certain role aspects while supporting and maintaining others: a puzzling way of combining their multiple roles. However by doing so, it enables the women to reconcile their traditional and professional roles in an ideological context where the traditional roles of women are highly valued. The justification of their role performance is organised differently in comparison with Western societies. This study attempts to provide insights on the differences between the ideological justification of roles between the West and an Arab country as Egypt.

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## **Research Summary**

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This qualitative study aims to gather insights in how higher educated working women in Cairo manage to combine their working role with their family-related roles. This idea arose after reading the Arab Human Development Reports (AHDR) of the United Nations. The development and empowerment of women in Arab regions is one of the main issues in this series of reports. The United Nations (2002-2006, AHDR) identified the economic participation of Arab women as one of the millennium goals to develop Arab states to more prosperous, stable and social (evenly) developed regions.

This rise of the Arab women refers to the impressive increase of the educational level of Arab women. Recently Arab women are increasingly entering the labour force but their labour participation remains low compared to the international level. Explanations can be found in cultural, religious and economical factors. From a cultural point of view, Arab societies seem to be reluctant to abandon their traditional views of women. A woman primarily committed to the house and children is still the most common role expectation in Arab societies. This traditional role of women represents a source of conflict for the more aware and educated women, trying to balance the modern world of work and traditional influences about family life. Within this context it will be interesting to formulate the following research thesis:

*How do Egyptian working university graduated upper- and upper-middle class women in prestigious or well-paid jobs manage to combine their working role with their family-related roles?*

The attention for this subject of study is relatively new. Few articles, books or documents can be found in relation to this subject. Even in the specialized library of the National Council of Women in Cairo, this illustrates the understudied nature of this subject. Because of this, this study will try to be a modest attempt, to explore the meaning and consequences of economical progress for women within a society that values the roles of women within the boundaries of the family. The confrontations of women with existing social structures, role expectations and their daily experiences in Egyptian society are the central approach of this study.

The theoretical approach failed to identify the slight and modest shifts that women make to deal with their roles and existing role expectations and social structures. Women deny and support existing role expectations and social structures, at the same time. They decide to deny certain role aspects while supporting and maintaining others: a puzzling way of combining their multiple roles. It enables women to reconcile their traditional and professional roles, within this ideological gender context were the traditional roles of women are highly valued. The relational structure of Egyptian society makes that women choose for moderate role changes in line with existing Egyptian social structures and role expectations. Only a privileged and fortunate minority of women is able to remove themselves from these role expectations and social structures, by their exclusive ‘non-conform the general norms’ family situation. The multiple role combination of Egyptian women can be regarded as a careful process of balancing between different roles.



## **1. Introduction**

Most women workers with children have to combine multiple roles. Numerous studies have shown that most women spend substantially more time on the household and childcare than their male partners (Seymour, 1992). They are more likely to experience the impact of their working role in their domestic roles as a mother, wife and manager of the household, and vice versa. The combination of multiple roles means that, women have to balance between their working role and family-related roles. Balancing between different roles can result in more positive or negative outcomes: certain conditions and situations produce more positive and beneficial results in relation to the well-being of working women and vice versa. (Barnett and Hyde, 2001).

The choices of women reconciling work and family life, are influenced by economic developments and social changes in society (Hakim, 2008), the experienced quality of the roles and the personal satisfaction of each of them (Barnett and Hyde, 2001). The structure and state of development of society forms the different roles that women engage in. Therefore are there large differences in women's labour market participation patterns in the Western World and the Arab World; and the choices in reconciling work and family roles. These differences will be highlighted below.

Women's domestic roles changed substantially, in the West. "One of the most significant social changes in post- World War II era has been the increasing number of women in the formal labor force" (Semyonov, 1980: 534). The participation of Arab women in formal labour market is a relatively new phenomenon. Arab women are increasingly joining the work force, and rise to managerial positions (Omar, 2008).

The social and economical development in the Arab world lags behind the West (Arab Human Development Reports, UNDP, 2002-2008). This produces different contexts of combining career and family life for Arab women. Each context exists of different conditions and situations. These specific cultural, social, economical and religious settings influence the way Arab women combine their multiple roles. The degree of role satisfaction determines the experienced quality of the roles. This satisfaction depends largely on the role expectations of one's own and others (Barnett and Hyde, 2001). These expectations vary in the West and the Arab world. The Arab world is considered to have more traditional and conservative viewpoints (from a Western point of view) towards the roles of women as the West. In advanced and liberal societies as the West is considered to be, career and family choices are often based on personal preferences (Hakim, 2005). This implies that Western women are more able to own a choice between reconciling their work and family roles. The appreciation of women's traditional roles in Arab societies can be compared with the roles of women in the Netherlands during the 50's. At this period in history women's roles were valued at home within the family (Moree, 1992).

The multiple role combination of working women in the Arab world has gained little scientific attention. Although women's labour participation is positively affected by some (ongoing) structural changes. Like the increased control of women on their own fertility, and the rise of their educational level (Arab Human Development Report Towards the rise of women, 2005). Especially the impressive increase of the educational level of women is an important factor of influence, affecting the participation of women in the labour market. Increasing number of higher educated women enter the formal labour market. According to Omar (2008; 107) currently "a working Arab woman is therefore no longer an exception, but

rather a growing trend.” This makes it very interesting and highly relevant to explore how working higher educated Arab women manage to combine their multiple roles in their family and at work. A study could provide more information on the experiences of this group of women. It may be fruitful to learn more about the specific situation of this group of women. Especially from a Western perspective this study is an interesting opportunity to gain knowledge about the position and situation of the Arab higher educated working women. The Western image of the Arab woman is often this stereotypical view of an uneducated not working and ignorant women (Ali, 2003), which makes it also relevant to examine the opposite of this stereotypical image: the higher educated working woman, because reality is much more diverse than that one-sided Western picture of the Arab woman.

One country in the Arab world is Egypt. Egypt is a very interesting country from a scientific point of view. It can be regarded as an exemplary model of an Arab society in development. Egypt is seen as the most developed economy in the Arab world. According to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs<sup>1</sup> it is the largest, most influencing and trendsetting country in the Arab World. With regard to it’s economic development and women’s formal labour participation. Egypt has in comparison with the other higher income countries of the Arab region, one of the higher paid employment rates for females, 28% of the women in urban areas are engaged in paid employment, and in rural areas this number makes up to 26 % (Population Council of Egypt, 2006). The increased educational attainment of Egyptian females results in high labour force rates among higher educated women. The higher educated Egyptian working woman has many similarities with Western higher educated women in terms of educational achievements and working status. “According to figures for 1988, 88% of the unmarried women in urban areas with a university education participated in the labour force, compared to 40% of those with intermediate education. Of the highly educated women who were married, 66% were active participants in the urban labor force” (Assaad 2000:24). In comparison the labour participation of university graduated Dutch women was 75% 2005 (Emancipation Monitor, SCP, 2006: 72).

The long Egyptian history relating to women’s issues provides this country with a modern and progressive background with regard to this subject of the entrance of women in the public sphere. Egypt has a strong and famous history of women’s activism. Egypt is well-known for it’s feminists who raised social issues, like the participation of women in the public spheres (initiated by Qasim Amin, 1863-1908), the battle against female genital mutilation (initiated by Nawal el Saadawi, 1932), the foundation of the first Egyptian Feminist Union (by Huda Sha’rawi 1879-1947), and the development of a new Islamic perspective of Muslim Feminism (by Leila Achmed, 1940). Muslim feminism identifies the patriarchal interpretations of Islam as oppressive forces against women, rather than Islam itself. These activists all arose in Egyptian society. This unveils the actual importance and interest in Egypt for women’s roles in society.

The choice to focus this research on Cairo in particular, is due to the combination of traditional and modern lifestyles and expressions in this large urban context. The city reflects the Egyptian cultural inheritance on one hand and the road to a more modern life on the other hand. This makes Cairo a fascinating place to explore how higher educated working women combine the road to a more modern life (reflected in their working role) with their Egyptian cultural inheritance (reflected in their family-related roles). Important features of women who participated in this study are the specific characteristics of their socio-economic class.

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<sup>1</sup> ( Information available at:

[http://www.minbuza.nl/en/developmentcooperation/partners/countries\\_alphabetically,Egypt.html](http://www.minbuza.nl/en/developmentcooperation/partners/countries_alphabetically,Egypt.html))



Basically this group of higher educated working women has a very privileged position in Egyptian society. Their stories can not be considered as the average way of living for Egyptian working women. These women were able to maximize their assets in valuable socio-cultural and educational capital. Their distinctive socio-economic position gave them access to the best educational trajectories and to prestigious well-paid jobs. Their social cultural background provided them with liberal views concerning the economic participation of women. Their experiences and stories reflect a world on itself. They managed to benefit of economical progress and developments in Egypt. They enjoyed (in comparison to women from lower social economic classes) a supportive environment, to reconcile their work and family roles. Relating to this subject, the following problem definition is formulated in this qualitative study:

*1) How do working university graduated upper-class and upper-middle class Egyptian working women in prestigious and well paid jobs manage to combine their working role with their family-related roles?*

This question will be answered by a theoretical approach using existing theories of multiple role performance and role perceptions: 'the perception versus experience' theory. This theory aims to identify how working women deal with the combination of their work and family-related roles. The thesis consists of two main components:

- A) The personal perception of role expectations and social structures.
- B) The (practical) daily experiences of multiple role combining.

In Egypt, the women's primary role is still commonly perceived as one where she is committed to the household and care of children. This traditional role of women represents a source of conflict for the more aware and educated women, trying to balance the modern world of work and traditional influences about family life (Omair, 2008). This study will explore the difference between personal perceptions of (ideological) role expectations and social structures on the one hand (component A) and the actual implementation of roles in every day life on the other hand (component B). In order to examine possible similarities between the subjective evaluations and perceptions of existing role expectations and social structures in Egyptian society (component A) and the actual practice of roles in every day life (component B). For both of the main components are two research questions formulated. In relation to the first component (A), the following research question is addressed:

*1) How do Egyptian working women perceive their own roles in comparison with the identified (ideological) female role expectations and social structures in Egyptian society?*

The purpose of this question is to explore how women perceive their own role performance in relation to the influence of existing (ideological) role expectations and social structures. The question will be answered by reference to a theoretical approach that identifies three types of personal perceptions. To unveil how women perceive and evaluate the influence of traditional roles and structures with regard to their own role performance. Their subjective perceptions are the central focus of this research question. In order to examine the impact of existing role expectations and social structures on the role perceptions of women.

The second component explores the implementation of roles in every day life. The experiences of every day are brought to live. The purpose of this question is to increase

understanding of multiple role combination experiences in practice. The following research question is formulated:

2) *How do Egyptian working women combine their working career and family roles at a practical level?*

The question refer to a two-sided approach focussing on 1) the way women perceive their own roles relating to existing (ideological) female role expectations and social structures on one hand (component A) and 2) the way women combine these roles in practise (component B). This comprehensive approach attempts to explore possible differences between what people *perceive* as their roles and the actual practise and *experience* of these roles.

The following chapters present more details of this qualitative study. The first chapter (2) starts with a literature review on multiple role combination. It includes a rough impression of the major differences between the West and the Arab world. These comparisons are made to frame this subject of study in the proper place. After this comparison the focus will be directed to the specific environmental context of Egyptian working woman. To get an impression of the specific conditions and characteristics of the research group and the social context they are dealing with. The next chapter (3) presents the theoretical foundation of this study. It clarifies from which perspective social reality is approached and why. The terms used in the research questions will be defined and described. Other theoretical assumptions and the limitations of this study will also be addressed; followed by a chapter (4) about the methods of research. In order to clarify how the relation between the components and topics of this research measured in the questionnaire, how the women in this research were approached and how the analytical part is conducted. This will be the last chapter of a descriptive introduction of this research. This introduction is made to provide the reader with all the necessary information, before heading to the actual presentation of the data. This introduction is important to provide the (Western) reader with knowledge of the non-western context of this research and the Egyptian context in particular. The presentation of the data consists of an extensive and rich description about the experiences and perceptions of the women in this research. The last chapters (6 and 7) present a summary; it provides links with the previous literature review, and it includes an overall conclusion, some recommendations and theoretical implications.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. The Combination of Multiple Roles**

A general feature of working mothers is that they involve in paid employment while maintaining their traditional roles. Yang (1998) recognizes this as a global phenomenon. Women combine their family-related roles as a mother, wife and housewife with their economical working role at the labour market. (Yang, 1998: 16) “One of the major differences between male and female employees is that for most women the working day doesn’t end at 5:00 p.m.” This situation forces working women to cope with the multiple demands and responsibilities of their employment and family responsibilities. “Women, particularly mothers (..), still experience the most work/family problems, this is demonstrated by the research finding that employed mothers with children are in poorer mental health than other employed women” (Hansen, 1991:349).

Existing studies about the role performance of working women can be divided in two types of perspectives. Most of the studies on the combination of multiple roles are based on a “conflict perspective stemming from the early work of Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek and Rosenthal” ( Noor, 2004: 309). A minority of existing studies uses a more positive perspective, emphasizing the beneficial aspects of multiple role combining. Both perspectives will be reviewed.

#### **2.1.1. Sources of Conflict**

Conflict arises when the demands of work and family are incompatible with each other. (Barnett, 1998: 126) “There is a universal assumption that family demands compete with those of the workplace, such that family is seen as a problem and as a barrier to maximizing the corporate bottom line.” This perspective stems from the scarcity hypothesis which assumes that individuals have limited time and energy; therefore occupying multiple roles will eventually result in role conflicts and role overload. (Yang, 2000: 113) “In which the role pressures from work and family are non-compatible in some respect. That is participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role and vice versa.” Role conflict is generally defined as “the concurrent appearance of two or more incompatible expectations for the behavior of a person” (Biddle, 1986: 82). “Role conflict is experienced when the various role elements are perceived as nearly equal in importance” (Gilbert, et. al, 1981).

Literature on inter-role conflict between work and family roles can be summarised in different sources of conflict. (Greenhaus and Beutel, 1995: 76) “An examination of the literature on conflict between work and family roles suggest that work-family conflicts exist” in relation to three different types of conflict:

1) *Time-based conflicts* “multiple roles may compete for a person's time. Time spent on activities within one role generally cannot be devoted to activities within another role” (Greenhaus and Beutel, 1995:77). Time conflicts make it difficult to fulfil one’s role requirements. Topics in relation to this form of inter-role conflict are studies about time pressures, pressures from preoccupation with one or more roles. Conflicts can arise from work or family-related sources. Work related conflicts are for instance the numbers of hours worked per week. Family-related conflicts are related to family role characteristics that require a person to spend large amounts of time in family activities, like childcare, cleaning and cooking.

2) *Strain-based conflicts* refer to the existence of strain, “when strain in one role affect’s one’s performance in another role” (Greenhouse and Beutel, 1995: 80). Strain-based conflicts can be internal or external. Internal strain relates to several issues, like role overload relating to the total volume of activities of each role. But also to identity issues, like the discontinuity between early gender-role socialization and current wishes or practises. The intrapersonal identity integration of work and family can also be a major difficulty for women. The presence of young children, the amount of social support at home with family-related role responsibilities. External strain refers to normative issues like the expectations that others have from the role performance of someone. Like expectations from the husband about the performance of his wife, the societal pressures to fulfil certain roles etc. Strain-based conflicts produce symptoms such as tension, anxiety, fatigue and irritability. Work related sources of conflict refer to the fact that ambiguity of conflict within the working role is positively related to work-family conflict and vice versa.

3) *Behaviour-based conflicts* refer to the fact that one role makes it difficult to fulfil the requirements of the other. Specific patterns of role behaviour may be incompatible with expectations regarding behaviour in another role. It has been suggested, for example, that the male, managerial stereotype emphasizes self-reliance, emotional stability, aggressiveness, and objectivity (Schein, 1973). “Family members, on the other hand, may expect a person to be warm, nurturant, emotional, and vulnerable in his or her interactions with them. If a person is unable to adjust behavior to comply with the expectations of different roles, he or she is likely to experience conflict between the roles” (Greenhaus and Beutel, 1995: 81-82).

Other studies report about role conflict experiences on a micro level, providing more illustrative insights about this subject of multiple role combination.

Shuster (1993) identified different coping styles of employed mothers to deal with their multiple role demands. The three identified maternal responses are:

1) *enamoured mothers* have a belief of primary supremacy of mother as primary caregiver. Being sensitive and care giving are central elements of this role. 2) *Mother as a manager*, she is a caregiver and equal partner scheduling needs. Being responsible, responsive and providing care are central elements of this role. 3) A *distressed mother* refers to exclusivity of a primary caregiver but not necessarily as a mother. It refers to a competitive who spoils the infant. These mothers show varied and contra dictionary behaviour. 4) A *disengaged mother* denies motherhood, these mothers are disconnected from their mother role.

Another way of coping with multiple roles is identified by a study of Mc Bride (1997) she identifies *the superwomen syndrome* as a specific way of dealing with multiple roles. This refers to the attempts of women trying to be all things to all people, trying to do everything well or perfectly. This behaviour is accompanied with feelings of stress and tiredness or lack of control on one’s life. It is often caused by unrealistic expectations about one’s own role performance. Mc Bride (1997) writes that women are often socialized to accept total responsibility for problems and fears, which explains the tendency of women to adapt to this behaviour.

Other identified strategies to deal with multiple roles are decreasing the numbers of paid work, or strategies affecting the duration of care giving activities, changing standards of cleaning, sacrificing leisure time, adjusting timing of work activities and so on (Hubers et.al, 2007).

### 2.1.2. Benefits of Multiple Role Performance

Studies with a more positive perspective on multiple role combination show that women who engage in multiple roles, report lower levels of stress and higher levels of subjective well-being, than their counterparts who engage in fewer roles (Barnett and Hyde, 2001). Multiple roles are beneficial for several reasons.

The quantity of the roles serves as a *buffer*: failure or dissatisfaction in one role can be buffered by the success and satisfaction in another role. For instance “for women rewarding experiences on the job, especially those associated with challenging work, offset the negative effects of child-care burdens on the mental health”(Barnett and Hyde, 2001:786).

Providing an income can also *reduce the financial stress* which can be experienced by sole-breadwinner households. “Women’s employment can serve as an antidote to the effects of economic hardship by decreasing the poverty rate of married couples”(Barnett and Hyde, 2001: 786).

Multiple role performance *also increases opportunities for social support*. A supportive environment will increase the well-being of working women. “Greenberger and O’Neil (1993) found that women’s well-being was linked to social support from husbands, neighbours, supervisors, and co-workers” (Barnett and Hyde, 2001:787).

Multiple roles offer multiple opportunities to experience success and to develop *a sense of self-confidence and self agency*. Although studies in this field are limited “a longitudinal study of employed women (Barnett, Marshall and Singer, 1992) the mental health of women without family roles as compared with that of employed women without family roles was less vulnerable to the vicissitudes of their working role” (Barnett and Hyde, 2001: 788).

Multiple role performance also contributes to an *expansion of frame of reference*. It increases the changes of obtaining more and varied information from others.

Another advantage is that when women and men combine family and work, their *experiences* become more *similar*, facilitating spouse communication and marital quality. “Cowen et. al. (1985) concluded that in many traditional couples the birth of a child begins a process of gradual disengagement between spouses. While she stays at home fulltime, he becomes more engaged at work. Over time the community interest between the spouses diminishes, leading to a widening communication gulf” (Barnett and Hyde, 2001:788).

*Gender role ideology* influences the traditional or non-traditional attitudes about the proper social role of women. It moderates and forms the relationship between multiple roles. In general those with liberal gender- role ideologies benefit more from combining work and family roles than those with traditional gender-role ideologies.

### 2.1.3. Positive or Negative Outcomes

From these studies it becomes clear that multiple role combinations can produce positive or more negative experiences. Certain conditions and situations produce more positive and beneficial results in relation to the well-being of working women but the opposite is also true. The result depends on various influences.

A negative impact might arise when the number of roles become too many or when the role demands are too many (Barnett and Hyde, 2001). More important than these quantitative role aspects is the (qualitative) personal level of satisfaction.

Satisfaction is achieved when someone is able to meet their own social role expectations (internal) and / or those of others (external). These social role expectations are developed by socialization processes. Internal role expectations (at a micro level) are created by virtue of socialization in early childhood. External role expectations (at a macro level) exist in wider society. Both are a reflection of historical times, cultural norms, values and



beliefs. These internal and external social role expectations moderate and form the environmental setting where women combine their work and family-related roles. Social role expectations will influence the way working women combine their working and family-related roles in different countries and societies.

## 2.2. Contrasts between the West and the Arab World

As we have seen certain conditions and situations produce negative or positive experiences regarding the combination of multiple roles. At a macro level societal changes and economic opportunities influence women's choices in balancing work and family roles. These external produce different societal environments regarding the multiple role combination of working women. Five historical social changes (Hakim, 2000) created differences between modern societies like the West, and developing societies like in the Middle East. The following section will give an outline of the major social changes and economic influences in the West regarding the choices of women balancing their work and family life. This comparison is made to frame the non-Western setting of this research subject properly. It is necessary to be aware of the existence of these differences in order to avoid the mistake to take one's own beliefs for granted.

### 2.2.1. The Western Setting

In most Western societies the roles of women in the family and society changed substantially. "One of the most significant social changes in the post- World War II era has been the increasing number of women in the labor force" (Semyonov, 1980: 534). (Feldman, et al., 2001: 492) "With the replacement of the one-breadwinner family by the dual-earner household in most Western societies, most researchers have begun to examine" the effects of female employment on family life and vice versa.

Interest for the (competing) environments of family and work arose for a large part due to the growth in numbers of women combining motherhood with paid employment after World War II. When many white American middle-class mothers began to enter the workforce, researchers turned their attention to this issue of working mothers (Edwards, 2001). According to existing research economic uncertainty provided legitimacy for women to work and to adopt new work-family arrangements (Edwards, 2001).

Currently these work-family arrangements and choices take place within the setting of modern societies. Modernity is seen as an important feature of the West. According to Hakim (2000) in Western Europe, North America and other modern societies five historical changes produced new scenario's and choices for women (in relation to work and family) that were not available before that time.

The following historical changes are identified by Hakim (1998):

- 1) The *contraceptive revolution*, gave women control over their own fertility.
- 2) The *equal opportunity revolution* created more equal access for women to all positions, occupations and careers at the labour market.
- 3) *Expansion of white-collar occupations* created more job opportunities for women, since these jobs were more attractive for women than the blue-collar occupations.
- 4) The creation of *jobs for secondary earners*, provided women with the option to have flexible part-time jobs. These jobs did not interfere in great extent with their family life.
- 5) The increased importance and attachment to *attitudes, values and personal preferences* in the lifestyle choices of modern and liberal societies, create the



possibility for women to make their own choices in relation to occupational attachment and their role performance. This increase of personal preferences and choices urged the development of individualism that is so typical for modern societies.

Three of the five identified changes refer to structural economic changes affecting the labour market opportunities for women. From which can be concluded, that economic development is a major influence, affecting the choices of women reconciling their working and family-related roles at the labour market. Hakim (2000) identified three types of women with certain work family preferences:

1) *Adaptive women* combine employment and their family without giving a fixed priority to either of them. This type of woman wants to enjoy the best of both worlds. A majority of women in this group take part time jobs after having children, seeking to devote as much time to their work, as to their family.

2) *Work-centred women* are a minority. Despite the increased entrance of women to higher educational levels and higher grades of work in the past three decades. Work-centred women are the type of women who are focussed on activities in the public sphere. Family life is organised around work, which makes work the first priority for them. Many of these women remain childless.

3) *Home-centred women* are also a minority. This type of woman prefers to prioritise her home and family on the account of work. After they are married, they often have large families. This type of woman prefers to avoid paid work after marriage, except in times of big financial stress.

The relation between work-family preferences and the socio-economic changes in modern societies underlines the important influence of society. The experiences and choices of women to balance between their work and family-related roles are part of these developments in society. In modern societies the choices that women make about combining work and family roles are more a result of their personal (lifestyle) preferences.

### 2.2.2. Different Ideologies

According to Hakim (2005) women decide themselves whether they give priority to their working role and/or their family-related roles. This is an important difference between Western and Arab societies. Western societies are individualized societies. The individual itself and his or her personal development, personal choices and preferences, structure the organisation of this type of society. Much emphasize is put on personal autonomy. On the contrary to Arab societies, which are collective societies. Arab societies are organised around the individual in relation to his or her social roles and the significant social context. Arab societies are based on social role systems. This difference in the organisation of societal structures results in different appreciations of personal development. In Western societies the choices of women are not appreciated with regard to the roles women perform but with regard to the ability to make their own decisions and to follow their own personal preferences, values and attitudes. Women in Western societies do have more possibilities to make their own personal choices to reconcile between work and family life (as identified by the three types of lifestyle preferences of Hakim (2005)). On the contrary, in Arab societies the choices of women are linked and more limited to the expectations and ideologies of their social roles and their specific economic circumstances. The way women justify their own role performance varies in Western and Arab societies. In Western societies women refer more to this ideology

of equality between men and women. Women should be able to achieve and do the same as men; this idea of equality is an argument to justify one's own role performance. Just like the ideology of the ego or self. The self functions as a means to justify one's own behaviour, on the contrary to Arab societies where role performance is justified by role ideologies. Instead of relying on the self, women in Arab societies rely more on their sex-related roles, on religious and social expectations and the social context. Therefore, the reference system in relation to the performance of roles is organised differently in the West and Arab societies.

### **2.2.3. Family and Work in the West: Inconsistency in Modern Societies**

Despite this conviction of the importance of personal choice in modern societies, there are also studies that show the opposite. Komter (2005) shows that marriage relations do exist out of unconscious and unspoken power relations between men and women. According to Komter women and men do have unconscious cultural beliefs in their marriage, this results in sexual asymmetry. "This inequality is not only reflected in marriage relations, but also in the distribution of social valuable resources as knowledge, education, income, status and work" (Komter, 2005:107). The quest for equality between men and women is widely accepted these days, even in conservative circles 'emancipation' is not a strange word any more. One of the most prominent issues in this era of women's emancipation, is the great discrepancy between ideals and practise. Despite all the improvements in legislation, education, and the labour market participation of women, the practise of gender equality is far less behind, by the every day cherished traditional gender ideals in politics and daily interactions. This is caused by the unconscious power of sexe-specific thinking, behaviour and talking. Differences between men and women are often justified by reference to, the differences in nature between men and women. Komter (2005) argues that a modern society seems modern and emancipated from the outside, with regard to progress that has been made on the area's of legislation, education and the labour participation of women. But on the other hand, inside society there are still unequal power relations between men and women, especially in the private areas of the family and the household.

This is also reported by a Dutch newspaper (6-07-08). The headline reports that the roles between fathers and mothers in Holland are still very traditional. "We pretend to be a modern society, but men who decide to work less are still seen as suckers without ambition. And women who take their children to nursery for three days a week are considered as regenerated mothers." By contrast Dutch fathers are strongly involved in the upbringing of their children. Important decisions are taken together. But fathers are hardly willing to work less when they have young children; fifty percent of the fathers leaves all childcare for their wives. They are not willing or able to participate on this area.

Comparative studies about the combination of work and family life, in relation to time-based role conflicts, also produce some surprising and paradoxical results. A study of the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK (Cousins and Tang, 2004) unveils the following findings. Sweden is seen as a very progressive and modern country when it comes to policies reconciling work and family care. Despite the presence of extended facilities, higher proportions of mothers report about conflicting pressures between work and family life. But it is noteworthy to add that, it is typical of Sweden, that the majority of men and women have working hours from 31 up to 40 hours a week. Only a minority works part-time. This makes Sweden also the country with the highest proportion of egalitarian families based on working hours between men and women.

In the Netherlands and UK the majority of women are engaged in part-time work arrangements. In the Netherlands this is even the only form of employment working mothers seem to engage in. “The solution of part-time hours for mothers, suggests a strong ‘gender compromise’. We could even call this an ‘unchallenged’ gender solution to working time, in which it is the accepted norm that mothers work part-time” (Cousins and Tang, 2004: 544). This shows that despite improvements in legislation, education and the labour participation of women, traditional role expectations still prevail.

Another noteworthy outcome of a comparative study between West- and East European countries (Cousins and Tang, 2005) is that the numbers of working mothers indicating conflicts between reconciling work and family life; are considerably higher in the three West European countries than in the East European countries. Despite the fact that, the social facilities to combine work and family are in general much worse developed in Eastern Europe as in the West. The traditional division of domestic labour in East European countries makes women fully responsible of the household and family life after their working hours. Women and men with and without children work for very long hours. Despite this, women in these countries still report lower conflicts between the both of them. From these studies it becomes clear that, various forms of social policies and gender cultures lead to various results of combining care and work.

#### **2.2.4. The Arab Setting**

As we have seen a lot of available research on multiple role combination is focussed on Western countries. Meanwhile this topic is relatively new in the Arab world. In a thematic overview of academic articles about Arab women in management positions Omair (2008) writes that the majority of research has been published from 2000 and onwards. As we have seen in the West, multiple role combination gained scientific attention at the time when more women were entering the workforce. It is therefore very likely that, this lack of academic attention in the Arab world can be explained by the fact that the formal female labour participation is still relatively low. “A very modest 29 per cent of Arab women participated in the national economies of the Arab region. The economic participation of women in the global economy was estimated at 55.2 per cent, with corresponding rates in East Asia and the Pacific at 70 per cent, South Asia at 43.6 per cent, and Latin America and the Caribbean at 42 per cent” (Hussein, 2004: 12). It should be added that, not all economic activity of women in the Middle East is actually measured by the available statistics. Household work, domestic work or other forms of informal economic activities are not defined and measured as economic activities (Danahoe, 1999). Ironically enough it is often the kind of work many women in developing and industrialising countries in the Arab world, engage in. In Cairo (Egypt) you see many working women in the streets and homes, working as maids or nannies, selling bread or napkins in the streets or the underground.

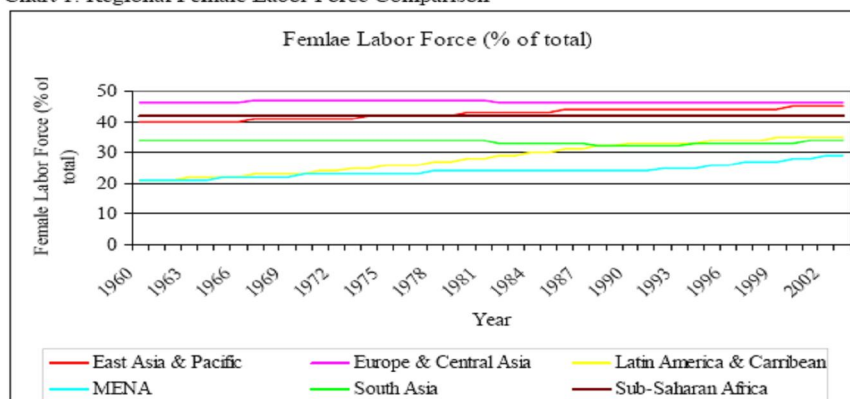
As we have seen in the West, social changes and economic opportunities at the labour market influence the choices of women reconciling their work and family-related roles. The combination of multiple roles is connected with these specific contextual structures of a society. Arab countries are developing societies, after the post-colonial era they were involved in complex processes of development from decolonisation often influenced by (Western) forms of modernization, urbanization processes, war, revolution and education (Abu-Lughod, 1998). Arab societies must deal with conflicting social, economic and religious forces. On this road to modernization some parts of society, and in particular certain classes, are confronted with the road to a more modern way of life and their cultural inheritance. Unlike the West, the five structural changes as identified by Hakim (2000) did not occur in the Arab world, especially the state of economic development which is not as far developed as in the West.

This section will address the developmental structural changes in the Arab world. A major change that has occurred in the Arab world is the *increase of the educational attainment* of women. The rise of educational performance of females has been impressive in the Arab world. “Starting from the lowest average years of schooling in the world, women in the region have either narrowed the gap or surpassed their counterparts in other regions. The educational gender gap has been shrinking. The ratio of male-to-female years of schooling fell from 2.5 in 1960, to 1.9 in 1980, and to 1.4 in 2000. Rising female enrolment rates at all levels of education since the 1970s are responsible for this trend and, at the current pace, will push educational outcomes towards greater gender parity” ( World Bank, 2004:67).

Another new development in the Middle East is the *ongoing demographic transition* from “high to low mortality and fertility rates (United Nations, 2004). An ongoing trend is also the *increasing number of women entering the work force* and rising to managerial positions (Omair, 2008). “A working Arab woman is thus no longer an exception, but rather a growing trend” (Omair, 2008: 107). Muslim women are closing the gap between their own labour force participation rates and those of non-Muslim women. This is visible in the Chart 1. from the fourth Arab Human Development Report (Towards the Rise of Women, 2005: 8)

“Starting from a low base, between 1990 and 2003, the Arab region witnessed a greater increase in women’s share in economic activity than all other regions of the world: the increase for Arab women was 19 per cent compared to 3 per cent for the world as a whole.”

Chart 1: Regional Female Labor Force Comparison



Source: World Bank WDI Online

There are some major ongoing structural changes in the Arab world as identified by Hakim (2000). But the educational attainment of women is the only one that can be regarded as an impressive development completed, control over fertility rates and the participation of women in the labour force are still ongoing and developing trends.

### 2.2.5. Family and Work in the Middle East: Patriarchal Structures

Despite some (ongoing) developments towards modernity; Arab societies can still be regarded as male-centred (patriarchal) societies. This means that these societies are mainly dominated by males. Men have the primary authority in societal structures and family structures. Men take primary responsibility over the welfare of the community or society as a whole (definition available at wikipedia).<sup>2</sup> Not surprising that the roles of women are highly valued within the boundaries of the family. Women are assumed to perform their roles as a mother and wife. These roles are highly valued in Arab societies. Mothers are even idolised

<sup>2</sup> ( Definition available at wikipedia at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriarchal\\_society](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriarchal_society))

and seen as self-sacrificing and nurturing good hearted women. Self-sacrificing care is the ultimate quality of a woman and a mother in particular. Miller and Petro-Nustas (2002), show in their ethnographic study of Jordanian women, that women are caring more for their family than for themselves. This appreciation of the family is often viewed and defined as traditional from a Western point of view. Joseph (1993) makes a distinction between two different styles of patriarchal relations between male and female family members. Patriarchal relations can be 'cold' or 'hot'. The first is refers to a pattern of distance and aloofness. This can be described as a social setting in which things are defined more as rules, 'things are just the way they are'. The second form exists of greater proximity and communication. This 'hot' form of patriarchal relations leaves more space for negotiation and exchange between members. Both forms of social relations refer to the extent of flexibility of social structures. Patriarchal structures create inequality for working women. They produce a male-centred society or social environment.

If these family roles are framed within a conservative and patriarchal point of view, the roles of women are only defined within the boundaries of family life. Roles in other areas like the public sphere or the labour market are excluded from these gender views. These conservative and limited role expectations restrict women in their other (public) roles. Especially the more aware and educated woman may experience conflicts in her attempts, trying to balance the modern world of working women, and traditional conservative influences, that value the primary roles of women only within the family and at home (Omair, 2008). Working women face difficulties when a woman's ability to negotiate is limited by conservative traditional values. Islamic modernity strives to develop the participation of women in all domains, politically and economically within the Islamic framework (Sidani, 2005). This modernist discourse is critical, it views the traditions as a restriction of the participation of women. This new discourse originated in Egypt, by Heba Ra'uf a member of the teaching faculty of Cairo University. She argues that the private and public roles of women are related with each other. And that each woman should have the choice between different roles at different stages of life (Sidani, 2005).

In general Arab women continue to occupy certain tasks in the sexual division of labour, both in the public as in the domestic spheres (Ghorayshi, 1996). Women identify various central concerns: childcare especially for children under the age of 14, women's multiple tasks as preparing food, cooking, shopping, cleaning and entertaining. Regardless of women's other work they are mainly responsible for domestic and familial tasks ( Ghorayshi, 1996: 458-459). The inequalities between men and women in society influence the experience of women. Women have to deal with these inequalities. Ghorayshi claims that women's mothering, domestic and familial tasks make them vulnerable workers. Paid employment for women leads to negative sentiments and fear of neglect of women's primary roles (Ghorayshi, 1996).

The appreciation of family roles in Arab societies can be compared with the ideas that, existed in the Netherlands about the roles of women during the 50's (Moree, 1992). These days, there was almost complete consensus, about the duty of mothers to care for their children. This obligation was taken very literally and seriously. But in contrast to the Netherlands in the 50's certain parts of the Arab world consider it nowadays as a right of women to work, like Egypt for instance. This right is described in article 13 of the 1971 constitutions which gives all citizens the constitutional right to work, without discrimination between men and women. This ideal of the 50's of a male breadwinner and a mother who takes care of the children and her household is also legally presented in Arab Constitutions.



Like in Egypt, in addition, articles 10 and 11 of the Constitution impose an obligation on the state to protect mothers and children, as well as, to reconcile between women's duties towards their families on one hand, and their work in society on the other hand. The declared right of women to work and the plight of the state to protect women to reconcile family and work at the same time. The situation is different within the Arab context in particularly with regard to Egyptian society. When this comparison with the 50's is made, the Dutch women did not have these legal rights yet. The Egyptian Constitution allows women to work, as long as it is not at the expense of family life. This is similar with the views on work and women during the 50's. Moree (1992) explains that husband and children were a woman's first priority, work came second. Work may not interfere with the family; this conviction corresponds with the Egyptian Constitution. Other similarities of women's roles during the 50's were, "the warmth of the house should be guaranteed by the woman. Mothers should be at home and with full attention if their children are there. A woman cannot claim to leisure" (Moree, 1992: 73).

Existing studies about women and work in Arab countries, mainly report about cultural, social and economic barriers for women, attitudes towards women who work, driving sources for success and reasons for working (Omair, 2008). Specific studies about the balance between work and family life are rare. Shah and Al-Qudsi (1990) have found, that hired personnel is very important for working women to balance their multiple roles. They conclude that "for most Kuwaiti women, a combination of family and career is possible only insofar as it does not interfere with one's role as a mother and wife" (Omair, 2008: 116). Facilities and supportive factors are important for women to balance between their working and family-related roles. Metcalfe (2006) writes that policies and organizational opportunities aren't supportive for Arab working women. Especially with regard to childcare and maternity leaves, because it is 'naturally' expected that women will look after their children. Jamali et al. (2005) discovered that within the Lebanese context work arrangements as job-sharing, flex time and childcare support were absent into a great extent. On the contrary a study from Oman, (Al-Lamski, 1999) reported that "Omani women enjoy a wide range of child-care support services. This varied from family support to professional support as nannies or childcare services" (Omair, 2008: 116). All these studies have in common that they are mainly focused on structural factors with regard to the combination of work and family. Personal experiences of women in relation to this subject are understudied.

### **2.2.6. The Egyptian Setting**

Like in other parts of the Arab world, Egypt is also characterized by a lack of academic attention about multiple role combination. Perhaps caused by the "general assumption within Egyptian society that work life is less central to women than to men, men are usually perceived as the primary breadwinners" (Mostafa, 2003: 253).

Currently Egyptian women are pressured again to quit their jobs and become fulltime mothers to protect their children from possible child delinquency. Not surprisingly perhaps than women, despite their educational achievements, still have the status of the 'reserve army of labour', because of the primacy attached to the concept of motherhood and domesticity (Mostafa, 2003). In comparison with the West, the Arab world seem to be reluctant to abandon their traditional viewpoint of women, a woman primarily committed to the house and children. Egyptian employed women haven't yet received recognition of their role expansion or social backing for their multiple roles. "Cultural values continue to strongly enforce and prescribe assignments of responsibility for children and home to women, regardless of paid employment. Employed Egyptian women are expected to attend to their "womanly" duties and obligations and to continue to consider these responsibilities as their primary roles" (Hattar-Pollara et.al., 2003: 252).



Another interesting finding of the study of Mostafa (2003) is that with regard to the assumed influence of Islam towards attitudes on women who work “the study detects no significant difference between Muslims and non-Muslims in Egypt regarding their attitudes towards women who work.”

### **2.2.7. Multiple Role Performance**

There is one study that focused particularly on multiple role stress of Egyptian working women Hattat-Pollera et.al., 2003. Despite the fact that the women in this study are all women from lower socio- economic classes, the findings in this study provide valuable insight information on personal experiences. The women who participated in this research were asked how they combine their multiple roles and how they experience satisfaction and stress. A common feature in relation to the multiple role performance of these women was the interconnectedness between all roles when they express themselves about role stress, satisfaction and coping. Another major theme is the perception of inequality this transcends all roles. “Idealization of traditional gender roles compounds the employed women’s daily efforts to handle both paid employment and family without structural assistance. By virtue of early socialization into prescribed traditional gender roles, Egyptian women tend to conform to their socially expected roles and take upon themselves the juggling of responsibilities for both paid work and family”( Hattar-Pollera et. al, 2003: 125). The outcome of trying to accomplish it all, with the same resources and without the recognition often results in multiple role stress. Women manage to cope with this by being self-reliant, by using cognitive and emotional focused approaches. Women’s stress was embedded in the inequality of gender roles. Women empower themselves by relying on endurance and outliving conflict.

Another interesting Egyptian study about working and family-related roles is from Sherif (1993). This study is carried out around the married upper-middle class in Cairo. The main finding of this research is that ideological gender representations are often not close to practise. (Sherif, 1993: 9) “This study reveals that the gender 'rules' that are often invoked for Egyptian society only represent 'reality' as it exists within the limited framework of a particular ideological system: one that relegates women to a subordinate female sphere.” This great discrepancy between ideals and practise, corresponds with the finding of Komter (2005). With this difference that in modern societies this ideal of equality between men and women is much more institutionalized in society. But still traditional gender views prevail inside family homes, as illustrated by the ‘gender compromise’ in the Netherlands (page 6). This discrepancy can also be found in Egypt, gender rules only represents reality within a limited framework, it does not include the variations that do exist in reality. Traditional roles are reflected by this ideological framework, but they can vary in practise.

An interesting detail is the recent link of Islamic ideology with modernization. Islam serves as a mean to develop new gender constructs. Women gain Islamic knowledge to support their own roles. Women do have economic strength, by accumulating wealth and investing it in the material and social welfare of the family. “Both men and women either directly or indirectly acknowledge the importance of women’s economic activities and their part in generating status” (Sheriff, 1993: 13). These findings indicate alternative gender relations and configurations within households and families. Women do perform a role of the economic provider within the context of the family. A gender ideology refers to attitudes regarding the appropriate behaviour of men and women in society. “Many upper-middle class Egyptian women are in the process of creating mechanisms that enables them to accumulate wealth for their families by negotiating central and peripheral domains. They are thereby reworking the definitions of what it means to be either male or female. The dominance of

women in their households, combined with a certain degree of economic strength, suggests a degree of status that is increasingly comparable to that of men” (Sheriff, 1993:13)

### **2.2.7. Strategies of Working Women**

Egyptian society is a society with a relational social structure. This means that the most important unit is not the individual itself and his or her development like in individualised Western societies, but the individual in relation to its social context. The individual is seen as part of a larger social system. People are more orientated towards social relations and the social context of life. This relational orientation makes that “individuals work to maintain social harmony and to preserve their own and others face, because disharmony threatens the social system on which the individual’s self construal is dependent” (Brett and Gelfand, 2005).

Joseph (1993) refers to this as an ‘interconnected’. In his research among Arab working-class families living in Lebanon, Joseph defines this ‘interconnectedness’ as: “relationships in which a person’s boundaries are relatively fluid so that persons feel part of significant others.” (Joseph, 1993: 452) People see, and experience others as extensions of themselves, and themselves as extensions of others. This finding directs the meaning of individualism towards another mode of existence. Individualism is more orientated towards managing, and directing social relations instead of acting as an individual itself. Individuality is expressed by the ability to mobilize or influence one’s social relationships effectively, rather than as an ability to act independently. Because of the importance of this relational orientation, (that appreciates social harmony and social reputations) it is more likely to expect that working women will combine their multiple roles in line with existing (ideological) role expectations and social structures. This means that most women explore for alternative gender constructions in line with their social surrounding. The following examples will illustrate the strategies that are used by women, dealing with the relational structure of Egyptian society. Women rely on their roles and avoid any direct confrontation in the negotiations between their (gender) roles.

The headscarf functions as a cultural symbol, it represents a message of traditional and conservative views. A veiled working woman literally cloaks herself in orthodoxy and modernity. “It conveys the social message that a woman can hold down a job without abandoning her traditional roles of wife and mother.” (Sheriff, 1993: 12) The veil reflects the attachment to these traditional roles and values. Their working role reflects this modernity. Working veiled women are modern while appreciating traditional roles. They use existing ideological role expectations to perform their working role.

Another strategy of working women (and their husbands) to negotiate between their ‘modern’ working role and traditional gender roles is to work together as a couple, this happens especially in the medical field and is often the result of studying at the same university (Sheriff, 1993). It assures a woman’s safety at the workplace by her husband. She is not working alone with strange men.

Working women do attend small religious groups often with a sheikh (a religious official) present, where women learn more about Islam. Women feel a need to educate themselves, especially about their Islamic rights. This creates the opportunity for women to study religious issues and to discuss certain subjects, in the presence of a sheikh. They use and explore Islamic texts to justify or support their own working roles.

The above examples all illustrate how women justify their working role by means of religious structures and (ideological) role expectations. Women do create some freedom for

themselves which enables them to perform their working roles, by playing with existing roles and the associated role expectations and ideologies. It becomes clear that the Egyptian setting exists of a particular framework of gender role ideologies and role expectations. These ideologies and expectations value the traditional roles of women. The appreciation of traditional roles reflects also a dilemma when conservative and patriarchal view points do not leave any space for women to perform their working roles as well.

To obtain a proper impression of the women who participated in this research, the following section will present more information about their characteristics.

### **2.3. The Distinctive Position of the Women in this Study**

It is important to pay attention to the specific circumstances of the situational context and social economic position of the women who participated in this study. The stories of the women in this study are only illustrative and representative for a small minority of Egyptian women. Their specific socio-economic class background results in a very specific lifestyle and socio-economic position. With their multilingual educational trajectory they have the largest access to paid employment in the formal sector. They are fortunate in that sense, that they have the financial means to participate in the most prestigious multilingual educational trajectories. They graduated at private, expensive and prestigious, public, multi-language institutions and universities. Their distinctive and favourable socio-economic class position, produces a specific social cultural capital, which is high valued within the Egyptian labour market. It provides them with the right social relations and behaviour to meet the requirements of good positions and prestigious jobs. Their educational career and socio-economic class background enables them to work in these high positions and to maintain a certain lifestyle.

The women in this study are all privileged enough to afford a hired support system with maids, servants, nannies and in some cases even drivers to support them in their domestic tasks and family responsibilities. Actually in many cases the basic household tasks are carried out by this support system. Another socio-economic class distinction is that many of these women do have more liberal orientated opinions towards life, in comparison to their lower class counterparts. Mingling between men and women is allowed in modest ways at work, or in public places, travelling alone through the city is also accepted just like going to public places. These working women do have more public lifestyles than their lower class counterparts (Koning, 2005). These social economic and cultural class markers make that these women are more privileged and able to combine their working role with their family-related roles. Their specific social economic class background and situational circumstances are not average in Egyptian society. They are rather a fortunate minority. It is important to keep the exclusivity of their situation in mind. The more, cause the majority of the Egyptian people are not, that fortunate to have such a 'wealthy' life.

The following table (1) provides more information about the personal background and situation of the women who participated in this research. Their educational careers, occupation, family situation and the extent of the hired support system are important features of this group of women. As you can see in this chart below all women (except one) do hold managerial or coordinative positions. The women in this study do hold very responsible and high positions. Eight women went to the most expensive university of Cairo, The American University, which is only affordable for a very small rich segment within Egyptian society. The other four women went to prestigious faculties of public state universities. Most women in this study are able to afford an extended support system. The minimum that women have

are maids to assist in the household. The maximum are all facilities of a driver, nanny, maids and servants. The size of this extended support system depends also on the personal opinions of women to hire support. Not all women like to have living-in nannies and two women even dislike the idea of having people work for them. They only want to hire the necessary amount of support, which limits it this to paid maids. All the working women who participated in this study are mothers. All mothers (except one) have at least one child under the age of six. So they all have very young children to care for, which makes the combination of work and care even more relevant for them.

<b>Table:1</b>	<b>1.Gielan</b>	<b>2. Iman</b>	<b>3. Rania</b>	<b>4. Omany</b>	<b>5. Ola</b>	<b>6. Nabil</b>	<b>7. Dahlia</b>	<b>8. Dina</b>	<b>9. Ghada</b>	<b>10. Noha</b>	<b>11. Neveen</b>	<b>12. Maftau</b>
<b>Educational trajectory</b>												
<b>Primary school:</b>	Private schools in varies countries	Private School in Kuwait	Private German School Cairo	Private English School	Public School Arabic & English	Private English School	Private English School	Private English School	Primary Public School in the UK	English School in Kuwait	English Private School	French Private School
<b>Secondary school:</b>	American High School at the States & Egypt	English Public School in Kuwait	Private German School Cairo	Private English School	Public School Arabic & English	Secondary School of University of London	Private English School	Experimental Private English School	English Private School in Cairo	English School in Kuwait	English Private School	French Private School
<b>University:</b>	Private American University Cairo	Private American University Cairo	Cairo University	Cairo University English Section	University of Ains Sham	American University Cairo	American University Cairo	Cairo University	American University in Cairo	University Ains Shams	University Cairo University	American University
<b>University Degree:</b>	Master in Social Science	Master Computer Science and MBA	Master Communications and Electronics	Post Graduate Diploma in Art Criticism	Master Mass Communication at University of Ains Shams	Bachelor of Science with highest Honours	Bachelor in Economics and Political Science	Faculty of Economics & Political Science	Ba. in Arts of Mass Communication	Faculty of Art English section	Master Journalism at Faculty of Mass Communication	Master Business and Economics
<b>Occupation :</b>	Senior Policy Officer of Gender Dutch Embassy Cairo	Manager of Application Development Project Management Office (IBM)	IT-Manager at German Institute	Journalist/Chief editor Alalam al Youm, Financial Daily	Sponsor Relation Coordinator /Country Office NGO	General Manager of Plant for Aluminium Power Coating	Owner of Mag for Translation Company (at IBM)	Regional Program Coordinator (Promoting Human Rights, Liberalism and Democracy) NGO	Communication Manager (NGO)	Executive Translator (NGO)	Manager of Development programme Egypt (NGO)	Owner/Manager of Cilantro Coffee shops in Cairo
<b>Support System</b>	A nanny, driver, servants and maids	A nanny, driver, servants and maids	Servants and maids, mother takes care of the children	Maids and Servants	Maids and Servants	A nanny, driver, maids and servants	A driver, servants and maids and nanny	Servants and maids	A nanny, driver, servants and maids	A maid	Maids	A driver, nanny, servants and maids
<b>Languages:</b>	Fluency in English and Arabic	Arabic and English	Arabic, German, English, French	English & Arabic	Arabic, English & French	English & Arabic	English & French	Arabic & English	English& Arabic	English & Arabic	English & Arabic	English, French & Arabic
<b>Family size:</b>	Husband, two daughters (5 and 10)	Husband, one daughter (2)	Husband, one son of 5 and one daughter of 3	Husband and son of 4	Husband and son of 13	Husband, daughter of 13, son of 2 and pregnant for 3 months	Husband, son of 16, daughter of 12 and son of 10	Husband and son of 5 and daughter of 3	Husband, two sons of 7 and 3	Husband, daughter of 13 and mother	Husband and son of three months	Husband and daughter of 5 and living in nanny

### **3. Theoretical Foundation**

To examine how women combine their work and family-related roles, this chapter will introduce a theoretical approach. This chapter will discuss the theoretical foundation using existing theories. It will serve as a search light in the dark highlighting relevant parts with regard to the problem definition. It clarifies from which perspective social reality is approached and why. The terms used in the research questions will be defined and described. Other theoretical and assumptions will also be addressed. This chapter tries to provide insights in the developed theoretical approach and the reasons and theoretical foundations behind it.

#### **3.1. The 21<sup>st</sup> Preference Theory**

The preference theory of Hakim (2000) was highlighted before in the literature review (page 14). She showed that the development of work lifestyle preferences of women reconciling work and family are a result of Western modernity. This part will show why this theory will not be included in the theoretical approach of this study. Hakim's theory is very well known in Western societies: this is also the reason why her theory is not suitable for a study conducted in Egypt. Hakim's theoretical approach applies only to modern societies, in which modernity is defined by five historical changes. 1) The contraceptive revolution, 2) The equal opportunity revolution, 3) Expansion of white-collar occupations, 4) ) The creation of jobs for secondary earners and 5) The increased importance and attachment to attitudes, values and personal preferences in the lifestyle choices of modern and liberal societies. These historical changes resulted in different work lifestyle preferences of women in modern societies. 1) The adaptive women, 2) the work centred women and 3) the home centred women.

Therefore because the five changes did not occurred in Egypt, the preference theory of Hakim is not suitable within the context of Egypt society. Egypt is a still a country in development and can not be regarded as a modern society as identified by Hakim (2005). Not when this modernity is linked to the occurrence of these five structural changes. This makes it impossible to apply this theory within this object of study. It will only be possible to refer in the final conclusions to what these findings mean in comparison with the preference theory of Hakim (2000).

#### **3.2. The Social Related Nature of the Self**

This theoretical part is also not used in the theory itself, but it contains valuable information about the environmental setting of Egyptian working women. Egyptian society is characterized as a society with a relational social structure (literature review p. 20). The self-concepts of people are also affected by these structures. The self-concept can be defined as the concept that an individual has from him or herself as a physical, social, spiritual and moral human being (Cekas, 1982). Self-concepts do reflect the responses and appraisal of others about what is seen as acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. This perspective is highly relevant in a society such as Egypt.

The importance of social roles and social relations creates a social orientated sense of self. This social related nature of the self is also the object of study of the processual interactionist perspective (Cekas, 1982). This perspective considers social situations and interactions as the main context within identities are established and maintained through a process of negotiation. "This identity negotiation, or identity bargaining (Blumstein 1973), is a central aspect of the individual's broader task of 'defining the situation' and 'constructing reality' (Cekas, 1982: 10)." This process is particularly important for Egyptian working



women from the higher class. They try to explore the limits of their gender roles within their significant social context (see p. 21). This relation between one's identity and its social surrounding is also relevant for Egyptian working women. Identities are, more than in Western societies, constructed and maintained by social interactions and situations – (by others). This makes the meaning of the social context for working Egyptian women also more important. Acts of individualism come to existence in relation to others, women trying to manage and direct their social relations according to their own wishes. Self-concepts are therefore more connected with social roles instead of the self. The link between one's self-concept and his or her role comes to an expression in the sub identities that a person has. A sub identity is that aspect of a person that is related with a certain role (Cekas, 1982). For the working woman combining her multiple roles, her sub identities are, being a mother, wife, housewife and employee. These identities refer to her maternal role, relational role, role in the family and her working role. These multiple sub identities of working women can cause role conflicts.

The important influence of the relational orientation of the self and the relational nature of Egyptian society is part of the focus of this research. The way women perceive their own roles (self-identification) in relation to existing social structures and role expectations is one of the main components of this study. In relation to this the next part will describe a theory of conflict solution that relates to the appreciation of role expectations (Vliert, 1981).

### **3.3. A Three Step Theory of Role Conflict Solution: *Conflict Solution in Relation to Role Appreciations***

The three step theory of role conflict solution of Vliert (1981) is based on a conflict perspective of multiple role performance. It focuses on the impossibility of women to combine their multiple roles. The solutions for this role conflict are four behavioural options for women to deal with this conflicting situation. Women can 1) choose to *conform to one* of the incompatible roles (role A or role B), 2) *conform partially* to role A and role B, making a compromise. And they can *conform to neither* of the roles, which is regarded as 3) avoidance. Vliert writes that (1981: 77) “which behaviour will be selected is assumed to be a function either of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the roles and the sanction that will or will not follow from deviation from role two prescriptions”. This process of choosing an appropriate option exists of three steps. A person will first look 1) at the possibility and desirability of resolving the conflict by changing role A or B or both, which is step 2. When this solution strategies fails or is rejected, someone can consider a compromise which is step 3. Only when this compromise is rejected avoidance occurs. “A careful analysis of role conflict processes suggests that choice, solution, compromise and avoidance are considered in this order. The actor tries to decide first, which solution will work if this fails the only option will be avoidance” (Vliert, 1981:77).

According to Vliert (1981), the selected option of behaviour is a function of either the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the roles and the sanction that will or will not follow from deviation from role A or B. Legitimacy and illegitimacy of roles and sanctions that will or will not followed from deviation, are linked with existing role expectations and gender role ideologies. The Egyptian context exists of (ideological) female role expectations. Working women are forced to negotiate their own roles against the background of existing cultural, social, and religious role expectations that value the roles of women within the boundaries of the family. These ideological role expectations influence the extent of legitimacy and illegitimacy of certain gender roles and the sanctions that will or will not follow from deviation from these roles. Ideological role expectations influence the choice for certain role conflict solutions.

Working women are dealing with these ideological role expectations in their multiple role performance this makes the theory of Vliert (1981) a very suitable theoretical approach for this study. This relation between behaviour solutions and ideological role expectations is a perspective that will be used for the theoretical focus of this research. More will be explained later, when the theory of this study will be presented.

### **3.4. Model of Coping with Role Conflict: *Practical Coping Options***

Halls' theoretical model (1972) of coping with role conflict is also based on a conflict perspective of multiple role performance. But this theory is more focused on the ways how women structure and organise their roles in practice. An interesting element in this model of role conflict (Hall, 1972) is the identified level of different role processes. These processes reflect different structural demands that are being placed upon the individual in a given social position. The focus is directed towards the pressures and influences from the social environment. This shift towards practice makes it possible to examine the daily experiences of working women.

According to Hall, there are three practical coping options (Hall, 1972: 474):

1) *Structural role definition*: Women try to cope with their multiple roles by controlling or changing the external demands. For instance they confront certain role expectations in their social environment and try to come to a mutual agreement on a revised set of expectations. A practical example of this is a working woman who agreed with her employer to leave from work at 3 o'clock so that she can be home when her children arrive from school. Another example of this is the relocation or sharing of domestic tasks as cleaning, taking care of the children and so on.

2) *Personal role redefinition*: Changing one's own concept of role demands received from others. Instead of changing the expectations of others, women can change their own expectations. By setting priorities among and within roles, being sure that certain demands are always met (for example, the needs of sick children), while others have lower priority (such as dusting furniture). Another response in this category might be adopting the attitude that role conflict is an unavoidable fact of life, there is no way to really reduce it, and therefore all one can do is bear with it and hope it decreases in time.

3) *Reactive role behaviour*: is coping solemnly through role behaviour. When there is no associated attempt to change the structural or personal definition of one's roles, the result is the attempt to improve the quality of role performance, trying to satisfy all of the demands of one's role senders. The implicit assumption of this type of role coping is that one's role demands are unchangeable, and that the person's main task is to find ways to meet them; this involves a passive or reactive orientation toward one's roles.

These three coping solution will function as a mean to identify the types of practical role performance of Egyptian working women. The reason to focus on daily experiences is to unveil the relation between women's personal perceptions and their daily experiences. The following part of this theoretical chapter will introduce 'the perception versus experience' theory derived from the last two role theories. To bridge the gap between existing role expectations and practical role experiences. This theory will be unveiled in the following section. In addition to the problem definition and the research questions all used terms will be defined, to avoid any misunderstandings.

### 3.5. Theoretical Design

The following problem definition is formulated in this study:

*1) How do university graduated upper-class and upper-middle class Egyptian working women in prestigious and well paid jobs manage to combine their working role with their family-related roles?*

To avoid any misunderstandings used, terms will be defined and described, to clarify what is meant.

Working: Working, means women who work at least 32 hours a week, to be considered as a full-time working women.

University degree: Women who have obtained a degree at university level; for instance a Bachelor or Master degree.

Upper-class and upper-middle class: These classes are very similar to each and only vary with regard to the income level. Both classes are identified by their educational trajectory as described in research of Koning (2005). The upper-and upper-middle classes are able to afford certain specific educational trajectories which are highly valued at the labour market. The best trajectory exists of:

1) Attending a private elite primary and secondary language school followed by graduation at a private university in Cairo often the American University of Cairo (AUC).

A private school, is a multi-language school where the curriculum is for example in English, and German, or French and Arabic, but it can also consist of a curriculum entirely in English or another foreign language. These private schools may provide British or American certificates (which are the most prestigious and expensive) or Arabic certificates. Private universities may also provide students with foreign certificates which, again are the most prestigious and expensive ones. These foreign diplomas are only affordable for a very small and rich segment within Egyptian society. Because “tuition fees of private universities are beyond the reach of most families who are able to afford primary and secondary language schools, most pupils of private primary and secondary schools, (...) continued their education at a public university” (de Koning, 2005:65).

2) The second best trajectory exists of attending a (private) language primary and secondary school, followed by a public university trajectory. These trajectories vary in certain aspects.

Public universities also have strong differentiation mechanisms. Some faculties are seen as more prestigious than others. Medicine, pharmacy, political science, economy and certain language departments are examples of studies with a high social prestige and quality. Enrolment in these prestigious faculties is only possible by high numerical scores pupils obtained in secondary school (Gran, 1977). The most prestigious fields require scores close to 100%. These high scores are the result of the received quality of education and the number of private lessons that pupils have followed. These private lessons are the essential ingredient of a distinctive good education; it allows students to achieve the required results of the prestigious faculties. Cairo University and the Ains Shams University are examples of top state universities. These universities have recently renewed their faculties with a new kind of social economic differentiation mechanism. ‘Language sections’ have been opened in which the entire curriculum is given in a foreign language (French or English). This requires fluency in one of those languages, which is the result of a primary or secondary foreign language

curriculum. The class mark of upper-class families. In this way this language curriculum serves as a selective mechanism to differentiate in relation to social economic class background.

Prestigious and well-paid jobs: These jobs can be found in the upmarket segment of the economy. The upmarket segments are often linked with global developments. Like the communication branch, IT, foreign investment, consultancy branch, and business producer services. But prestigious jobs can also be found in the public sector for instance in governmental institutions with an international image, like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Embassies and so on.

Working career: The professional life of a woman refers to jobs which require a high degree of commitment and a continuous developmental character.

Roles: Are shared normative expectations and practical experiences of behaviours. They are socially determined. This refers to characteristic behaviour: social roles that are played based on certain expectations (Biddle, 1987). This research will focus on these shared normative expectations and the practical implementation of female roles in every day life.

Family responsibilities: All those responsibilities/tasks and duties of women connected with the family.

The research problem consists of two components.

1. *The component of personal perceptions of ideological female role expectations and social structures.*

The first component focuses on how women perceive their own roles with respect to existing ideological female role expectations and social structures within Egyptian society, that are not supportive towards the economic participation of women. This lack of support and recognition confronts working women with a dilemma. Women need to balance and negotiate their working role against the background of existing cultural, social and religious role expectations and social structures that value the roles of women within the family. Sherif (1993: 12-13) explains that for working upper-class women “competing ideologies interact to create a confusing and forceful dilemma in their every day lives. Women both resist and support existing loci of power in different contexts and different points in their lives.”

This component of personal perceptions, tries to unveil the influence of existing ideological role expectations, and social structures on the way women perceive their own roles. In relation to the used terms it is important to define them.

Role expectations refer to the social expectations that people have of certain roles and sanctions that will or will not followed from deviation.

Ideologies refer to the reasons behind the role expectations: the stories and justifications about the performance of different roles.

Social structures refer to the social organisation of a society. Societies are organised on a social manner resulting in social structures.

The topics concerning these (ideological) role expectations and social structures are:

1. Discourses about primary female role expectations (refers to ideologies)
2. Islam and Work (refers to role expectations and social structure)
2. Family as psychological main unit (refers to role expectations)
3. Appreciation of female qualities (refers to ideologies)
4. Patriarchal structures (refers to social structures and role expectations)

5. The view on and appreciation of the role of economic provider (refers to social structures and role expectations)

The research findings will be described in the analytical part of this study. It will provide insight in the way working women view their own multiple roles with regard to existing (ideological) female role expectations and social structures that prevail in Egyptian society.

The second component of this research problem is:

2. *The component of the daily experiences of multiple role performance*

This component focuses on how women manage to combine their multiple role tasks and responsibilities on a practical level. The specific combination of multiple roles appears to be a problematic and stressful combination for women. This is the finding from a research of Hattar-Pollera, Meleis and Naguib (2003). Their research focussed on the ways women manage to deal with stress in their multiple roles performance. Stress seems to be an inevitable outcome of the performance of multiple roles. The following roles (topics) are identified in this multiple role performance on a practical level:

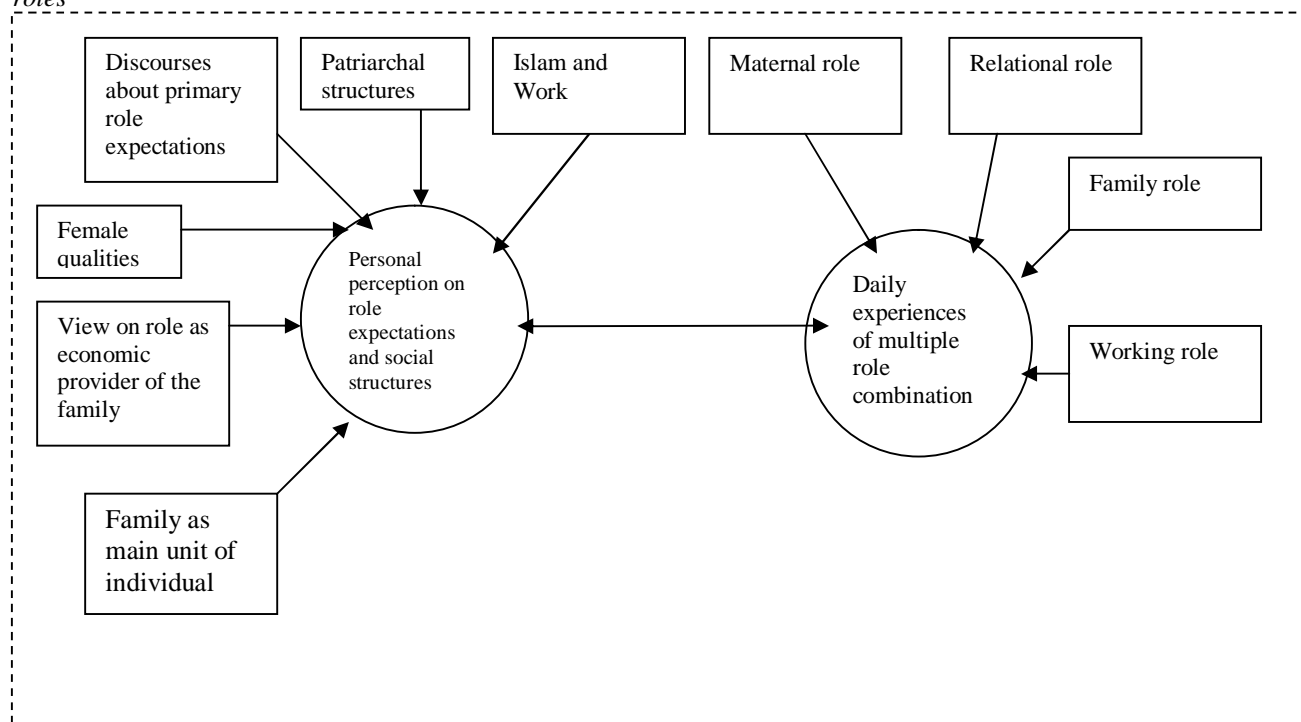
- 1) The role in the family
- 2) The maternal role
- 3) The relational role
- 4) The working role

Multiple role combination is not only reflected in the perceptions of Egyptian women (like in component 1), but also reflected on a practical level. Multiple role combination in practice, confronts working women with a dilemma. Egyptian working women do not receive any recognition or social backing of their role expansion by their working role. Cultural and social values continue to enforce and prescribe role responsibilities and tasks related to the home and the family, regardless of paid employment (Ghorayshi, 1996). Research of Hattar-Pollera et.al. (2003:126) notices that “little is known about the nature of stress that Egyptian employed women experience in managing the demands of their multiple roles and the coping pattern they use to offset stress.” The results indicate that stress is specifically related with the requirements of multiple roles.

When both of the components and their related topics are captured in this graphical overview this results in the following figure (1).



Figure 1: Model combining working career and family roles



After this explanation of the two central components and their topics, the next part will present the theoretical foundation of this study: the ‘*perception versus experience theory*.’

A theory derived from two other theories and translated in a theoretical model.

### 3.5.1. The Perception versus Experience Theory

The ‘*perception versus experience*’ theory may promote a better understanding of the relations between the daily experiences of multiple role combination, and the way women perceive their own roles. The ‘*perception versus experience*’ theory can be regarded as a role theory. But the definitions generally used to define roles vary enormously. The most consistent definition of roles can be summarised as follows: roles can be considered as “characteristic behaviour patterns. They can be explained by presuming that persons are members of social positions and hold expectations for their own behaviours and those of other persons” (Biddle, 1986: 67). This basic vision of role theory refers to behaviour, expectations and social position.

This study tried to integrate at least two of these aspects (behaviour and expectations) in its theoretical approach. The expectations are linked to different types of perceptions. The behavioural component focuses on the roles of women in every day reality. This distinction between the way women perceive their own roles and the actual implementations (practice) of these roles creates the opportunity to explore the relation between the personal perceptions and reality. The importance of this distinction is identified as an important factor in the way women combine their multiple roles (Groenendijk, 1998). She notices that the subjective experience of working women is of major factor of influence of the well-being of working mothers. “The personal appreciation of combining work and care is a very important factor in the whole of factors related to mothers’ well-being.” (Groenendijk, 1999: 268)

The ‘*perception versus experience*’ theory is based on a conflict perspective. It presents different options (with regard to perceptions and experiences) to deal with multiple

roles. (Stryker and Macke, 1978: 70) “The major problem of role conflict then becomes how individuals manage to carry out expected role performances.” According to Stryker and Macke personal orientations are important determinants in solving role conflicts. Biddle (1986: 182) writes about other studies on role conflicts that “most if not all studies have focused on the role of normative perceptions in role conflict and discussions.” But this one-sided approach is not suitable for the Egyptian context. Ideological role representations are often not close to practice they are only a limited reflection of reality, unveiled by the previous literature review. This is especially true for women from the upper-middle classes (Sheriff, 1993). This discrepancy between ideals and practice stresses the need, for a broader theoretical approach to explore the reality of working women. The ‘*perception versus experience*’ theory offers different options to cope with multiple role demands and it offers different perceptions of how women can perceive their roles. Personal perceptions, as well as every day practices will be examined, to get a realistic impression of the situation of this group of women. This distinction between perceptions and practice is also more relevant in a society like Egypt. By the strong developed ideological dimension and influence of social roles. People could be more inclined to give socially desirable answers on certain questions. This stresses the need to focus on a distinction between personal perceptions and visions on one hand and the actual daily experiences, implementation of roles on the other hand.

### 3.5.2. Limitations

The limitations of the ‘*perception versus experience*’ theory will be discussed in this part. The first limitation of this theoretical approach is the fact that it examines the personal level only. The ‘*perception versus experience*’ theory is a limited theory in the sense that it does not completely integrate other aspects of roles at for instance a meso or macro level. It is actually a narrow perspective, without paying attention to larger social processes related to role conflicts. The influence of ideological role expectations, social structures and the actual daily experiences are all descriptions from subjective opinions and stories. The women are the only sources of information. This is a limitation concerning this study. The personal subjective experience is the central focus of this study. Other sources of information that could contribute to a more complete and nuanced view, are for instance the partners of the women, the employers, an observation of the social interaction between family members, other social contacts like friends and family, child-care and maternity leave possibilities at work and in society etc.

The theoretical assumption underlying the personal perceptions of existing (ideological) role expectations, assumes that persons are fully aware of the expectations they have. This can be questioned.

Another underlying theoretical assumption is the unchangeable nature of social roles. They are what they are, assuming that an individual has no other option than to cope with these social roles. The main focus lies on the impact of social roles on an individual level.

The choice to focus in this study on the personal perceptions and daily experiences of working women represents also certain limitations. The relation between existing (ideological) role expectations and social structures on one hand and the perceptions of women on the other hand is a very complex relationship. The assumption of a linear relation between a person’s personal perception and the influence of existing role expectations and social structure in Egyptian society is too simplistic. In reality there are many processes that intervene and influence the final outcomes of these personal perceptions. This study is not able to unveil this complex relation. It is only an attempt to gain more knowledge and information.

There are also many factors of influence with regard to the performance of multiple role in every day life, that are excluded from the scope of this research. For instance the

interaction between family members, characteristics of the relationship between woman and man could not be measured. These limitations also constrain the research findings.

Nevertheless, this study can be a modest contribution to increase knowledge and understanding about this research subject.

The last part of this theoretical approach shows the research questions of the two identified components; and the relation three types of perceptions and practical role performances. Both are reflected in this graphical image (page, 36).

### 3.5.3. Component 1) Personal Perception of Role Expectations and Social Structures

To examine how women perceive their own roles, the following research question (RQ) is formulated:

RQ (1): *How do Egyptian working women perceive their own role in comparison with the identified ideological female role expectations and social structures in society?*

The identified three perceptions are in fact three modalities. The perceptions are derived from the three step theory of role conflict solution of Vliert (1981). Vliert presents four different solutions to deal with multiple roles. When confronted with two incompatible role prescriptions (identified as role A and B) the individual can: 1. Conform to role A, 2. Conform to role B. From these two solution options I created the '*non-conform the general norm*' perception with this difference that there is no option to choose for role B or A, because the perception of the roles rather than the roles itself will be the central focus. Option 3. conform partially to role A and B from which I created the '*supporting*' perception. 4. Conform neither to A or B (avoidance) from which I derived the '*denial*' perception. All of these options are depending to the amount of appreciation of social roles. The more women appreciate existing role expectations and social structures, the more they will refer to them in their personal perceptions. The more important the legitimacy and illegitimacy of social roles are, and the sanctions that will or will not follow from deviation. This relation between personal appreciation of role expectations and social structures and the way women perceive their own role makes this approach very suitable for this research. The following types of personal perceptions are derived from Vliert (1981).

- 1) It is possible that women deny (or say that they are unaware) of the existence of certain ideological role expectations and existing social structures. Women can avoid confronting these issues by denying the existence of these issues or the influence of these factors on their own life. This way of perceiving reality will be defined as the '*denial*' perception.
- 2) Another option is that women are using existing social structures and female role expectations for their own role empowerment. This means that women have integrated their role within the existing framework of role expectations and social structures. Women are able to explain how they look to their own roles against the background of existing role expectations and structures. This way of perceiving reality will be defined as a '*supporting*' perception.
- 3) The third option is that women explain or emphasize that their personal perception is not a part of existing role expectations and social structures. They will emphasize that they perceive their own role on a (totally) different way. It may be that they are

unaware of the influence of these social structure and role expectations and that they are not influenced by them in their opinion. They emphasize a view or perception that does not fit in general gender expectations and social structures. This way of perceiving will be defined as a ‘*non-conform the general norm*’ perception.

### 3.5.4. Component 2) Daily Experiences of Multiple Role Combination

The first component of personal perceptions will be linked with the second component of daily experiences. The three identified types of practical role performances are identified by Hall (1972) in his model of practical coping solutions. The following research question can be formulated:

RQ: *How do Egyptian working women combine their working role and family- related roles on a practical level?*

The relation between the personal perceptions and the practise of multiple role performances is presented below. Hall’s coping solutions are linked with the derived personal perceptions of the theory of Vliert (1981).

1) The perception referred to as the ‘denial perception’ may be linked to *reactive role performance*. In this type of role behaviour a woman tries to improve the overall quality of her role performance with this goal to satisfy all of her role demands, motivated by this desire to do everything on the best possible way. This means she appreciates all her roles with the same importance and that she wants to satisfy all role expectations. Women take their situation and the structures as they are.

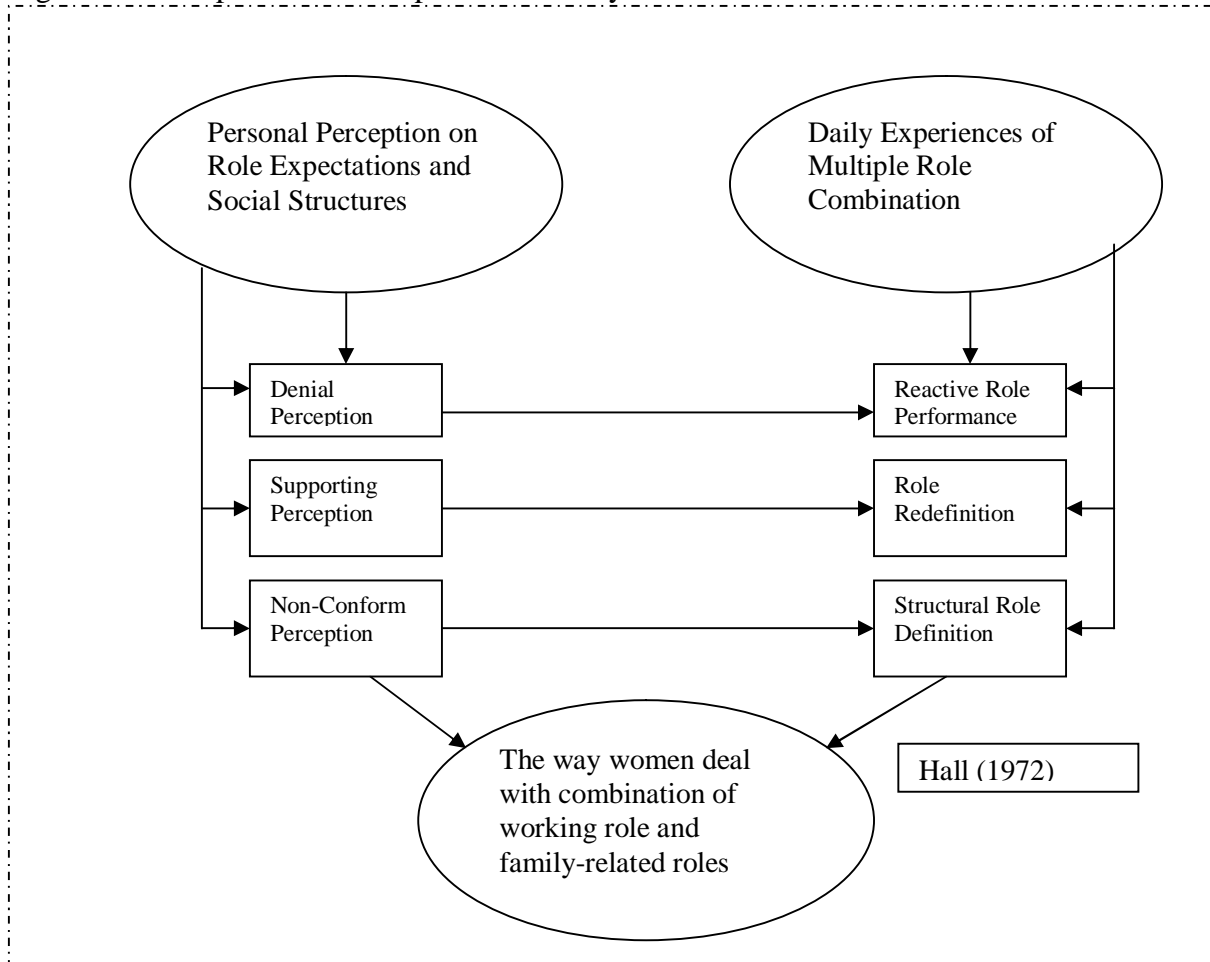
On a practical level this results in efforts trying to establish all her role duties and tasks. This attempt to manage everything as good or perfect as she possible cab be linked with a ‘denial perception’: a denial of the existence or influence of existing role expectations and social structures. This denial may be caused by a woman’s motivation to fulfil all of her role demands on the best possible way, regardless of the circumstances. This means, that a woman is unaware of reality. It is not realistic that she is able to perform all her roles on a perfect way. No matter what kind of role demands need to be fulfilled, the main task is to fulfil them. This type of role performance is implicitly based on the assumption that multiple role demands are unchangeable and that the only option is, to meet them all.

2) The ‘supporting’ perception may be linked to the *role redefinition performance*. Role redefinition means that someone changes her own perception regarding the role expectations she has from herself. This comes to expression at a practical level by setting priorities among and within rolls. Being sure that certain demands are always met (for example, the needs of sick children), while others have a lower priority (such as dusting the furniture). Another response in this category might be “adopting the attitude that role conflict is an unavoidable fact of life, there is no way to really reduce it, and therefore all one can do is bear with it and hope it decreases in time”(Hall, 1972:474). This refers to a realistic approach of reality. A woman adapts her role expectations to her social reality. She redefines her own situation; she is aware of this reality and tries to use this reality to support her own roles.

3) The ‘non-conform the general norm’ perception may be linked to *structural role definition*. This means that a person can alter or resist external, structurally imposed expectations held by others. This resistance of expectations may result in a change of the demands, caused by existing role expectations and social structures. On a practical level this can mean that role tasks as cleaning, washing, and childcare will be shared or relocated.

The above theoretical approach is translated in this theoretical model of the ‘*perception versus experience*’ theory in the figure (2) below.

Figure 2: ‘Perception versus Experience Theory’



When we combine this ‘*perception versus experience*’ theory with the theoretical notions about the social related nature of the self, the following has to be taken in account. Because of the importance of social relations in Egyptian society in which social harmony and maintaining reputations are important features, denial of gender roles can expected not likely to occur from this point of view. Given the importance of the individual in its significant social context it can be argued, that it will be more likely that women will look for solutions to deal with this dilemma, that will fit within the larger context of their social environment. Sheriff (1993) refers to this way of coping of working upper-middle class women, as a reality of negotiating and balancing between different influences. Egyptian society can be identified as a high context culture, which means that the (Brett and Gelfand, 2005: 190) “meaning is embedded within the context. This context surrounding the words and acts cannot be interpreted without a cultural understanding of the context in which they are communicated” In non-Western society’s conflict generally is not seen as an isolated incident but rather as a



threat to the harmony of the social network. In order to ensure social harmony all the collective interest of the social network need to be engaged. Also from this point of knowledge it can be assumed that it will be more likely that working women will use existing social structures and ideological gender representations to support and construct their own gendered role constructions. So what kind of assumptions can be formulated based on these wider theoretical notions and in relation to the 'perception versus experience theory'?

Assumptions 1)

Given the relational structure of Egyptian society and the relational experience of the self it can be expected that **in general:**

*Working women will 'choose' for a 'supporting' perception in which they use existing social structures and ideological gender role expectations to support their working role and family-related roles.*

This 'supporting' perception will result in a role redefinition in which:

Assumption 2)

*Working women redefine their own role by setting certain priorities and choosing between competing demands. They develop role redefinition performance.*

With regard to the other perceptions can be expected that:

Assumption 3)

For women who can be identified as expressing a 'denial' perception it can perhaps be expected that they are so focused on the fulfilment of all their roles; that they aren't able to reflect on their own situation. With other words, they accept their situation or they really want to maintain this image that they are doing everything as best as possible, an image of a perfect woman. Based on this reasoning the following assumption can be formulated:

*A woman who expresses a 'denial' perception is so strongly embedded in existing social structures and ideological role expectations that she isn't able to reflect on them she finds it normal that she performs and fulfils her roles (perfectly). She develops this type of reactive role performance.*

Assumption 4)

*To maintain this (self) image of perfect role performance in which a woman want to perform al her multiple roles as good as possible she has to deny the existence of role expectations and social structures, to maintain this self image.*

Assumption 5)

*Women who have a 'non-conform the general' norms perception can be expected to emphasize a certain lifestyle or orientation towards life that is different from the identified mainstream ideological expectations and social structures.*

Assumption 6)

*Since women with a 'non-conform' perception deal with a certain lifestyle or orientation of life that does not seem to fit in existing role expectations and social structures they are also more willing to emphasize structural changes to cope with the confrontation of their working role and family roles. They develop this type of structural role definition performance.*

## **4. Methods of Research**

The combination of work and family of educated working women has gained little scientific interest in the Arab world. The unfamiliarity of this subject of study makes it interesting to explore it. The explorative nature of his stud is reflected in the problem definition and the research questions. The question how women combine their work and family role refers to an explorative and explanative approach. The experiences and perceptions of Egyptian working women are explored with the ‘experience versus perception’ theory. Its goal is to identify relations and possible explanations between the daily experiences of working women and their personal perceptions.

### **4.1. Qualitative Study**

The quantitative measurements of women’s work in the Arab World are often unreliable and not complete as became clear from the previous literature review (p.15). It is therefore much more interesting to focus on the qualitative experiences of working women. This makes it possible to gain knowledge about this subject on a more personal level. From a Western point of view this is also interesting to obtain knowledge of. As we could read in the introduction (p.7) the Western view of the Arab woman is often a stereotypical image of an uneducated, not working and ignorant woman (Ali, 2003). The women in this study do not fit in this cliché at all. They refute this image by their socio- economic status, their educational degrees, knowledge and their working status in prestigious or good paid jobs. The qualitative nature of this research makes it possible to gain more understanding in the experiences, thoughts and lives of Arab women. The experiences and findings reflect a world that by many Westerners is often viewed as very different and far away. This is also why it is interesting to focus on Egypt as an Arab country in particular. The increase in Egypt of women’s educational levels and degrees, and the high labour participation rate of higher educated women make it interesting to focus on this group of higher educated women.

### **4.2. Non-Western Setting**

A study conducted in a non-Western setting should take possible distorted observations into account, caused by differences between Western and non-Western settings. A familiar observation and interpretation error is caused by orientalism. Said describes this as (1979: 3) “a way of coming to terms with the Orient based on the European/Western experience. Anyone who (...) writes or researches the Orient is an orientalist and whatever he is doing is orientalism.” This unveils that it is almost impossible to observe other societies or cultural settings without approaching them, without one’s own beliefs. This is also why the differences between the West and the Arab world are explicitly framed in the literature review. To show how the Arab world is viewed, from a Western perspective. This unveils the underlying assumptions relating to this subject of study. Another attempt to avoid interpretation errors is the way how the topics are addressed in the questionnaire. Aware of the fact, that many studies of Arab women are viewed from a Western perspective; the findings of these Western orientated studies were included as topics in the questionnaire. The women were asked how they perceive the influence of existing Egyptian role expectations and social structures in their own lives. A good example of this is the first question in the questionnaire:

1) *What do you (as a working woman) think of images and visions of women within society who portray them as primary responsible for the home, a woman who obeys her husband and nurtures her family and children?*

This (Western) stereotypical image of the Arab woman is included in the questionnaire and the women were asked how they think of this image. These are the kind of questions used to confront women to Western and Arab assumptions. They are used to explore how women perceive their own roles in relation to existing role expectations and social structures. Women do formulate and express their own views and opinions about these assumptions. The confronting nature of these questions fits well with this group of higher educated working women. They are more used to be critical thinkers.

Because of the explorative nature of this research, the questionnaire consists of 'open' questions. The questionnaire will be presented at the end of this chapter to unveil the relation between the questions, the topics and the two research components.

### 4.3. Introduction of Research

The presentation and introduction of this research, to potential respondents was an important feature of the methods that were used to reduce the extent of orientalism (interpretation errors). This research was introduced as a study of how Egyptian higher educated working women combine their work and family-related roles. The emphasis was put on the understudied nature of the higher educated women in comparison with her uneducated and poor counterparts. This makes it even more relevant and interesting to conduct a research about the higher educated working woman, a forgotten but existing group.

A second argument that has been used to introduce this research to potential respondents was the fact that, this research focused on the daily experiences and personal perceptions of women. Especially the importance of their personal perceptions was used as an argument. I argued that this research intends to explore how higher educated working women, themselves think about the influence of role expectations and social structures in their own lives and the experiences they have as a working woman. Their own experiences and perceptions are the basis of this research.

Respondents were approached by the snowball method: new participants were found on the basis of existing contacts. Good and useful contacts to get in touch with my research population were the Dutch Embassy in Cairo, a branch of a famous ICT multinational and a network of Egyptian journalist and communication professionals working for various newspapers. These three contacts delivered most respondents. To know if this were the women from the higher-upper and upper-middle classes their educational background served as a selection mechanism. The majority of the women in this study attended the best educational trajectory. This is a private elite primary and secondary language school followed by graduation at a private university in Cairo in many cases the American University of Cairo (AUC). Eight women graduated at the most privileged and expensive university in Egypt (Cairo) - at the American University (AUC), only affordable for a very small rich segment within Egyptian society. The remaining women followed the second best educational trajectory. This second best trajectory exists of enrolment in a (private) language primary and secondary school followed by a public university trajectory at a prestigious faculty department. Cairo University and the Ains Shams University are regarded as the top state universities; the remaining four women attended these universities.

The interviews were all conducted in English. Because of the multi-language educational trajectory of all women, this was not a problem. Women were able to express and explain themselves. I noticed that my own religious background created a closer familiarity. Some women even told me that they told me things because they believed that I could understand them. Some women also explained to me, that they were afraid that their stories would be interpreted on a wrong way. They were convinced that there are a lot of

misconceptions and prejudices about Arab countries and Islam, among people from Western countries. These reactions illustrate the difficulties for an open relation of exchange of information and communication between the West and the Arab world. A major obstacle concerning my interviews was the general amount of lack of time. Many women were willing to participate in the interviews, but their hectic and busy time schedules didn't allow them to do so. Women planned their appointments far in time, illustrative for their preoccupied lifestyles. This Lack in time constraint my opportunity to interview the amount of women I wished for. I expected to talk with 20 until 25 women but I ended up with 12. If I would have more time available I could have done more.

#### **4.4. Social Participation**

The relational nature of Egyptian society came to expression in the way the interviews were conducted. In Egypt it is extremely important to socialize to find more women willing to participate in the interviews. This socializing needs time, time to get settled with women and to get to know women that could participate in the interviews. Reference by mutual friends was an important key to find women willing to participate in the interviews. Knowing people can close and open doors with regard to social contacts. Many women participated in this study by the fact that I was referred to by someone they knew. It seemed that the more powerful and respected the position of that person was, the more willing people were to participate.

The interviews often took place in informal social settings. A favourite place to meet was the social club. Such associations are everywhere in Cairo. These social gatherings are differentiated by socio-economic class and also often by occupation. The social club is a place, where everything can be found to relax. The high standard clubs that I visited are distinctive by their beautiful gardens, extensive eating possibilities, sports, games, entertainment and all short of leisure activities you can think of. Many women preferred to meet in these places and to have their conversation by the pool with a glass of juice and food. Other women invited me at their homes, where their servants prepared a dinner or made some tea with little snacks. The social related nature of Cairo came alive in this social setting. Moreover, the interviews were also characterised by their duration. The interviews were extensive interviews that took several hours. This was the only possibility to examine this subject in depth. The answers of the many questions gave a good and realistic impression of the experiences of these women.

During the interviews it was also important that women felt comfortable and at ease. Therefore I didn't start with the interview questions. In most cases I talked with women about their lives, home, the social club or other subjects that could serve to create a comfortable sphere. I also explained the reasons of my research again. I explained that if there were any questions that they didn't want to answer or if they didn't understand something they could tell and/or ask me this. I tried to create an open atmosphere by not using the questionnaire all the time. I rather introduced my questions during a conversation. But in all cases I used the tape recorder to record the interviews. Another way to create an open and equal atmosphere was to ensure women, that if they had any questions for me personally they could also ask me personal things.

#### **4.5. Analyse**

The stories and answers of the women were the guidelines for the obtained research results, with this purpose to obtain a realistic and complete impression of their perceptions and experiences. Almost immediately after the interviews took place, they were written down word by word. Back in the Netherlands data is entered in this qualitative analysis programme ATLAS. This program offers the opportunity to label and process various interview parts in

different ways. Key words were used to summarize and order all the data. A tentative approach had been developed. This resulted in a summary of key words with regard to the two identified components. 1) There are keywords representing the personal perception of women and 2) keywords representing the daily experiences of women. This process of labelling can be described as a back and forward way of exploring the data, resulting in more clearly defined data.

The data was analyzed with use of the identified theoretical concepts. For each topic with regard to each component, is examined if and how one of the three types of perception or types of role behaviour could be found. At first this was a complex matter, because many of the responses of the women were characterized by a high degree of ambiguity, which was even not directly visible at first sight. This was particularly the case with regard to the part about the personal perceptions. Support as well as denial of existing role expectations and social structures could be found in one answer or story, resulting in deviated perceptions as pre-formulated and expected in the theoretical approach. Ambiguity created much more divers and ambiguous perceptions. Supporting and denial perceptions (that were identified as two separate perceptions) could be found in one answer. An example of this complexity is illustrated by this woman who explains that she supports existing female role expectations:

*“I feel it’s true: this image of women in which they are responsible for the household. For me, from my perspective I do all the things. I know: I am the responsible person for the household, the children, for the house, for everything.”*

But later on she denies this: *“It is not the image that I want to give to my daughter. I have a daughter and I don’t want her to be this way.”*

This complexity was further reflected in the variation of the degree of support of existing role expectations and social structures. For instance, the group of women with ‘non-conform the general norm’ perceptions, identified their economical role as part of their role in the family. They consider themselves as economic providers of their families. However a shift occurs when the context is changed in the appreciation of family life. In this context the ‘non-conform’ women emphasize the meaning and appreciation of family in line with existing Egyptian role expectations and social structures. As illustrated by this answer:

*“I work; I financially contribute to the family.”* But this emphasis on this economic role shifts when the context is changed in the appreciation of family life. The same woman explains: *“Having support and having an extended family that is caring and can help you out is important to have. And my daughters are important for me.”*

This shows the complexity of the variations in data, and how data is processed. The ambiguous and complex nature of the answers of women made it necessary to carefully unveil their answers. The analytical part became a detailed descriptive study of slight shifts and variations of personal perceptions and daily experiences. It should be noted that the second theoretical component, the component of the practical daily experiences is less complex. Contrary as what was assumed by the theoretical approach the experiences of combining multiple roles on practice resulted in only one type of role performance. This shows that the practical experiences of working women are much more similar to each other and less complex. Variations could be found in the group of the so called ‘non-conform’ women (this



non-conformity is described at p. 34). Though women with this kind of perception do develop the same type of role performance in practice, there are some slight variations. 'Non-conform' women seem to experience less pressure and are more able to enjoy some leisure time. Their orientation towards the raising of their children is also more concentrated on the independent development of their child. This is an illustrative remark of this:

*"I want to treat my children as respectable adults."*

After this description of the analytical part, the questionnaire will be presented below. This part unveils the relations between the topics and research components and how both of them are reflected in the questionnaire; the questionnaire is presented below to unveil these relations.

## 4.6. The Questionnaire

### Component 1: Personal Perceptions of Role Expectations and Social Structures

#### Topic: Personal Perceptions of Primary Female Role Expectations

1) What do you (as a working woman) think of images and visions of women within society who portray them as primary responsible for the home; a woman who obeys her husband and nurtures her family and children?

*This question refers to the confrontation between traditional role expectations and the professional working role of a working woman. The underlined part refers to the stereotypical role expectations of a traditional woman whose roles are limited to the home and family. Because of the appreciation of these roles in Egyptian society, the women in this study were asked about their opinion about this. The question refers very directly to how they as a working woman perceive these primary role expectations of women in Egyptian society. The women in this study do not fit in these primary role expectations, their working role does not limit their role performance at home. This makes it very interesting to explore how they perceive these primary role expectations.*

*Goal: exploration of personal role perceptions in relation to existing primary role expectations.*

#### Topic: Islam

2) Do you think Islam permits women to work? Why- explain

*This question refers to the confrontation between the working role and the Islamic faith. Islam is often viewed as a major factor of oppression in the lives of Arab women. This question tries to explore the personal perception of women about this. The working women in this study express their opinion and perceptions about how they think that their working role is influenced by the Islamic Faith.*

*Goal: exploration of the influence of Islam on the way women perform their working role.*

### **Topic: Personal Perception of the Family**

3) What kind of role: responsibilities, tasks and contribution do you have in your family?

*This question refers to content descriptions of the family role. How do women perceive and describe their own family role?*

*Goal: exploration of role description.*

4) Do you find family important? Why – explain?

*This question refers to the amount of attachment and appreciation of the family. How do women perceive this, and how do they describe this importance of the family?*

*Goal: exploration of value and meaning of the family.*

7) How do you make a choice between your individual development (things you do for yourself, like relaxing or hobbies and personal time) and the responsibilities and duties you have towards your family?

*This question refers to the importance of personal time and interests and time spend for family needs. It unveils the priority of women with regard to personal time and family time.*

*Goal: to explore how much value is attached to family needs and time in relation to personal time and needs.*

### **Topic: Personal Perception of Female Qualities**

10) What do you find important qualities for a woman? What do you consider as the unique features or characteristics of a woman?

*Ideas about female specific qualities are examined with this question.*

*Goal: to gain insight into what extent personal perceptions are influenced by existing role expectations about what is seen as typical for a woman's nature.*

11) Do you feel that you can use these female qualities in your work? How and why? Explain. Also do you feel that you can use them more in your role in the family as a mother, wife or daughter?

*This question refers to the existence of female qualities in relation to other roles. To examine if women attribute female specific qualities to their working role or other roles.*

*Goal: exploration of congruence between roles and attributed female qualities.*

### **Topic: Personal Perception of Patriarchal Social Structures**

12) When decisions need to be taken in your family who has the most power to make these decisions?

How do you view this or how would you like this to be?

*This question refers to the way decisions are taken within the family, and how women perceive this process.*

*Goal: exploration of the existence of patriarchal social relations.*

13) How do you get involve in decisions as a woman in your family or with your husband? For instance if you really want something and it is important for you the decision about this will be positive, what do you do to influence it? Or how do you express your opinion, against whom and why?

*This question refers to the way women view their own influence power and how they involve in the process of decision making. It tries to gain knowledge about how women involve in decisions and if they are confronted with patriarchal social structures.*

*Goal: exploration of negotiating possibilities and ways to negotiate with (patriarchal) relations in the family.*

### **Topic: The Role of the Man as Economic Provider**

14) Do you consider yourself or your husband as the *economic provider* of the family? Why?

*This question refers to the perception of women in relation to economic power in the family. It confronts women with their own working role, in comparison with this role (expectation) of the man as the economic provider.*

*Goal: exploration of the influence of existing role expectations regarding the economic roles of men and women on the perceptions of women.*

15) In a marriage, the man is formal the economic provider of the family (according to the Islamic religious legal marriage model). How do you view at this being a working woman?

*This question refers to the perceptions of women about the role of the economic provider in relation to the Islamic religious marriage model.*

*Goal: exploration of influence of Islamic marriage model.*

### **Component 2: Daily Experiences of Multiple Roles**

#### **Topic: Daily Experiences of Maternal Role**

16) When you come home after work how do you deal with your domestic responsibilities? What kind of things do you need to do? How do you feel about these things you have to do after a day of working?

*This question refers to the practical aspects of the maternal role performance on a daily basis.*

*Goal: to examine what women do after working hours with regard to their maternal role performance.*

17) Do you find it difficult to combine your domestic responsibilities with your working career? Why?

*This question refers to the experience of combining the maternal role with the working role.*

*Goal: to examine how women deal with their working role and maternal role as well.*

18) Do you have any support in the performance of your domestic tasks? For instance, support from family members, your husband or daughters or your mother? Or do you have any maids or assistants that do these things for you?

*This question refers to the role and importance of support in combining domestic tasks.*

*Goal: to examine how important this support system is and how people or family members offer assistance to working women.*

19) How do you take care of your children after work? Do you feel that you are able to offer the care they need?

*This question refers to the practical role performance of the maternal role. What are women doing with their children? And how does this make them feel about their own maternal role performance?*

*Goal: to examine how they feel about their role performance and how they take care of their children on a practical level.*

20) Do you feel that you are able to be the mother that you want to be? If yes explain, what kind of mother you are. If no, what kind of mother would you like to be than?

*This question refers to expectations women have from their own maternal role performance.*

*Goal: exploration of satisfaction and fulfilment of maternal role.*

### **Topic: Daily Experiences of the Relational Role**

22) What kind of wife do you want to be for your husband? What kind of tasks, responsibilities, wishes, and qualities do you find important to give in your relation with him?

*This question refers to the way women perceive their relational role on a practical level. It describes the role content?*

*Goal: to examine what it means to be a wife.*

23) Do you find it sometimes difficult to be this kind of wife (the wife you described you want to be for your husband at question 22) because of your work?

*This question refers to the way women combine their relational role with their working role.*

*Goal: to examine the difficulties to perform this role in relation to the working role.*

### **Topic: Experiences of the Working Role**

25) What kind of benefits are you experiencing from working? For instance what qualities, abilities, know-how or parts of your personality are stimulated by your work?

*This question refers to the positive influence of the working role on the personality or qualities of women.*

*Goal: to explore the way work develops and influences the personality and qualities of women.*

26) Do you wish to achieve something in your work? For example what kind of goals do you have in your work?

*This question refers to the degree of commitment and career orientation of women.*

*Goal: to explore long term achievements or plans, to see how women look to their professional development in the future.*

27) Can you imagine yourself not working? Why?

*This question refers to the degree of attachment and appreciation of the working role.*

*Goal: to examine how much value is attached to the working role.*

29) Do you find it is easy to combine your work with your family role? Why?

*This question refers to the way, women feel about combining their family- related roles with their working role.*

*Goal: to see if this combination created problems.*

31) Do you see yourself as a working woman? Or do you consider yourself a working mother and/or wife or daughter?

*This question refers to the appreciation and priorities to different roles.*

*Goal: to explore the degree of attachment to different roles.*



## **5. Analytical Part of Multiple Role Combination**

The experiences and perceptions of Egyptian working women to combine their multiple roles are described in this part. The complex and often ambiguous nature of the answers made it necessary to unveil the slight shifts and variations of their answers. That's why this analytical part will present a detailed description of their perceptions and experiences. This reflects the experiences and perceptions of the women who participated in this study. Perceptions and experience of the same subjects are presented together.

The identified topics relating to the two research components of personal perceptions and experiences are described below. The way women perceive, feel and experience their every day lives will be discussed. Each topic will be introduced with some background information, to frame this subject within the context of Egyptian society. The topics are presented in the following order:

- 1) Personal perception of female role expectations
- 2) Daily experiences of the maternal role
- 3) Personal perception of the family
- 4) Daily experiences of family life
- 5) Personal perception of patriarchal structures
- 6) Daily experiences of the relational role
- 7) Personal perception of work and Islam
- 8) Personal perception on the role of the economic provider
- 9) Experiences in the working role

### **5.1. Personal Perception of Primary Female Role Expectations**

Primary female role expectations represent a framework of a particular ideological system. In which the roles of women are highly valued within the boundaries of the family. These ideologies reflect the reasons behind role expectations. They reflect the stories of why women should perform certain roles. Gender role discourses in Egyptian society appreciate the primary roles of women at the heart of the family: performing her primary roles as a mother, wife and housewife. The revival of traditional conservative Islamic values reflects images and role expectations of women in their primary roles. According to Sherif (1999: 9) "The ideal woman is a wife, and a mother, she is a woman who raises a new generation of Muslims, wears the veil, guards her modesty, obeys her husband, and expresses her views only through her husband. She takes care of her family and, because the family is at the heart of Muslim society, she performs the noblest task that society can ask." For married women, who choose to work, these conflicting ideologies have become an increasing burden, both within their marriages, and with respect to their position in larger society. Working women have to juggle between their responsibilities at home and in their work. The strong appreciation of the primary roles of women in their families creates high demands and pressures to fulfil these roles. Working women are expected to fulfil their family responsibilities, regardless of the fact that they are working.

Sherif notices, that especially upper-middle class women find themselves in a difficult position where they are confronted with these primary role expectations. This is also noted by Omair (2008: 119) "several studies indicate that there is a strong influence of Arab culture and societal norms on women's career advancement. It is interesting to note, that while women's education from primary to tertiary level is highly appreciated, women's primary roles in society are still expected to be limited to domestic activities in the private sphere."

Egyptian women are surrounded by a context, in which the primary role expectations of women are highly valued.

### **5.1.1. Influence of Primary Role Expectations: Ambiguity**

The working women in this study were asked, how they perceive these images of primary ideological role expectations within society. That portrays them as primary responsible for the home: a woman who obeys her husband and nurtures her family and children. The impact of these primary role expectations is reflected in ambiguous perceptions. There are two ambiguous perceptions about these primary role expectations.

- A) Women supporting and denying primary role expectations at the same time.
- B) Women denying and not fitting in general role expectations (=non-conform the norm) at the same time.

These ambiguous perceptions about primary role expectations are a way for women to deal with existing social structures and primary role expectations. It reflects their personal negotiations against the background existing gender role expectations. Women are caught up in ambiguous statements and feelings, representing this forceful and often confusing dilemma about their own multiple roles.

#### **5.1.1.1. A) Support and Denial of Role Expectations at the same Time**

Support and denial of role expectations at the same time, means that the women in this group (8) support and deny these ideological role expectations at the same time. They are not willing to support all aspects of these primary role expectations, and they are not willing to deny all aspects either. The denial of primary role expectations varies from denying the existence of these primary role expectations, to emphasizing reality is much more diverse than this stereotypical image of a woman, bound in her primary roles at home. The existence of this ambiguity corresponds with the finding of Sherif (1999), she notices that working women both resist, and support existing ideological female expectations. To unveil the ambiguous nature of this subject we will head to Dina who will illustrate how women are caught up in ambiguous feelings of support and denial with regard to their own primary roles. In her response of primary role expectations she tells: *“I don’t believe in obeying my husband blindly, I even disagree with the word obeying. I wish that this image could change, but I don’t see it changing in the near future.”* She explains she denies this image of a woman who obeys her husband blindly, a passive woman who has no voice of her own. But she supports the role expectation that a woman should take care of the household and family life. *“I feel it’s true: this image of women in which they are responsible for the household. For me, from my perspective I do all the things. I know: I am the responsible person for the household, the children, for the house, for everything.”* But Dina is caught up in ambiguous feelings. She doesn’t want to raise her daughter with this role expectation. *“It is not the image that I want to give to my daughter. I have a daughter and I don’t want her to be this way.”* Dina is aware of this ambiguity inside herself. She feels that taking care of the home is her responsibility and role. She explains why she feels this. It is something she learnt to value *“I was raised to believe that women should do the household and that they are responsible for the whole household. I was raised this way and this is the way the system is working all over the country.”* It is clear that Dina is caught up in mixed and ambiguous feelings. She denies certain aspects of primary role expectations (like obeying), but at the same time she values other parts (being responsible for the household). With regard to the role of a woman in the household, she wishes this role expectation to change in the near future. She even doesn’t want to raise her daughter with this conviction. But this confronts her with a forceful dilemma,

cause as she says in her own words. This is how the system is working all over the country and this is also how she performs her own role at home. Eventually this is something how she has been raised and what she learnt to value. Rationally she would like to see this otherwise. Emotionally she is socialized to appreciate this role and societal role expectations also support this image of the woman who takes care of her household. This makes it very difficult for her to change this. This illustrates the power of existing role expectations. This dilemma is also illustrated by Ghada. At first she responds at this image of a woman in her primary role with denial: *“I feel insulted. I do not like to generalise things because it is stigmatization. This is how they portray an Arab woman and for me it’s not good. Ghada denies this image of a woman in a passive role. She emphasizes, that reality is much more divers than this image of a passive woman bound in her primary role. “This is not the real picture. I mean there are women who are like that definitely. But there are other women who are also career women. There are passive women they exist in our society, but there are other women who are respected in society and play positive roles.”* But, later on she contradicts her own words by emphasizing the importance of this primary role of a woman is. She supports this role expectation of a women taking care of the household and the children.” *You do the cooking, clean the house, take care of the kids and raise them this is a very, very important role that a woman plays. Cause the husband at work most of the times and comes home late and so on. So it’s the women who takes care and raises the children you know.”* She denies this role aspect and image of a passive woman, who’s not playing an active role in society. But she supports this role aspect of a woman taking care of the household and children. Actually, she explains that this is a result of sex-related roles. The husband works a lot and has no time for the children.

The above stories illustrate the extent of variation of support and denial of ideological role aspects. Women deny passive role images, but they support this role aspect of a woman taking care of the household and her children. We will head to the next part that will explain why support and denial of primary ideological roles exist at the same time.

#### **5.1.1.1.1. The Ambiguity of Denial and Support Explained**

Denial and support of primary role expectations enables women, to view their family role, as well as their working role, as interrelated with each other. Women express the desire to cover both roles. Their working role does not mean that they are leaving their primary roles and vice versa. Primary roles are still important in terms of value, and attachment. This finding is in line with the appreciation of primary roles of women in Egyptian society. Denial and support at the same time allows women to redefine existing primary role definitions by adding their working role. This enables them to value both roles and to extend their roles. This role extension allows them to work while maintaining, and supporting this image of a woman in her primary roles. This explains the ambiguity in the answers of the women.

The next quotes illustrate how women use existing primary role expectations to integrate, and value both roles: in the family, and at work. Miss Muftau explains: *“You know as a woman you can do both, working and taking care of your children. It is both.”* Muftau explains it’s a choice. *“You can choose, if you prefer to stay at home fine, if that suits your nature. But if you like to develop yourself with regard to your work and you feel also a sense of being in your working role than, fine you can add your working role besides your family life.”* Work is seen as an additional role beside the other family-related roles. This also implies that all roles have to be done. Miss Rania links her own perception of her primary role to religious role expectations. These religious expectations provide her with a sense of meaning and a perspective to priorities her primary roles and working role. She explains: *“She has to be a wife, and a mother this comes first and then, comes the work.”* She sees the

primary role of women as a natural state of being; this is how God created the woman. *“The first thing she is going to be asked about on the Day of Judgement, before God, is her role as a mother and as a wife. This is her first role in life, number one and then, comes if she wants to have other work, or something, this is no problem. Because actually Islam encourages women to work especially in some fields, like for instance as a doctor for females or something like that, or in the teaching fields, where she is needed. So this is no problem. No problem at all as I told you as long as she is covering her role as a wife and a mother.”* Religious role prescriptions serve as a way to prioritise and to make sense of one’s own roles. It even enables women to value both roles. They consider their primary role, as their main priority while adding their working role, as a second priority. We will now head to the perceptions of the second group of women, about existing primary role expectations.

#### **5.1.1.2. B) Denial and Non-Conform the General Norm at the same Time**

Denial and ‘non-conform’ the general norm exists in this second group (4) of women. Their answers are also ambiguous. Women in this group deny the existence of primary ideological role expectations on the one hand, but on the other hand, they consider themselves as very fortunate and lucky (referring to their personal situation). By emphasizing their fortunate position, they actually acknowledge their distinctive position in comparison to the general role expectations. The ambiguous nature of this second group is illustrated with a response of Neveen. In her first reaction she denies the existence of primary ideological role expectations: *“I don’t think this image exists, it all depends on how people deal with their roles on an individual level. We humans are all equal men and women. This is reality.”* But later it becomes clear that, she is very aware of the non-conformity of her own family situation. *“Me and my husband we share in everything. We share also in cooking and cleaning. This is something we agreed on before getting married. She attributes the fact, that her partner is willing to share in the household to the fact, that he is an Egyptian man lived and is raised in the U.S for a long time. With this she emphasizes his distinctiveness in comparison with the average Egyptian man. This distinction is ‘non-conform’ general role expectations. She explains: “I also do think this has to do with the fact my husband is raised in the United States so he finds it normal to help and assist in the household though he is Egyptian. For me this is normal and it has to be normal also, because we are all human beings and we have to help each other and make life easier for the both of us. This is also something that Allah wants us to do: to help each other as husband and wife.”* She tries to emphasize the normality of this situation on one hand she claims this to be normal, though on the other hand her husband is an Egyptian who has been raised in the U.S by which she explains his willingness to share in the household.

Ambiguity can also be found in the story of Amany. In her first answer she denies the existence of ideological role expectations of a woman in her primary role: *“These are very ancient visions of women, when their sole/primary responsibility was to feed her family, clean, wash and so on. Now, things are different, maybe more complicated.”* But later it becomes clear, that her situation can be regarded as an exception: ‘non-conform the general role norms’. She explains that in her own social environment, ideological primary role expectations do exist, and result in difficulties for working women, in such an extent that some women decide to end their working career. *“I am lucky enough that I am having a sharing husband who likes to have a major responsibility in raising his kid, because he missed this in his own up growing. He is a pro women person; he likes to support women. He finds that they have their own rights in society, and that they should be supported, and be assisted to overcome whatever there is to overcome. I know that I am fortunate; I know that I am lucky because I can name a few people who have been that fortunate.”* It’s clear that she emphasize the non-conformity of



the amount of support and understanding of her partner in raising their child, and also with regard to the difficulties, she as a working woman has to overcome. She actually acknowledges the existence of primary role expectations for working women by emphasizing the fact that they have to overcome difficulties. She even explains how primary role expectations normally came to put an end to the working career of women. *“Marriage comes to end a career, that seemed at the time very flourishing. Than the children are coming, and that’s it, that’s the end of it. A career seems like something, that you have to do if you want to. Or sometimes you are forced to stay at home, because you cannot accommodate or take over all these household tasks. You’re forced. I mean a woman is sometimes forced to stay at home and to be a housewife. Because she just can’t do all the stuff you know. To cook, clean the house, raise their kids, take care of the house, and take care of the children and the studying and the kids studying. It just becomes a very hard job, so you have to choose.”* Her story unveils that in general, for most women, it’s very difficult to combine their primary roles and their working role at the same time. This can be too much to handle. Role expectations do put pressure on the way women deal with all their roles.

In their first reaction this group of women denied the existence of primary ideological role expectations. But later on it’s clear, that they consider their own situation as a very exceptional one, when compared with average situations and ideological female role expectations. They even, consider themselves as lucky, and fortunate to be in this kind of situation, in which they are not or less forced to deal with and confronted with primary role expectations. Non-conformity can be found in the fact that partners are willing to share, on some cases even in household tasks, but also partners also help in raising their children.

### 5.1.2. Conclusions

As we have seen two different groups of women can be identified with different perceptions about the influence of ideological primary role expectations. These two groups share perceptions that are marked with ambiguity. This ambiguity serves as a strategy to deal with competing role expectations. The denial and support of ideological role expectations of the first group is a result of dual role appreciation. Women value both roles: their working role does not mean women leave or want to neglect their primary roles. Their working role is an additional role. Women appreciate and support certain aspects of primary role expectations, and deny other aspects of these primary role expectations at the same time. This passive image of a woman who obeys her husband is denied, while taking care of the household and children is supported. At the same time women view themselves as active participants in Egyptian society: having public roles, identities and contributions.

The result is a redefinition of their role. They are working women but committed to their family roles as well. These findings are in line with the study of Sherif (1999). She found that working women resist and support ideological expectations at the same time, as a way of dealing with competing role expectations.

The denial and non-conformity of the second group is a result of their relative distinctive social position. They define their own situation as ‘non-conform the general norm’, in comparison to existing primary ideological role expectations. They describe themselves as fortunate and lucky; to be less surrounded with stereotypical female gender expectations. Their family situation enables them to deny these ideological primary role expectations. The variations resulting in two different groups occur by a different way of reference to existing female role ideologies.



## 5.2. Daily Experiences of the Maternal Role

As the previous chapter shows women do support and resist existing primary role expectations at the same time. Also, the 'non-conform' group of women is caught in these ambiguous answers. Regardless these variations in perceptions, all women are strongly committed to their maternal role performance in their daily life. This role can be perceived as the most special and valued role of all roles. Women view their maternal role as very responsible and serious. They have very high expectations of their maternal role performance. They want to be the best mom, raising the best children. Even the 'non-conform' group of women considers their maternal role as extremely important. Therefore, it can be said that, this primary role performance is highly valued by all women. These high expectations result at a practical level in attempts to meet and fulfil all maternal role expectations. All women develop this type of reactive role performance. Women want to satisfy all maternal role demands.

These high expectations put a heavy pressure on the shoulders of these women. Their working career takes a large part of the day away. Having not enough time and energy working women constrain to deal with their children and related issues. In this way they don't fulfil this role in a satisfied manner, resulting in feelings of guilt, stress and attempts to push themselves even more, to accomplish what they long and desire for. This extreme motivation to perform their maternal role at the best possible way can be explained by the high valuation of the maternal role in Egyptian society. The maternal role is adored in Egyptian society, mothers are even idolised. Having or becoming a mother is seen as a great source of pride, and satisfaction. They are seen as the main carers and teachers of the new generations in society, which makes this a very noble and serious task.

### 5.2.1. Importance of Maternal Role: Preoccupation with Raising an Intelligent and Good Child

During the interviews and meetings with the women, I noticed and experienced a very disciplined and serious orientation towards the education of their children. This preoccupation with the upbringing of children was in some instances even very excessive. Especially because of the young age of some of their children on one hand and the high expectations mothers have on the other hand. For instance, one woman told me she was very worried about the poor mathematical skills of her four year old daughter. She was thinking to enrol her in a special training programme, to develop her mathematical skills. Same case with another woman, her five year old child already participated in this special training programme. These examples illustrate the concerns, and serious attention mothers have concerning their children, even when they are very young. Another example is the swimming lesson at a social club. This is a place where many Egyptian families spend their spare time during the weekends. During this swimming lesson, the five year old son of one of the women couldn't keep up with the new practises they were learning. Then the teacher took him out of the group, and yelled at him to exercise in the correct manner. Meanwhile, his parents and grand parents were laughing and watching him while he was crying. Eventually he had to practise as long as necessary, until he was able to perform this practise properly. This resulted in a swimming lesson that lasted three hours. His mother smiled and said that this was a good lesson for her son. These examples illustrate the major concern of mothers in raising a successful and intelligent child. The maternal role is seen as a very important and serious role regarding the education of a successful and intelligent child. When this obsession of raising this almost perfect child is studied more in details, several remarks can be made.

### 5.2.2 Desire to Perform Maternal Role as Perfect as Possible

Women try to meet their own maternal expectations, responsibilities and tasks at a practical level. The importance of the maternal role comes to an expression in the appreciation of two different role aspects. Firstly women want to set an example, as a role model. Mothers want to make their children proud of them. This is illustrated by Ola: *“You know, I try to meet his expectations. Make him proud of having a mother like me.”* She explains that she tries to accomplish this, by adapting herself to his expectations. *“I try to see what the nature and expectations of my son are and what he wants his mother to be, and I try to be what he wishes.”* Actually she explains that she is seeing herself through the eyes of her son. Trying to understand him, to be the kind of mother he desires. This way of seeing herself through the eyes of her son empowers her to direct her son in the direction she wishes. *“I try to motivate him and you know at the same time I try to fulfil his expectations, about what he thinks a good mother should be. And at the same time I try to push him to be this good son I want him to be. I try to push him but not to force him. I try to help him and to be patient with him, trying to have a good future.”* Adaptation to his expectations allows her to manage him in the direction she wants him to be. She emphasizes mutual empathy for each other in the form of friendship. *“When they were children I used to be a friend of them playing, talk to them in their language and try to understand them you know. Thanks to God my son is doing well in his studies he got 97% last year in the high school the highest scores.”* Mothers who wish to be a role model for their children is illustrated in the story of Ghada: *“I am indirectly showing how to be honest, how to be good Muslims, how to have a low voice, when they eat not to open their mouth, how to behave, when they are sitting and having their lunch that their voice will not be raised high at their parents, how to respect elder.”* Secondly other women want to create the best conditions as possible, to raise their children in this kind of good personality. Illustrated by Omany, she tries to provide her child with the best conditions that she and her partner can offer. *“I try to do my best for him, he goes horse riding in the club on a weekly basis; he goes to the park, entertainment places for kids, regularly. We choose a good nursery for him. We provide him with good clothes, toys, food, etc. I only hope that I m doing a good job. I am very precise when it comes to everything concerning him and my husband believes so to.”* Besides this she emphasizes that she appreciates it when her child is able to express himself freely: *“I believe it is my responsibility to raise a happy child. We love him, try to understand him, let him express self freely.”* Especially the ‘non-conform’ women emphasize this kind of self expression with regard to the education of their children. Perhaps this indicates that their orientation is a bit more focused on individual expression and development compared to the other women.

### 5.2.3. Quality Time: Being Sensitive and Adaptive for the Child’s Needs

The absence of working women during the day is caught up when they arrive home. All women want to spend some quality time with their children. This special time is an important part of care women provide for their children. It serves as a means to accomplish their own desire to meet and satisfy all their maternal role expectations and demands. It enables them to be this sensitive and adaptive mother for their children. This is illustrated by Gielan: *“I come home after work; I eat and go straight for ward to my children’s room, I sit, and play with them the whole time. Play puzzles, read, do some homework with them, spend time together.”* Quality time means the creation of time to listen, to be sensitive to the needs and lives of their children. Illustrated by Omany: *“I settle myself beside my child, answer his needs, talk to him, try to find out what happened with him at the nursery. I do some house work. Than play with my kid again for a while, or watch TV. Prepare him for sleep. Chat with my husband for a while, see what he may need, that if he didn't fall asleep before the kid. Do my house work again, prepare for tomorrow, do some work if I have to. Read for a while or*

*watch TV. And finally I try to sleep.”*

#### **5.2.4. Value of Support System in Taking Care of the Children**

The support of a paid support system with maids, servants or drivers, creates more spare and family time. Also, the support of other family members contributes to a reduction of role demands. It allows women to perform their maternal role in a better way. Miss Gielan gives an example of how her hired assistants help her to spend more quality time with her daughters. *“If she has sports after school I will ask the driver to drive my (oldest) daughter after school straight to Gezira Sport Club which is actually right behind my office. I will come to Gezira Club after my work. The nanny will pick the youngest from school and also comes to Gezira. I play with the youngest until the other is finished with sporting and then we go home.”* The value of hired assistance is also illustrated by Nabil. She considers assistants as a necessary asset for each family and the way women deal with their multiple roles. *“Everything is ready for me when I come home. What I have to do is just supervising my kids. So I am able to spend quality time with them, me and my husband can spend that. Having a good nanny or having a good maid is an asset to my family. I believe it is a necessity for your family. A friend of me said a good maid is equal to a happy family.”* It becomes clear that hired support represents a change of lifestyle. It frees women from practical household tasks and it creates more time to spend with the family, allowing more quality time and attention to spend with the children.

#### **5.2.5. Responses at Competing Role Demands**

The desire of women to meet their own maternal role expectations on a practical level, in combination with their working role, results in three responses regarding their maternal role. The first response is *feelings of guilt or worries* towards their children. Miss Gielan explains how her working status involves feelings of guilt towards her children. *“I’ve got mixed feelings I always feel guilty. Now I feel guilty a lot. But fortunately I find ways around it. I don’t feel that they are neglected. I find a way around it and off course I could do more. But at the same time she also appreciates her working role, it gives her satisfaction. “But this is a decision do you want to be a 100% mum and not having a life on your own or do you want to be 80% mum or 80% good job It is that kind of decision. I cannot imagine myself not working I would become crazy. I find that work helps me to be a better mother. If I have to spend every day looking after them I would go crazy, they would drive me crazy.”* She is very aware of the value of both of her roles. She could not imagine herself neglecting one of them. She is caught up in this dilemma in which she wants to be a good mother and worker. But she is confronted with the incontestable fact, that she is not able to be 100% mother. Though she is able to reflect on her situation rationally, she still struggles with mixed feelings of guilt.

A second response to deal with competing role demands is the overall attempts of women *to do as much as they can*. They push themselves to meet their own role expectations: to be this good mother. It’s if they are thinking: *“I am working but this does not mean that I will perform less in my maternal role.”* Women keep on trying to perform this role as good as possible from the moment they arrive at home until the moment they go to sleep. The attempt to do as much as possible in both roles is illustrated by Ola: *“I told you that my first responsibility is my home. I have to give everything to work, but also for my family and home. My working doesn’t mean that my family is affected and the opposite. Both responsibilities have to be done in a good manner. I am fortunate; because I told you we go home at the same time and start the day. So they (She is referring to her children) do not spend any time alone my son and my husband.”* Miss Ghada also pushes herself to meet the expectations she has from herself as a mother: *“I really want to give them the best I have: the best in me. It is*

*difficult you know when you come home after work, but I have to do this and have to focus and concentrate to provide my children with the best. I want to do it all.”*

The third response in dealing with competing role demands is *role overload* which is the result of trying to fulfil competing demands. High role expectations result in more pressure for working women. The impossibility to fulfil these expectations results in role overload. Rania explains what kind of expectations she has from herself, as a mother and the maternal role in general: *“It is the mother mainly who raises the children. She puts these ideas in them and forms their character.”* She unveils in this last sentence that she does most in comparison to her partner. *“This needs a lot of time. It is not that you tell them something once and it is okay. You have to tell them things all the time and be behind them all the time. Looking after this, what you are raising and what you are teaching is going to be followed or not. If not we have to start thinking how can I get to the point that he follows that? Or that he loves what he is doing and what I am trying to teach to him and so on.”* But these high expectations put a lot of pressure on her shoulders: *“I feel really exhausted, I can’t cover it up, and I feel like being the whole time under stress. The whole time during the working day I am under stress. I feel like this from the moment I wake up from the moment I go to bed.”* She is not the only one. Miss Noha explains it is very difficult for her to handle both roles. *“I feel terribly exhausted. I’ve to prepare my lunch, the servant prepares the basics and I complete the rest.”* Besides her lack of energy it becomes clear that her partner is not very supportive in the things she tries to accomplish after work at home. *“And I have to be cool with my husband’s comments on the cooking. I wish they change working hours for women, make it easy to leave. Time is not enough to do everything on a perfect matter.”* The influence of a non-supportive partner with regard to the preparation of dinner comes alive in the experience of Miss Noha. This could possibly also explain why some women feel supported by the flexibility of their partners, with regard to the preparation of food. Some women feel supported by the fact that their partners do not have high standard concerning the dishes.

It becomes clear that the women in this study want to be a working woman and a good mother at the same time. This desire creates mixed feelings in which they feel that they are not always able to meet their own expectations.

### **5.2.6. Family Needs First**

The strong appreciation of the mother role can also be attached with the importance of the maternal role in Egyptian society. Mothers are seen as main nurturers and as self-sacrificing. This finding corresponds with the practical fact that, the interviewed women care more for their children and families, than for themselves. They are mainly focussed on the well-being of their family members. Rania explains that she maintains a certain lifestyle in which she doesn’t have time for herself: *“I put myself at the end actually, at the end of these priorities. When my children need something or when we have to do something or have to buy something for them or do some work for them. This always comes first before me. You don’t have the kind of rest that you can do whatever you like and you have your free mind in the weekend and you have your inner peace. It is not like that you have time for yourself. It is just I mean not a big problem cause this is your role as a wife and as a mother. And it is just a hectic part if you are working woman it is very hectic in these issues. You are doing everything quickly because you want to cover your work and you want to cover this part of your life also.”* This valuation of family needs is how women desire it to be. Nabil explains: *“All my spare time is going to my family and family relations. But I also enjoy this. I want to offer my children the attention and teach them the things they need. Help with their homework, and so on. I want to be there for them. And I am very happy I can spend much quality time*



*with them because of the hired support I have.*” Also women with ‘non-conform general norm’ perceptions report that family needs come first, which indicates the importance attached to the maternal role.

### 5.2.7. Conclusions

The women in this study all have high expectations about their maternal role performance and what they wish for their children. These high expectations result in a practical level in this type of reactive role performance in which a woman tries to meet her maternal role expectations. Women want to perform this role as best as possible, this in line with existing maternal role expectations in Egyptian society. This role is seen as the most noble and responsible role a woman can have. Women are seen as the main nurturers of the personality of the child. This role is taken very seriously even in relation to very young children. The women in this study are supported in their maternal role performance on a practical level, by the availability of a support system which exists out of paid assistance and supportive family members (often mothers and/or sisters). The high expectations women do have about their maternal role results in three kinds of responses. Some women do have 1) *feelings of guilt and worries* towards their children. Other women explain that they 2) *try to do as much as they can* to meet high role expectations as best as possible. Other women feel 3) *overloaded* to some extent by satisfying all role demands. Furthermore it becomes clear, that women prioritize their family needs before their own, which increases this image of the mother as a self-sacrificing person. The maternal role is not exactly the same as the role in the household. It rather refers to the importance and attachment of women towards their children. Their children are the most important and women want to give them everything.

### 5.3. Personal Perception of the Family

The appreciation of the meaning of the family and the family role are also one of the topics influencing the self perception of Egyptian women. Family plays a central role in Egyptian society. Marriage is usually the beginning of family life. (Mensch et al, 2000) “Marriage is a fundamental social institution in Egypt and a nearly universal experience. More than 98 percent of Egyptian men by age 40 or Egyptian women by age 35 have been married at least once.” The family is the most important social unit in society. It provides people with a sense of belonging, and social support. The roles of Egyptian women and men are valued within the boundaries of the family. Caring for their families was described as a key element in the health, and wellbeing of women in a research of Miller and Petro-Nustas (2002) and unveils the importance women attach to the meaning of family. Moghadam (2004) argues that the appreciation of family life in contemporary Islamic societies corresponds with Parsons vision at the family. Parsons identifies the family as a unit with very fundamental and functional tasks. He makes a distinction between two main functions of the family. (Moghadam, 2004: 137-138) The family is there 1. “to socialize children into society’s normative system of values and inculcate appropriate status expectations, and 2. to provide a stable emotional environment for the male worker which prohibits him from the psychological damage of the alienating occupational world. These two functions are carried out by the wife and mother.” So the wife plays an affective and expressive role of nurturance and support, and in comparison, the husband has an instrumental role of earning money.

The women in this study where asked how they view their own role in the family, and what family means for them. How they view their own role relates to existing expectations and the appreciation of the meaning of family refers to ideologies of the family.

There is a difference between the way women look at their own role and the importance they attach to their family. The family role is mainly expressed in managerial



related terms, like organising and planning things. On the contrary the meaning of the family is mainly expressed in emotional expressions. The non-conform group of women perceive their working role as part of their family role, this distinguishes them from the other women.

### 5.3.1. Supporting Ideologies of the Family: Meaning of Family

The importance women attach to the ideological meaning of family is mainly expressed in emotional and ideological terms. Women refer to family as “a place of belonging, a place of social support, understanding and warm feelings.” The coherence between existing wider social structures, role expectations and the personal emotional expressions of the women in this study, unveils how women are using Egyptian role expectations and social structures. Miss Nabil explains how she views her family as a place of belonging: a place where she can be someone. Which illustrates the importance of the family as the psychological main unit: *“Yes, without a family you feel lonely, you don’t have a value if you dedicate all your time to your work. She relates the importance of family with the nature of human beings. “At the end women by nature like to have family and they feel value when they have babies and when they feel responsible for their babies and the whole family.”* By which she emphasizes that family makes a person complete. The same is true for Noha she explains: *“Family is very important to me, family means all warm feelings they accept you as you are, unconditional love and they give you endless support, without asking for anything in return. Family means giving, when you live with a family you change to be the volunteer person.* These descriptions are similar to the meaning of the family in Egyptian society. It illustrates the meaning of family as the psychological main unit of the individual. Providing social support and serving as a place of belonging, a place of emotions and care. The meaning of family is internalized through socialization. Iman explains how she learnt to appreciate family during her childhood: *“Family is every thing, this is how I was raised, to appreciate having family not just immediate family but also extended. I cannot imagine myself going through the bitter phases in my life if I haven’t had my family around me, my sisters, my mother, and my parents.”* It becomes clear that women support wider social meanings of family as valued in Egyptian society.

### 5.3.2. Non- Conform the Norm: Perception of Family Role

In contrast, the family role is mainly referred to by managerial expressions. When we compare this with existing role expectations we can qualify these managerial expressions as ‘non-conform the general norm’. A managerial family role does not fit in role expectations as identified by Parsons; in which the mother and wife has an expressive and affective role. These role prescriptions in managerial terms rather refer to an instrumental role. Women are preoccupied with managing their family, coordinating care, and household tasks. This is illustrated by Muftau, she explains her role in the family: *“I have to plan and coordinate things. I take care everything is done and we have everything we need. You have to think forward to delegate tasks to maids and servants in order to get everything managed.”* These managerial expressions are a result of the competing demands of her daily life and multiple roles. The managerial aspects also include the coordination and management of hired personnel, like maids, servants, and drivers. This coordination of the support system is illustrated by Dina: *“I have to coordinate all aspects of life I don’t have to do things myself, but I am in charge of the coordination.”* These managerial expressions are contrary to the empirical findings as presented: that family can be seen as an emotional environment and place of belonging. Miss Iman explains more about this role: *“In my immediate family (my husband & my self), it’s my role to keep-up the household running - food available, clean and washing. Whether I use hired help to do it or not, it’s my choice and time.”* The managerial family role corresponds with this image of a woman who is working very hard, to keep her

home, family and household running. In which the competing demands are so much to deal with, that an instrumental managerial role is the inevitable outcome to deal with everyday life.

### 5.3.3. Difference between Emotional and Managerial Expressions

The appreciation of the ideological meaning of family in emotional expressions corresponds with existing ideological expectations about the meaning of family in Egyptian society. Contrary to this are the descriptions of the family role in managerial expressions. These managerial expressions can be explained by the fact that women are confronted with the every day reality of their multiple role performance. This difference between both roles unveils the difference between (ideological) role expectations and experiences of daily life. Women value this ideological image in which the meaning of family is presented as an emotional place of belonging on one hand. But on the other hand: in their daily lives women have to deal with competing role demands, like managing their house and household after their working hours which results in this managerial role. This shows that ideological perceptions can be discrepant and totally different from everyday experiences.

### 5.3.4. Appreciation of the Economic and Family Role

There is also a group (4) of women who refers to their economical role when asked what kind of role they have in their family. They identify their working role as a part of their family role. This appreciation of their economic role distinguishes them from the other women. It refers to a perception, which is 'non-conform the general role norms'. The role of women in Egyptian society is centred at home and the family. But these women also mention their working role, when asked what kind of role they have in their family. Miss Gielan tells: *"I work; I financially contribute to the family."* Also Neveen identifies her economic role besides her family role: *"I am working for my family to maintain a good life."* The women in this group are surrounded by more non-conformity elements in their own family situation. But at the same time, they also value the belonging, care and social support of a family. Miss Gielan explains: *"Having support and having an extended family that is caring and can help you out is important to have. And my daughters are important for me."* This is also emphasized by Sara: *"At the end of the day family and extended family are important to me; they are what really matters in life. They love, care and worry about me. They help me when I need their help. They back me, encourage me, I can depend on their moral, emotional, and even financial, support, when I need it."* Eventually family is what really matters in life. Even for the three women who link their working role with their family role.

### 5.3.5. Conclusions

All women appreciate the ideological meaning of family. As a result the meaning of family is mainly expressed in emotional and ideological expressions. Care, belonging and social support are central aspects and qualities of this appreciation of family. This is in line with wider ideological structures in Egyptian society. Contrary to these emotional expressions, the family role is mainly described in managerial related terms. This can be explained by a difference between ideological appreciation of the family and the daily experiences and role expectations of everyday life. The latter exists of daily attempts to manage the household and family life. Another interesting finding is that women, who are surrounded with more 'non-conform the general norm' role expectations and social structures in their family situations, identify their economic role as part of their family role. This non-conformity of their perception changes, when asked to the ideology of the family: what family means for them. The result represents a shift in role aspects; their appreciation of the ideological meaning of family is in line with existing ideological appreciations of family in Egyptian society.

Therefore with regard to the role expectations about their family role they are not longer ‘non-conform the general norms’.

#### 5.4. Daily Experiences of Family Life

Attachment and appreciation of the family role on a practical level is expressed in time and effort women spend at this role after working hours. Immediately when they arrive home, they switch from their working role to their family role: taking care of the household and their families. Eventhough all women in this study get domestic help in the form of paid servants and support of relatives, housework and childcare remain their most important responsibilities. There are some slight variations and shifts in the way women experience these responsibilities. The group of women with more ‘non-conform’ role expectations in their family situation do experience less pressure and are able to create more spare time. They experience more support from their spouses. Miss Gielan explains: *“My husband serves the drinks when we have people at our home.”* Neveen is sharing all household tasks (even the preparation of meals) with her husband. Omany explains that her partner is very understanding and helps her with the upbringing of their child. ‘Non-conform’ role expectations in families create more time for women. This time is mostly invested in spending time with the children, or to work at home on work-related assignments. The ‘non-conformity’ of the role performance varies from two partners who are also willing to assist in the household, to partners who are helping with taking care of the children. The amount of support, understanding and recognition of the working role of women, increases the awareness of women of their economic power. Women with more ‘non-conform’ role performances at home also recognize their economic role in relation to their role and responsibilities in the family. Amany: *“Me and my husband we both pay for our expenses.”* Although these slight variations and shifts in the way women are dealing with their role in the family, all women say they try to perform their role tasks as good as possible. Their working role does not mean that they are neglecting their family role. On the contrary, their response is that, they have a strong desire to meet the expectations and demands of their family role. They develop this reactive role performance: women try to improve the overall quality of their role, with this goal to satisfy all of the role demands. Not surprisingly that many women experience difficulties in managing their multiple role demands.

##### 5.4.1. Multitasking lifestyle

A multi-tasking lifestyle represents the amount of tasks and responsibilities women are carrying after their working hours. This multitasking lifestyle is illustrated by Ola. She explains that she trained herself to manage to do several things at the same time. She explains this is something she learnt at work. This ability she also uses at home. *“This is what I have learnt from my work I can do many things at the same time. Gradually, I used to do for example two things at the same time, than three things at the same time. I try to train myself. To do this and to concentrate in everything I do. For example I can cook four dishes at the same time. And when I come here at my work in the morning at my work I write down the things I have to do during the day, at home I do the same. Like I will do this, I will cook this; I will clean this and so on.”*

##### 5.4.2. Occupied Daily Schedule

Women have an occupied daily schedule in which they are divide their time between family needs, family activities, care and their working role. Their lives are centred around work and their family. The following story illustrates the daily experiences of taking care of the family and shows how an average scheduled day looks like. Dahlia explains: *“Our day starts begins at 04.00 in the morning. He gets up and I get up. He takes our kids to the club*

*because they have training from 04.30 till 6.37 and than he takes them to school. Our youngest child I take care of him: I prepare his things and wait on the bus to pick him up at 6.30.”* It becomes clear that Dahlia has a ‘supportive’ husband who is willing to drive their children to their activities. She tells: *“My husband comes back and takes breakfast with me and he goes to work and I begin my day. I begin my day with cooking (dinner or lunch) making the home in order; I have a maid so I coordinate. She cleans and washes clothes, dishes, the kitchen and our bathrooms. I only cook but not every morning it depends if I am going out to my office or not. If I am going out the whole week I have to do all of this on Saturday for the whole week. I prepare meals and put them in the fridge. Only if I know that I will going out the whole week I am stock on Saturday with this. If I am not going out, I know my plans by week you know. I prepare something for every two days you know. It depends. Than I start with my work at home and I wait for the kids until they come back from school. If I am not able to work at home I come back from work after they came from school. Than I prepare the food and lunch and I prepare them to go out again because they have training in the morning and in the afternoon again. They take lunch with me and than we go out. I have to handle the eldest one to check if his day is going well if he has certain appointments or not. After preparing lunch I go with them to the club and than I come home at 11.30 PM and prepare dinner and sandwiches for school. After which I continue my work on my computer until 02.00 or 03.00 AM in the night.”*

#### **5.4.3. High Expectations**

The daily efforts of women to accomplish all role demands, tasks, responsibilities and expectations of their family role, shows women aren't adapting their aspirations and expectations to the fact that they are working. These unchanged high expectations are illustrated by Noha: *“When I arrive home. I feel exhausted. I don't have any energy left to be this energetic and positive person I would like to be in my family.* Here she explains how she would like to meet her own expectations about her family role but unfortunately she is not able to meet them. She tells: *“I am just tired. Handling the things needed. I don't have any energy left to talk about difficult issues like discuss some subject with my teenage daughter. It is difficult, because I would like to be able to be this energetic and alive person at home.”* It becomes clear that she isn't able to change the expectations she has from herself. She finds it difficult to accept the fact that she is tired from her work; this hinders her to be the kind of person she wants to be. The expectations and aspirations women have about their family role, stimulate and motivate women to meet all of their role demands. When women arrive home unfortunately new work is waiting for them, which consumes much of their energy, time and effort.

#### **5.4.4. Feeling Tired and under Stress**

Perhaps not surprising that many women report, that they feel tired, exhausted, and/or under stress. Women are dealing with a certain level of stress on a daily basis. Rania explains how she feels herself : *“During the working days I am under stress because I have to wake up very early to prepare anything for my children school things like their, bag and sandwiches. I have to get him down (her oldest son) to go to the bus and so on. And than after all this I have to prepare myself. I have to prepare for work and than a long day at work begins. When I come back home fortunately I don't prepare lunch because my mother helps with this.”* Here it becomes clear how support of family members can reduce the amount of household tasks for women. But Rania uses this time to spend on other family-related activities. She explains: *“I have to take care that my son does his homework and that he does his special mental training programme to improve his mathematic skills. I also have to take care that he memorizes Quran, that he does everything. And my daughter has other demands,*



*or my husband wants anything and so on. So I feel really exhausted, I can't cover it up so I feel like being the whole time under stress. The whole time during the working days I am under stress. From the moment I wake up from the moment I go to bed."*

#### **5.4.5. Conclusions**

When the focus is on how women manage and combine their family role on a practical level. It becomes clear that women are trying to satisfy all their role expectations, duties and demands from the moment they return home from work. Women develop this way to multitask to deal with the competing demands. The amount of effort, energy, tasks, and responsibilities that need to be spend at home creates a certain amount of stress. Women have to deal with lack of energy when they arrive home. Dealing with stress and multiple demands is an every day repeating experience. Their days are filled with occupied daily schedules. These daily experiences unveil why women describe their family role mainly in managerial and organizational terms. It's their way to deal with their daily experience. Though support and understanding of partners reduces and relieves some tasks and role demands. Also, their maids and servants assist them in their domestic tasks. Eventually all women tell, that they are trying to perform their family role as best as possible. In a response to satisfy all expectations women develop this reactive role performance, referring to a multi-tasking and hectic lifestyle in which they try to meet all role demands. The desire and amount of effort to care for their family can be attached with the importance and appreciation of the meaning of family in Egyptian society.

### **5.5. Personal Perception of Female Qualities**

Ideologies about how a woman should 'be' are prevalent in every society. These expectations produce ideas about femininity. These ideas about feminity influence the way women perceive their own roles. Especially for working women these ideas can produce restrictions with regard to the role performance of women. The Arabic term '*mu`adab*' refers to a range of attributes relating to norms of proper social interaction in the family and community. These norms also represent certain qualities that are seen as feminine. Atasoy (2006: 209) writes "ladylike behaviour, good manners and moral respectability are seen as stereotypical feminine traits." These notions about gender appropriate qualities and behaviour are internalized by socialization processes. "Adolescents grow up in an environment in which they become familiar with prevailing gender norms concerning the qualities of a 'good' husband or wife." A study of Mensch et al. (2003:13) reports that Egyptian girls and boys value gender specific qualities in women and men. "Girls prefer a husband who has a strong character, who is good-natured, who will treat them well and who is wealthy or has a good job. While boys are more likely to seek a wife who is 'virtuous', religious, well mannered and who comes from a good family." These gender specific qualities reduce the recognition of other roles that women can perform. Stereotyping of gender roles affects the way working women perform their multiple roles. Mensch et al (2003) reported that over 90% of Egyptian boys and girls think that wives should do all the cooking and cleaning in the household even though some form of employment outside the house is acceptable. Egyptian adolescents have traditional views on gender roles, regardless their socio-economic background. In such a social orientated society as Egypt, women also care for family- honour and name. Every family has to hold up a certain image or reputation within his wider social environment. Women bear responsibility for this by respectful behaviour as young adults. A young girl's behaviour is seen as a reflection of the family. Women receive their social esteem by public acknowledgment of their modesty and good behaviour. Shame brought on the family lasts for generations and influences family connections in the community (J. Miller and W. Petro-Nustas, 2002).



### 5.5.1 Perceptions on Female Qualities

The women in this study were asked what they perceive as female qualities, to gain knowledge about their ideas and ideologies, and the extent in which they are influenced, by existing ideological role expectations and social structures about femininity. They were also asked if they feel that they can use these qualities in their work and family-related roles. A rough distinction can be made between two ideological perceptions about female qualities.

A) A group of women supporting existing female qualities. They refer to this quality of 'being patient' and the transformation of female qualities into managerial and organizational skills.

B) A second group of women denies this whole idea of the existence of female qualities. They emphasize opinions that do not fit in general role expectations. The second group has perceptions that are 'non-conform the general norms'. All women in both groups identify a mutual relation between the female qualities they use at home and at work. They view this as related to each other.

#### 5.5.1.1. A) Supporting Ideologies and Role Expectations about Female Qualities

##### 5.5.1.1.1 The Quality of Being Patient

The appreciation of female qualities in this group is in line with existing ideological role expectations and social structures of female behaviour in Egyptian society. These ideological structures and expectations are part of their personal perceptions and descriptions of female qualities. This group (5) mentions 'being patient' as a typical female quality. Miss Dina tells: *"Women are strong, patient, smart, and flexible."* It becomes clear that being patient is not something that women associate with weakness; even more the opposite is true. The quality of 'being patient' refers to a wider concept: patience is seen as a way of dealing with people and social situations. It refers to an indirect way of handling things, a kind of soft or decent approach to deal with people and situations. The importance of this indirect way of patience is described by Noha: *"The way of handling a conversation is very important."* She illustrates this with an example from her personal life. *"For example my husband didn't talk with his uncle, because of family problems."* She explains that if she would use a direct approach she would not succeed, in what she wants to say to him. *"If you are just telling him like this: you are wrong, you should talk with him. Then you try to focus on his mistakes and he will get stubborn and he will not be open. The discussion will be closed and that's it. He would say it is none of your business to talk about it."* This direct way of dealing with her partner will not stimulate an open and understanding approach and discussion. She explains how she prefers to deal with this on a patient and soft way: *"When you just say: God ordered us to have good relations with relatives, to be kind for each other. When you do this God is satisfied with you. God blesses you more when you are having a conversation with all your relatives. So than you try to speak about some good things that happened in the past with his uncle. Just take it that way and I succeed. So when you take it directly he will just get stubborn and get closed inside. You are focussing on his mistakes and teaching him as a teacher. So when you use this soft approach. To remind him of this picture of his uncle, events in the past they shared. It is all about the kinds of words you choose."* This example unveils how gender appropriate behaviour empowers women more in their ways to influence people and social situations, rather than acting independently against these structures. They use this quality of 'being patient' to manage and direct existing social relations and structures. Ola explains further: *"You have to understand the nature of the person first and than you know how to handle. You have to be patient to see how people are and know how they will react on things. I use this experience at home in my work. So I have to understand the nature of the*

people first, to know how to deal with them. This is the same with my husband, I know him for many years and I know how to start and end a discussion.” Again this quality of patient is an effective method to influence one’s social relationships effectively. This stage of circumventing and manipulating social relation is an expression of individuality to maintain, and influence the social related nature of everyday life (Joseph, 1993).

#### **5.5.1.1.2. Transformation of Female Qualities in Managerial Skills**

Other women in this group (3) transform existing ideological female qualities into managerial and organizational related qualities. It’s interesting to note, that these women are all working within the private sector, holding jobs with many responsibilities and making long working hours. Transformation of female qualities empowers them in both roles, while maintaining, and preserving feminine traits. Nabil explains more about the managerial role of a woman at work: *“They can do this with kindness this is for me being feminine.”* She emphasizes qualities that result in a specific mix of qualities that can be seen as feminine. *“Woman are good managers, they have kindness and intelligence. With the good manager I mean that you can manage your salary, you can manage your family. You have the management feeling and the skills. I think women are better managers than men. They are managing things they have to do at work and at home. And they can do this with kindness this is for me being feminine. Not just being hard and stiff or just saying yes. Women can approach things on a soft manner. And with being intelligent I mean that women can know a situation, they know how to look and observe the whole situation from different accounts or angles and positions. I still think women are better than men in focussing. They are also better at studying in general.”* As seen in the above examples women are using existing female qualities as a way to empower them in their roles at home and at work. They identify a mutual relationship between them. This allows them to preserve their own femininity in all roles. Existing ideological role expectations are integrated in their working role. This mutual relation between the working and family-related roles is also identified by other women; they feel that they use their female qualities as well at work as at home. Muftau explains: *“You need to be patient to deal and manage things. This is essential if you want to combine everything your work and your family. Again being patient is important in dealing with people and existing social structures at work and at home. “I mean you have to know the people, situations and things you are dealing with to get everything cooperative. This is the same in my job as in my personal life.”* Finally there is only one women who explains, that the qualities, that she uses at work are opposite of those she uses at home. Noha: *“Everything at home should be handled emotionally not mentally. But in work everything is mostly by your mind. At home emotions are the ones that link the family, emotions only. You give without return. You do this effort of giving yourself without even thinking what you get back. So emotions are the link within the family.”* She explains that she feels that she has to switch a certain personality on and off, at home and at work. *“I feel myself switching on and off. At work it takes an hour after arrival here that my new character comes. That’s why I feel maybe that exhausted, I feel sometimes where am I? It is not me. Sometimes I feel I am not that person, and not that person. Yeah it is exhausting inside psychologically it is exhausting. That you are not living according your character. The real one, maybe I am mixed between the roles, I feel like putting a face, I am putting a face there, and a face there.”*

#### **5.5.1.2. B) Denial of Female Qualities: Non-Conform General Norm**

The women in this group (4) are denying the ideological definitions of female qualities like they exist in Egyptian society. They deny the influence of ideas about femininity and female qualities in to their own roles. They rather emphasize their individuality as a person, than as a woman. Neveen: *“You know I don’t believe in such things as specific female*

*qualities. You know.” Remarkably enough this is the same group of women who are surrounded by more ‘non-conform the general norm’ gender expectations in their own family situation. Two women even deny this whole idea of female qualities and emphasize their unique self. Miss Gielan explains: “All women are different. I don’t believe that you can generalize. It depends so much on your socio economic status, on your religion on your economy. There are so many differences I have no opinion on. I don’t believe there is such an idea as female qualities. I think I have qualities which are the result of my upbringing, education socio economic status, and my exposure and stuff. And I do employ different strategies to get what I want in work. I don’t believe that I employ these strategies because I am a woman.”*

### **5.5.2. Conclusions**

This chapter tried to gain knowledge about the ideologies of women concerning female qualities. The overall majority developed a perception on female qualities in line with existing ideological role expectations and social structures. There are two perceptions on female qualities. 1) One group mentions the quality of ‘being patient’. This concept refers to good manners: handling conversations, people and situation with care. Women influence their social relations and situations with this quality of ‘being patient’. It enables them to direct people the way they desire. These findings are in line with the good manners and respectability that Atasoy (2006) identified as typical female qualities. The other group describes female qualities in managerial skills, like organising and coordinating. Women do support female specific qualities but they use these qualities to empower themselves more in a feminine managerial role at home as well as in their work. This shift of the valuation of role aspects empowers them in all their roles.

2) The second group of women denies this whole idea of the existence of ‘typical’ female qualities. They do not support commonly held role expectations. They rather emphasize their individuality as a person. By which they emphasize a perception not fitting in general role expectations. A perception ‘non-conform the general norms’ and expectations. These are also, the women who are less surrounded by primary role expectations in their family situation. They emphasize their personal perception instead of existing ideologies of female qualities and behaviour.

## **5.6. Personal Perception of Patriarchal Social Structures**

Egyptian society is a patriarchal society. Patriarchal structures can be defined as social structures (Moghadam, 2004:137-139) “in which fathers have primary responsibility for the welfare of family units,” directing and managing the social relations within this unit. (Joseph, 1993: 461) “The patriarch sees his wife, sisters, juniors, siblings and children as extensions of himself; men are privileged to shape and direct relations.” These social structures influence the way women look at their own roles. Since men are privileged to shape and direct social relations it will be interesting to explore how women perceive their own role in decision making processes in the family. Joseph (1993) argues that these patriarchal structures do limit the autonomy of the individual. According to Moghadam (2004: 145) in the Arabic –Islamic family, the wife’s main obligations are to maintain a home, care for the children and obey her husband. She refers to this as ‘the patriarchal gender contract.’ Joseph (1993) sees both, men and women, as active participants, and developers of these structures. He writes: “I am cautious, however against seeing men or fathers as prime movers or causes of these complex relationships. Building on Minuchin’s insight, I would argue, that each person, including women and juniors, is an active participant, both affected by and causative of the relations of inequality in patriarchal systems.” Joseph makes a distinction between two different styles of social relationships between male and female family members. Patriarchal

relations can be 'cold' or 'hot'. The first is referring to a pattern of distance and aloofness. This can be described as a social setting in which things are defined more as rules, 'things are just the way they are'. The second form exists of greater proximity and communication. This 'hot' form of patriarchal relations leaves more space for negotiation and exchange between members. Both forms of social relations refer to the extent of flexibility of social structures. Patriarchal structures create inequality for working women. They produce a male-centred society or social environment.

### 5.6.1. Perceptions on Social Structures

The women in this study were asked how they perceive their own influence (power) with regard to decisions in their families. The patriarchal nature of Egyptian society makes it interesting, to gain knowledge about the way women view, and experience these processes. The interviewed women can be divided in two groups.

- A) A group supporting patriarchal structures and a
- B) second group whose participation in decision making can be qualified as 'non-conform the general norm'.

#### 5.6.1.1 A) Supporting Social Structures

The participation in decision making processes of the women in this group (8) is influenced by the patriarchal nature of social relationships. This process of decision making exists of 'hot' social relations. This is supported by the fact, that women explain, that decisions are the results of mutual discussions and communication between them and their partners. Rania explains: *"Decisions in life or in my family are a mutual share between me and my husband we discuss things over."* Negotiation and exchange of communication are aspects of (hot) communication and proximity between men and women. When one takes a closer look in, how women involve in these decisions, patriarchal structures do emerge. The involvement of women in mutual discussions is often a result of an extended process of preparation to introduce a subject of discussion at a proper manner. This preparation varies from gathering as much information as possible (about the subject of discussion), making a summary of pros and cons, thinking about possible reactions of the other, introduce the subject of discussion in such a way that it will suit their partners.

##### 5.6.1.1.1. Strategies of involvement

All of this is part of a woman's involvement in decisions. The above mentioned strategies serve as a means to convince their partners, or to open a discussion. The existence of these patriarchal structures is illustrated more in depth by the story of Iman. She explains her 'secret': *"The key is how you introduce the discussion and closure. You have to give the man his posture and his position in order to get what you want."* It is clear that she uses and supports existing patriarchal role expectations to get what she wants. She links the position of the man to Islam. *"Islam gives the man a position in the family you don't have to think little of this."* She explains how she deals with situations, she would like to influence. And how she supports existing gender expectations to get what she wants. *"For example even if I know for sure that he is going to say yes to something I propose, I should not take this for granted. I should give him the opportunity to say yes. I will ask him to give him the respect, that he is part of this decision. Give respect to his position. You have to give this to him it is his ego. Let him feel that he is the owner of the decision."* The impression she gives her partner, of him owning the decision, gives her not only the possibility to influence the decision, but it also has another advantage: *"He cannot blame you afterwards."* She also explains her personal opinion about this way of dealing with discussions and issues: *"It is not about equality but about*



*etiquette. You would normally do this with strangers. Why not with your husband, it's about being polite being respectful. It is really framing out what you want in a nice way that allows others to understand.*" This example corresponds with the finding of Joseph, that both men and women are supporting, and using existing patriarchal structures to manage, and direct decisions. Contrary enough the continuation and perpetuation of these patriarchal social relations empowers women to deal with these unequal structures and allows them to influence them.

Another example comes from Rania. She gathers as much as information as possible, making a list of pros and cons about a certain decision, before opening the discussion with her partner. Preparing the whole discussion is an important way of dealing with the discussion. Her good and extended preparations usually end in agreement from her partner, because he knows she worked a lot on it. Rania: *I try to convince my husband with it. I try to make up my point. I mean I have my reasons for me. I start collecting the pro's and cons from my point of view. Discussing it with my husband and editing it after he expresses his opinion. Than I start to get pro's and con's by asking people to help me. This is also according to Islam. I also make special prayers to guide me in decisions. Than I get a certain idea. Than I get back to my husband to get the final through. He knows that I am worked on it a lot. In most cases he agrees with what I finally came up with. In most cases he also the sees the same advantages more.*" Communication and exchange of information in this 'hot' form of patriarchy enables women to participate in decisions and to express themselves within patriarchal structures. Women and men all have their own roles within these structures. Women are able to empower and influence themselves by supporting existing role expectations.

#### **5.6.1.2. B) Non-conform the Norm**

The women in this group (3) refer to their role in decision making processes as 'a natural way' of dealing with things. They can not give clear descriptions how decisions are made. This could indicate that they are not aware of their own role involvement and the way things are really going. They are less likely to develop certain gender specific strategies, to deal with patriarchal social structures or decision making processes. They are not aware of this, because they do not deal with gender differences in decision making processes in their own family situation. They emphasize a view 'non-conform the general norms' within Egyptian society. Miss Sara explains that decisions are just something natural between her and her partner: *"The way things go right now its okay, I mean things go just naturally. No problem at all we discuss it and it's okay."* This reference to a 'natural way' indicates that she is not aware of gender specific role behaviour in decision-making. The distinction in comparison with general norms is clearly illustrated by Neveen: *"I don't do something special when I discus something with my husband. I mean why would I? I listen to his point of view, he to mine. I mean we are all human beings."* We can conclude that there is only one woman who reports, that her partner is mainly responsible for all the decisions. Noha tells: *"My husband is mainly responsible for the fatal decisions. Sometimes some issues are negotiable but mainly even if he was wrong I can't change his mind."*

#### **5.6.2. Conclusions**

We can conclude that the majority of the interviewed women developed a kind of social intelligence and way to deal and operate with existing patriarchal social structures. This refers to the gender specific way women involve in patriarchal structures of decision making processes. Women support patriarchal structures to direct, influence, involve, and manage decisions. The majority of the interviewed women view themselves as active participants in decision making processes. This is similar with the finding of Joseph (1993): that each person, including women, is an active participant, both affected by and causative of the relations of



inequality in patriarchal systems. Women developed different strategies to deal with decisions. Women manipulate social relations to gain power and influence them. They influence decisions and discussions by collecting pros and cons, gathering as much information as possible and use indirect ways of introducing a subject to their partner. The fact that, women emphasize mutual communication and negotiating, qualifies this as ‘hot’ patriarchal relations. The strategies of involvement in discussions increase their role as a serious communication partner. A smaller group of women say that they are not aware of their gender specific roles. They are referring to decisions as a ‘natural way of dealing with things’. This is ‘non-conform the general norm’, given the female specific role expectations that do exist within these patriarchal structures. This indicates that the women in this group do not have to deal with stereotypical role expectations and social structures that emphasize them as a woman. They are therefore unaware of them.

## 5.7. Daily Experiences of the Relational Role

### 5.7.1. Lack of Time

Apart from family-related roles, the relational role is also one of the roles working women have to deal with on a practical level. Especially when there are children, time for each other can be a problematic issue, because all time is going to family issues and family concerns. The more children are involved the more difficult this is. Especially when children are young they need a lot of attention and supervision. No time or little time is left for the relationship between partners. Ghada explains her desire to have more time with her partner: *“I would like to have more quality time to spend with each other, without the kids around us, or I would like to have more time to do nice things for him, like for example preparing a romantic dinner at home, with candle light or something. I do not have the energy now to do these things, really.”* Many women explain and feel, that their relational role is often neglected, when compared with their roles, and time spend in the family. The fact that the relational role performance is prioritized as less important, qualifies this type as a *role redefinition performance*. The relational role is prioritized according given circumstances. Family life is more important for women, than their relational role. Many women consider their relational role also as part of their family role as illustrated by Rania: *“Time for my husband? Well. ...actually all my time is going to the household and the children. When I want to make time for him, actually I have to plan this. I have little time, because of all my responsibilities in daily life. You know me and my husband we are both working for our family. This is actually the most important we share with each other. Now it goes not only between him and me, but about us our family.”* Daily life activities set the agenda for communication issues between women and their partners in daily life. Ola explains that she has time with her partner to chat, discuss, or talk about things. But the examples she gives are all related to the family. *“Discussing some items related to the house, to our son, related to his family, my family.”*

### 5.7.2. Ideological Role Expectations within the Relation

Though many women experience a lack of time, contrary enough giving attention and time to their partners are important elements of the relationship on a practical level. Women say they want to provide support for their husbands. They want to be open, to listen to him, share stories, share thoughts and to be understanding and patient. These high role expectations produce a difference between the way women perceive their role and the reality of this role performance. Ola explains what she considers as a good wife: *“A good wife is cooperative, helps in solving problems and is not a burden or a trouble maker. She is faithful and understanding.”* Noha experiences difficulties in being the woman she would like to be: *“Of*

*course when I go home I want to be this person who is active, open, understanding, I mean with a free mind. But the opposite is true I am often tired, I am not active, but very tired. I am not the kind of person I want to be. I always feel I could do better.”*

### **5.7.3. Expectations of Partners**

The expectations that partners have from their working wife's role's performance play an important role in the way women deal with their multiple roles. Supportive and understanding partners are willing to assist in the daily activities with the children, varying from driving the kids to the club to helping them doing their homework. But also reasonable expectations about the role performance of their wife with regard to household tasks, helps working women to manage everything. For instance: partners, who don't complain much about the state of the house or about the fact that women aren't able to serve fresh meals on a daily basis, or partners who are also satisfied with a take away meal. They lower the pressure for working women to deal with competing role demands and expectations. Dahlia has a very busy daily schedule which preoccupies her day from 04.00 in the morning until 2 o'clock in the evening. But she says: *“My husband is very supportive. I cannot imagine that he would leave me alone. Really I need his support. He is helping me in the sports of the children, getting everything working around. Without him I could not handle everything.”* The role expectations partners have about the role performance at home, are important for women to deal with competing role demands. Iman explains how reasonable expectations of her partner about her role performance at home help her to manage everything: *“He doesn't complain much on the state of the house (I have help for that) or on the type of the food. He eats everything. He does not want a hot cooked meal every day or that he does not want food from outside. No my husband is not like that, actually most of the time we order food.”* Neveen has one of the most supportive partners. Her partner is also sharing in household tasks and cooking. She tells: *“My husband helps me when I come home from work. You know we share, we share the cooking, the cleaning of the house and he also takes care of our son. Sometimes he cooks and sometime I do it. And you know he also don't expect very big extended quality meals. We are happy with this life and we try to make it easier for each other. And sometimes the food is perhaps not very delicious, because I have to make it quick. But I don't matter we have each other. You know this the way we handle things we are in this life together.”* But contrary enough not all women are that lucky, Noha has to be cool with her partner's comments on her cooking when she prepares the dinner after work. Support of a partner can often have a two sided nature. Omany experience support in the acceptance of her partner's that she is travelling around the country. She tells: *“You know I travel a lot in my work I am a regional coordinator so I travel maybe three four times a year. So my husband is very cool with this, he will not tell me: 'no you are not allowed to travel'.”* But at the same time she explains how she cannot expect her partner to take care of the household and children when she is gone for a trip. *“I cannot load him with things and especially when it, are things related to the fact that I am travelling. This is my own choice and this is my work. This is the kind of work that I want to do. So I can travel as long as I coordinate things and as long I am able to manage.”* It becomes clear that, support of partners is varying with regard to certain role aspects. Women are allowed to travel but they are responsible for the consequences regarding their household and the children. This is also the case for Rania. With regard to this issue it seems that, working is fine as long as women find ways around it, without neglecting their primary responsibilities.

### **5.7.4. Conclusions**

The relational role of women is a neglected role when compared to time and attention given to the family. The relationship between partners is orientated towards the family in

general. Most shared interests relate to family issues and concerns. Women prioritize their relational role as the least important role, resulting in lack of time for each other. The fact that they prioritize this role as less important: adapting their role expectations to their daily circumstances; qualifies this behaviour as *role redefinition performance*. Women prioritize their relational role as the least important in comparison to their other roles. Women emphasize they still value to be understanding, supportive, tender and carrying for their partners. There is a discrepancy between their ideological role expectations and the reality of their role. Role expectations of partners are important for women, to deal with all their competing role demands. Support and understanding of partners does vary in relation to role aspects. Some partners are supporting their wives by allowing them to travel, or by accepting lower standards of meals, or by having lower expectations concerning their performance in the household. Other partners are willing to assist by driving the children to their club activities or assisting with their homework. Few men do participate active in the household. It seems in general all partners (a more or lesser extent) adapt their expectations to the fact that, their wives work.

### 5.8. Personal Perception of Islam and Work

This part tries to explore the influence of Islam on the working role, to explore if Islam contributes to certain role expectations with regard to the performance of the working role. One way of looking to the relation between Islam and the position of women is the notion that Islam would be completely oppressive to women (Library of Congress, 2005:13). Especially from an Orientalistic<sup>3</sup> point of view, Islam is often seen as the only cause influencing situational and personal aspects of the lives of women in Islamic countries. Roughly speaking scholarship about women in Islamic countries can be classified in two interpretative camps (Library of Congress, 2005:13). One camp views Islam as the major cause for women's low status. The second camp views Islam not inherently oppressive to women, and emphasizes that, other factors besides Islam influence the realities of women's lives. From an extended compared literature research Omair (2008:117-118) argues, that "several writers seem to agree that, existing gender inequality is not due to Islam, but to a patriarchal interpretation of Islam (Metle, 2002; Kausar, 1995; Khattab, 1996)." (Omair, 2008:115) "Arabic traditions and values date back to the pre-oil era when Bedouin values considered family honour to be dependent on female chastity (Abdalla, 1996). The cultures and customs of these countries, such as the tribal honour system prevailing on the Arabian Peninsula prior to Islam, have contributed to the conservative orientation towards women in Islam (Alajmi, 2001)." Against this background of competing interpretations of the influence of Islam on the lives of women; the Egyptian working women in this study were asked how they perceive the influence of Islam on their own working role. They were asked if they feel that Islam acknowledges and support their working role or not. According to the interviewed women they all feel that Islam supports and acknowledges their working role. Even the women with more 'non-conform the general norms' perceptions. Miss Ola explains: "*You know Islam permits a woman to work and encourage her to learn. You can not find any verse that permits this. There were also women working during the time of Prophet Mohammed. Islam says that we as humans need to seek for knowledge even though this will be in China. This is not only for men but also for women, this is for all. I think that there are enough successful examples of working women in Islam now and in history.*" This opinion is shared by all of the interviewed women, even by the less active practising Muslims. Like Miss Gielan: "*I think that from the Prophet's life. I mean the prophets wife was active she was his boss. She worked and many other women like*

<sup>3</sup> (Orientalist: definition of Edward Said, which refers to a dominant vision and interpretation of the Orient from a Western point of view. Which exists out of a construction of 'the other' to feed the own superior identity)

his daughters. *But Islam is not a driving force for me. I am not orthodox; this is not why I work.* A minority of women did report that Islamic regulations are less leading with regard to the performance of their working role.

Miss Gielan explains: *I do think that there are many positive messages in Islam and also many negative but I see this as the nature of all religions. It depends on how you use it and your own orientation.* Like Miss Gielan women refer to examples and historical situations to illustrate, that women worked during the life of Prophet Mohammed. They also refer to the fact, that there is no verse in the Quran that explicitly forbids women to work. Iman: *“Sure, it’s been evident from history that women worked since the early days of Islam. Also, there is no explicit Quran verse which says that women should not work.”*

### 5.8.1. Religious Inspiration

For more religious inspired and active women, Islam provides a wider framework of sense of meaning, and inspiration to perform all their roles. Though Islam is not identified as a force against their economic participation, we must not forget that; “Islam is a social order and a way of life that aims at producing a unique personality and distinct culture for society (Metle 2002) (Omair, 2008:117. The Islamic way of life produces certain restrictions or guidelines about role performance at work. Illustrated by Noha; she explains Islam does not forbid women to work. *“Islam didn’t prevent women from working.* But she says Islam provides working women with certain restrictions how to behave and act at work. *“Islam puts restrictions for the working woman, some rules that she should follow to preserve and keep herself away from being subject to harmfulness. Such restrictions concern the way she dresses, being alone with a man in closed areas and her behaviour in general. But Islam encouraged women to succeed in what she is doing in general.”* The last sentence unveils that, though working women should maintain certain religious regulations, this does not mean that women are forbidden to work. Actually it means working is allowed under certain conditions and circumstances. This is explained further by Iman: *“The concept of going out to work means mingling between women and men. This is something that has to be dealt with care within the Islamic framework.”* She explains how women should interact with men and behave at work. *“At all cases women should maintain specific behaviour. Being dressed in non-revealing non-inviting clothes they should maintain a lowering voice tone. So that you don’t hear hard laughter which is inviting for the senses or something like that. So there is lot that comes when women are in a mixed environment, any women should follow the guidance of Islam but there is no explicit prohibition to do.”* The more religious inspired and motivated women feel that these specific Islamic regulations are important guidelines for women, about how they need to behave in public at work. In most cases the working environment of companies and organisations in Egypt is also organised with respect of these regulations. For instance I could rarely find closed rooms in companies. The companies I visited all have rooms of glass to have mixed meetings between men and women. This keeps the rumours away when men and women are mixed in one room. So work is to some extent organised around these restrictions.

### 5.8.2. Conclusions

From an Islamic point of view there is no explicit verse in the Quran that forbids women to work. On the contrary the interviewed women refer to numerous events during the historical times of the life of Prophet Mohammed to underline women where playing an active role. The interviewed women do not identify Islam as an oppressive force, against their working role.

On the other hand more religious inspired women explain that, they have to take into account certain Islamic restrictions about their behaviour and dress at work. They consider this as proper Islamic behaviour. This unveils the Islamic role expectations. In the examples they



gave it becomes clear that, these regulations, do include certain restrictions. The participation of women in the economic domain is subject to a number of coded social mores: like no mingling between men and women, lowering the voice, showing no offensive behaviour etc, in order to maintain a certain mode of gender segregation. This puts some severe restrictions on the role performance of women at work, from a Western point of view. It results in gender specific involvement at work. But most women do not perceive these moral codes as restrictions. They rather view and experience this as being respected as a woman. And as Omair writes: "Islam is a social order and a way of life, producing a unique personality and culture for society." Which explains why many women take these regulations for granted, this is how things are going for them, they are used to this, and they are socialized in these regulations during their upbringing.

### **5.9. Personal Perception of the Role of the Economic Provider**

Within the patriarchal structures of Egyptian society men are seen as the main economic providers of the families. This role expectation reflects an instrumental role; the man earns the money, to provide for the welfare, and wellbeing of the family. This role is also legally recognized, and supported within the Islamic marriage model. Marriage is seen as a legal bond, and social contract between men and women. This contract is a legal mutual agreement. In which both partners can agree on certain conditions for their marriage. The contract guarantees, that it's the duty of the husband to provide economic care for his wife under three conditions. 1) "That she agrees with the marriage by signing the contract. 2) That's she puts herself under her man's authority to allow him free access to her 3) that's she obeys him for the duration of the marriage." (Sherif, 1999: 10) By which the husband, is legally recognized as the main economic provider of his wife and family. (Sherif, 1999: 10) "This contract does not include the concept of a shared matrimonial income. In this religious-legal model, the husband is the head of the household, the sole owner of property, and the sole provider. It is incumbent on him to provide for his wife and children for all of their needs, including food, clothing, housing, and medical expenses, and in turn, they must obey him. According to this model, the wife is a consumer in the home." A women's entitlement of economic support from her husband, and other rights, depends on the negotiations prior to marriage, as specified in mutual agreed conditions in the marriage contract. One of the conditions, that can be part of this legal agreement is a woman's right to work during their marriage. The process of negotiation is extremely important, to determine the brides position and bargain status in the conjugal relationship. "Making the right match is critical, and preparing for, and ensuring a successful marriage, preoccupies young people, and their families." (Amin and Bassusi: 2004: 1290) The marriage is only officially consumed, when both partners put their signature on the marriage contract.

The working role of the women in this study refers to a certain amount of economical power. Sherif (1999:13) writes "the dominance of women in their households, combined with a certain degree of economic strength, suggest a degree of status comparable with that of men. They are thereby reworking the definitions in what it means to be either male or female." Since the husband is legally recognized as the main economic provider of his family. It will be interesting to see how working women perceive their own working role within the Islamic marriage contract. Furthermore information is collected about how women view their own economical working role, knowing that in general the husband is recognized as the main economic provider of the family.



### 5.9.1. Participating in Economic Care within the Islamic Marriage Model

The women in this study all participate in providing economic care for their families. They describe themselves as, helping their partners, helping to maintain a certain lifestyle, buying additional things or relieving their partner financially by paying all their personal costs like clothing and so on. All women say, they have this 'extra' role in providing income for their families. Rania explains: *"I am helping, I am the helping part. Sometimes when we can't manage things financially I am helping but he is paying more and I am helping him.* This extra role is not contrary to the Islamic marriage model in which it's the man's duty to provide economic care for his wife and family. Their financial status is supported within this model. Women enjoy the right to keep all their earned money for themselves. In practise, many women emphasize they do share their income, they consider this as normal. It's part of an idea of mutual cooperation, in which both partners help to maintain a certain income, and lifestyle for their family. The husband is earning or contributing the most, and the woman plays a significant role by spending her income for additional things. It has to be mentioned that, during current bad economic times this role for the man, as main economic provider is sometimes hard to accomplish. If a woman is able to help her partner, by providing with her income, she can do so, and it is even considered as better to do so. This dual earning model exists within the social religious legal construction of the Islamic marriage. The 'extra' earning power of women within the regulations of the Islamic marriage model; is explained by Dina: *"Islam provided women with a separate economic position. If you inherited for instance a piece of land from your family or you have your own money from your family. Your husband cannot take it from you. It is your own money. And then the husband is still the main provider of the family and you have your own money if you feel that you want to spend it is your choice as an independent person as a woman, as a respected independent person, so it's your choice. And I also believe that my husband believes this and as long as the family doesn't need me to support with certain issues. As I told you it is flexible it is not that I am very, very greedy like this is my money and I will not pay a penny or one pound, because he is the main provider. It is flexible. I believe that it is very important to be economically independent. And this is Islam; this is how women are economically independent. If you want to share than share, but this is your own choice you are not forced to do it. I appreciate that I am not forced and I also appreciate the fact that I am able to do it."*

### 5.9.2. Distinctive Views on the Economical Working Role

Though all women explain their extra role in providing an income is not contrary with the Islamic marriage model; women are divided in the way they perceive their economic role distinctive from this model. A distinction can be made between two groups. One group emphasizes the role expectation of the man as the main economic provider of the family. The second group emphasizes a view 'non-conform' general role expectations; they view both, themselves as well as their partners as economic providers.

#### 5.9.2.1. A) The Role of Economic Provider: Supporting Existing Role Expectations

The women in this group (3) consider it is the role of their husbands to provide economic care for their families. They recognize their partners as main economic providers, in line with existing patriarchal structures and role expectations in Egyptian society. This integration of existing role expectations is best illustrated by Nabil. She considers her husband as the main economic provider this is just the way things should be in terms of role expectations. She explains: *"My husband is the main economic provider, since this is his role."* The economic role of the husband is considered as something natural: the way how things should be in terms of roles between husband and wife. Miss Noha explains this role ideology: *"He should feel this by nature. He should feel that he is the man and he should take*

*care of this for his woman. He should feel this inside.*” Rania also uses existing role expectations and role ideologies about the economic role of men. She attaches this role performance with Islam. *“Of course he is earning the money he knows this is his role more. Allah is for me the perfect one, as well for this I consider Him in everything in my life. I think it is true that God decided this for our life and this must be the best thing how it should go. My husband is the financier of our life.”* Rania considers the Islamic view on role performance as the way things should be ordered in life, since God knows what will be the best role for everyone. She views the role of her partner as something that God decided to be. It becomes clear that the women in this group do have strong ideological beliefs about how things should be going with regard to the economic role expectations between men and women. Though as we have seen these role expectations are not so strongly fixed. Women are recognising their own extra role within the Islamic marriage model, as an extra financial role.

### **5.9.2.2. B) Non-Conform the Norm**

A majority of the women (9) emphasizes that they view their partners as well as themselves as providing economic care for their family. This view does fit in existing role expectations in Egyptian society: in which the husband is recognized as the main economic provider. The women in this group also emphasize their own instrumental role of earning money. A dual-earning model comes to existence. On the contrary to the other group, these women do not emphasize the role of their husband as the main economic provider; they emphasize the fact that, they are sharing in providing income for their families. This is illustrated by Iman: *“Yes both of us are economic providers since both of us have an income. When my salary is not available it does affect somehow.”* Women view their own working role as an economical role in which they have an amount of economical power. Even though in practise, their partners do take care of the bulky costs of the house and household, in most cases. This does not downplay their own financial role in their personal perception: they view it as sharing.

### **5.9.3. Conclusions**

This chapter focused on two central questions: 1) how working woman look to this religious-legal marriage model in which the husband is legally recognized as the main economic provider. 2) How women perceive their own working role.

It becomes clear that, the working role of women is not contrary with the role expectations and descriptions in the legal Islamic marriage model. Women are able to have a separate financial status within this marriage model. They have the right to earn and keep their own money. While at the same time, they maintain and recognise the role expectation of the husband as the main economic provider. This enables women to perpetuate their own earning power while respecting the boundaries of the Islamic marriage contract.

The way women perceive their own working role distinctive from the Islamic marriage model, falls apart in two distinctive perceptions. 1) One group of women recognizes their partners as main economic provider, in line with existing Egyptian role expectations. But a majority of the women explains that they 2) perceive their own working role as well as the role of their partners as an economic role of providing for the family. This perception does not fit in role expectations as they do exist in Egyptian society. By which this view can be qualified as ‘non-conform the general norms’. Rather this view refers to an equality ideology between men and women based on a dual earner model.

## 5.10. Experiences of the Working Role

### 5.10.1. The Challenging Nature of Work

The women in this study are very attached to their working role. This role allows them to express and activate certain aspects of their personality and sense of self. They refer to the development of certain personal skills and qualities. It provides women with a more open attitude and orientation towards the world, particularly with regard to people and social situations in general. Nabil explains: *“In my work I feel I am more open to the world. I develop more soft skills, develop my ability to communicate, my self presentation and self achievement.”* Their working role challenges their personal as well as their professional development. Miss Gielan tells: *“I am really fortunate that I really love my job. I love the challenge it brings and I love having new deadlines. My job gives me the opportunity to be creative and to set my own objectives. I love having a sense of self. This is who I am. Work makes me happy. It’s a different kind of happiness than when I am with my friends. I am the type coming home from work and than I am very excited about my working day.”* Moreover she is not the only one who connects her working role with aspects of her sense of self. Neveen is even convinced that her work cultivates her character inside. She explains: *“Work develops not only personal skills but also the character inside. I believe this. You meet people, you exchange experiences together, and you get out of the house and also experience troubles in your work. When you work you get you out. You are not obsessed like if you stay at home, you are obsessed with problems at home and you find yourself the only person with this on the whole world. I can tell you something. I found that I am changed during my whole working years. I can face troubles more, stronger than before.”*

### 5.10.2. Working Role as Expression of Individuality

According to the research of Hattar-Pollera, Meleis and Naguib (2003) many working women in lower level jobs, reported that their working role hindered them, to carry out their primary responsibilities at the home. But that they also experience their work as a way of gaining a certain independence, and identity. This last finding has similarities with the stories of the women in this study. Women experience and view their work as part of their personal development. They view their work as an expression of their individuality; it enables them to have a sense of self. On the contrary to the finding of the study of Hattar-Pollera et al (2003) the women in this study are strongly attached to their working role, besides their family-related roles. Nothing in their stories indicates that, work is seen as second responsibility that may not interfere with their primary responsibilities at home. Iman explains: *“Me not working? No, I m a working person. I like my job and I like working. I have to confess that sometimes, I go home just because I miss my husband and son. If it wasn’t for them, I would have become a workaholic.”* The working role reflects a certain lifestyle that challenges and stimulates women for almost 24 hours a day. It means being preoccupied with more than the family only. Performing and switching in different roles and dealing with a certain amount of stress are everyday experiences. It makes women feel that they are alive. Miss Rania explains: *“Me not working? No, because I am used to working, I am that person. It became a characteristic of me because I was always the hard working person and searching and so on. I want to get challenged I have so many studies in the technical field and language field I want to use this. I want it to be benefit table. It is just I feel I don’t want my knowledge to be faded out it is also good you can gain more money and you can do something good with that it is good, if there is possibility to gain more money why not? And as I told you I need these changing roles, I need it. I need that because it became part of my character because I am used to it from a very young age. I was working when I was at school also in the vacations. I am the kind of person who has to remain occupied. If I am not multitasking I feel something is wrong. I have to be*

*doing this and that. This is me. I have to be talking about something doing this and doing that, feeling always occupied, my mind is always working. This is my personality.”* This attachment and importance of the working role comes also to expression in the long term career orientations. Many women have specific goals they want to accomplish in their work. Women express a desire to develop themselves in their work. They would like to grow on their career path. Like Omany: *“I will launch a new weekly news paper in English for the gulf area .I am responsible for this launch. In general I want to get better on all levels in my work, I want to learn more, get a better title and be appreciated for what I do.”* Ghada is also focussed on goals and achievement in the future: *“I would like to have Plan’s work recognised in Egypt. My role is that of communication manager to ensure that Plan’s visibility is known at the national level. Not all the people in Egypt know about Plan, it is not like Unicef than people would know. But when you mention Plan they say ohh what’s Plan and I have to explain what Plan is. So I want that people will know Plan on the national level: that they recognize our logo and work. This is what I would like to achieve.”*

### **5.10.3. Influence of Role Expectations**

On the other hand there are some instances where women decided to switch their career orientation to focus more on their family life. This is true for three women. They adapted their career goals to the expectations they have from their family role performance. One woman decided to adapt her career achievements to her family life. Since more progress on this field would interfere in her family life. Rania explains: *“Before I wanted to make a career actually. At the beginning of my life I wanted to make a career in my field. I started taking courses and started being promoted and so on. But than when my married life started I realised that if you give so much time to your work and your career it influences your family life. Your family needs much more time of you. So I skipped this idea of having this major career. I limited it to be the right person at the right place. By which I mean: to cover the needs at my work the best way I can. I want to be the right person at the right place. I am the IT-manager I am in a good position. I am responsible for all the IT-issues at the institute so I have to cover my role correctly and right. An institute is not like a huge company or something, than my roles would be more difficult. More hours, more stress, more demanding and so on. That is something I can’t offer at the moment. It is enough now, I have other roles.”* Another woman expresses her desire to develop herself in her career but she struggles with this dilemma because she is still wondering how she will combine this career development with her role in the family. Noha says: *“I wish I had chances to change my career. I want to take more courses. But this means that I can spend less time at home. Because I have to attend these lectures in the evening, and have to study at home, I can’t do that. I have to make my husband understand that I need these extra hours for my work. I told him about this and I started the discussion and it is not closed yet, it is still open. Some issues take days to discuss and to convince him. I also want to compensate him with things that make him satisfied so that he would say okay. But he says it is in my time and that it is my decision. He told me it is going to overload me. And he finds that if I can’t handle it. I can’t complain to him, it will be my own problem. But I am still negotiating and I will convince him that these courses are not taking any time from the home.”* This woman also illustrates how a not supporting and understanding partner influence the abilities of women to combine their working role with their other roles. Her partner considers the extra courses she wants to take as time that, is consumed from her role at home. He is not very willing to accept that, which unveils that, he does have certain expectations of her role performance and availability at home.



#### 5.10.4. Role Preferences

In general most women feel, that of all their roles (in the family and at work) are part of their sense of self and their identity. As illustrated by Rania: *“I am a working mother, a working wife and a working daughter. I am combining all of them. Actually I am a working everything. I am working on my technical field, my professional side. I am working as a mother as a wife and I am working as a daughter.”* Only one respondent reports that she experience both roles as totally different and opposite. Noha explains: *“The image of the working mother is completely different of the mother at home. It’s a difference with regard to the character, the personality of the women. Because I feel I am having these two kinds of personalities. I am having a different character in comparison with women that have one role. Even in discussions and talking with my daughter. It is different for me when I talk with my sister who is staying at home. We have different characters. Sometimes I think more flexible than her. The way of discussing issues with my daughter completely differs from her way. I think I am more flexible with my daughter in discussing things, in negotiating and talking. You know kids; you should have a way of discussing things with them. I am more open. She is like; you have to do this and that, you have to do this and that. I found myself, my character is completely different. I can convince my daughter with something, when she wants to go out with her friends’ in the morning or something and I am not satisfied with this. I have a way of discussing with her. I think work changed me, my personality, and the way of discussing things. Work makes you open-minded and flexible in discussing things, you create new thoughts rather than thinking one thing.”* It becomes clear that this woman developed certain skills that changed the way she deals with people and situations.

#### 6.10.5. Conclusions

The interviewed women are all strongly attached to their working roles. Work can be seen as an individual expression and way to get challenged. Their work represents the development of certain goals with regard to their personal as professional identity as well. They appreciate their work not only in the short term but also on the long term. These women are career orientated, this unveils that, their working role is also an important role besides their family-related roles. This role became such an important part of their daily lives that the majority of the women say that they can’t imagine themselves not to work. But we have to keep in mind that, there are also some instances where women decided to switch their career in favour of their family role. But this still doesn’t represent a decision of not working it rather refer to a strategy of finding better ways to be able to deal with multiple roles. Their working role created a hectic and multi-tasking lifestyle, which they get used to over time. They feel challenged and motivated by this lifestyle. This preoccupied life is something they learnt to value and to live with. Women are working to have it all. Work and family life, they experience this as getting the most out of life. Without their work women would not feel complete as a person and without there family roles they would also not feel complete. They need both of them.



## **6. Summary Combining Working Role and Family-Related Roles**

This study explored how working higher educated Egyptian women manage to combine their working role with their family-related roles. The theoretical approach made a distinction between:

1) The personal perceptions of women about their own roles in relation to ideological female role expectations and social structures.

2) The daily experiences of this role combination in practise. Because of the extensive descriptive nature of the analytical part, a summary is presented below for each distinctive component of the theoretical approach.

### **6.1. Component 1:**

#### **The Personal Perceptions on Role Expectations and Social Structures**

This component tried to explore how working Egyptian women perceive their own roles in relation to the identified ideological female role expectations and social structures in Egyptian society. The theoretical approach identifies three distinctive perceptions (see also the chapter 3.5.), to see how women perceive their own roles within existing ideological role expectations and social structures. These three perceptions are: 1. a *Denial* perception (of expectations and social structures) 2. A *Supporting* perception (of social structures and role expectations) and 3. *Non-conform the general norm* perception (perceptions that do not fit in existing role expectations and social structures). After gathering and analysing the qualitative data, it became clear that the perceptions of the women in this study could not be captured in these three distinctive perceptions. The perceptions of women were characterized by ambiguity.

This ambiguity resulted in more diverse and complex perceptions. There are two distinct groups of women, with different perceptions, namely:

1) One group simultaneously supporting and denying existing ideological role expectations and social structures at the same time.

2) A second group who does not fit within existing ideological role expectations and social structures, and are therefore more 'non-conform the general norms'.

#### **6.1.1. Support and Denial of Social Structures and Role Expectations: Ambiguity (Group 1)**

The women in this group simultaneously support and deny existing (ideological) role expectations and social structures. They appreciate certain aspects of existing role expectations and social structures, while denying others. This ambiguous discrepancy is a result of early socialization, they are socialized to value certain roles but they deny other aspects of ideological role expectations and structures. This ambiguity reflects a personal strategy of negotiating gender roles within the significant social context of Egyptian society; existing of (ideological) role expectations and social structures. Because of the relational nature of Egyptian society (literature review, p.16) women redefine their own roles within the boundaries of their social environment. Women explore alternative constructions of their gender roles within existing social structures and (ideological) role expectations. This group of women is more adapted to existing social structures and role expectations than the second group. This group of women uses existing role ideologies, role expectations and social structures to justify their own multiple role performance. The simultaneous support and denial of social structures and role expectations varies with regard to situations and contexts. This is illustrated by the following topics.

### **Primary Role Expectations**

Variations come alive in the following examples. Women deny this image of a passive woman who obeys her husband blindly, and has no voice or opinion of her own. On the other hand women do support domestic role ideologies of taking care of the house and children. Even though this strong appreciation for their primary roles, they still perceive themselves as active participants in Egyptian society: having public roles, identities and contributions. The existence of primary role appreciations alongside the working role, qualifies this perception as role extension. Women redefine their own roles, by adding their working role to their family committed roles.

### **Family Role**

The appreciation and importance of the ideological meaning of family is another example of shifting boundaries with regard to support and denial in the perceptions of women. Women support the *meaning* of family as a haven of social support, belonging and care, in line with existing ideologies about the family role, mainly described in emotional and expressive role expectations. This is in contrast to their family *role* which is mainly described in managerial and organizational tasks. This represents a shift from an emotional and expressive ideological appreciation of the *meaning* of family to a more instrumental description in managerial tasks of the family *role* itself. The description of the family role in managerial tasks is not similar to the emotional and expressive expectations of women's role in the family. The descriptions of the family role can be regarded as more 'non-conform to the general norms'.

### **Strong Commitment of Female Behaviour**

The first group of women has a strong appreciation of existing female role ideologies. Women are very aware of what it means to be a woman and how they as a woman involve in decisions. This group of women considers 'being patient' as a typical female quality. This quality refers to good manners in conversation and in dealing with people and situations with care. This 'quality of being patient' empowers women to influence and direct, people and situations. Being patient offers women the ability to influence the social relations of their every day life. They use existing role expectations to influence decisions.

Another minority group has a different personal perception on female qualities: they describe female qualities as managerial skills. This enables them to empower themselves in their working as well as in their family roles, while maintaining their feminine traits. Women emphasize positive aspects of these female qualities, like being sensitive and social and they highlight the benefits of women's way of knowing.

### **Dealing with Patriarchal structures**

Awareness of gender specific behaviour is also an important part of how women involve in patriarchal structures. The majority of the interviewed women view themselves as active participants in decision taking processes. They influence these decisions by female specific involvement. They develop a kind of social intelligence and way to deal and operate within existing patriarchal social structures. Women use these structures to manipulate decisions. Women develop different strategies to gain decision power like collecting pros and cons etc. These patriarchal social relations are qualified as 'hot' patriarchal relations because of the mutual discussions, communication and negotiating between partners. This gives women the opportunity to involve in decisions.

### **Islam and Work**

Islam is not oppressive towards the working role of women. But variation exists in the implementation and interpretation of Islam in one's daily life. Women do support the combination of work and Islam on a general level. But on a more personal level variation occurs: there is a distinction in interpretations of Islamic role expectations. Some women follow Islamic regulations in the performance of their working role and other women are less

inspired by these regulations. For the religious inspired women their participation at work is subject to a number of coded and unwritten social mores. These regulations are in line with Islamic interpretations in Egyptian society.

### **Role of the Economic Provider**

Variations and shifts of personal perceptions come strikingly alive in this topic. Women do emphasize their husband as the main economic provider in relation to this Islamic marriage model. Simultaneously they also explain that the working role of women is supported within the regulations of the Islamic marriage model. Women have a separate financial status within this marriage model. They have the right to earn and keep their own money. On the other hand, they also support and recognise the role of their husbands as the main economic provider. This enables women to perpetuate their own earning power while respecting the boundaries of the Islamic marriage model. When the focus is directed to how women perceive their own working role, separate from this model, their perceptions change. The majority of women emphasize that, both they and their partners are the economic providers of the family. They emphasize an equality ideology between men and women, a dual-earner model. Only a small group emphasizes that their husbands are the main economic providers, in line with existing role expectations in Egypt.

### **Conclusions**

The women in this group developed a way of role shifting within the context of existing social structures and role expectations. These social structures and (ideological) female role expectations do play a major role in their perceptions and appreciations of certain role aspects. This reflects the negotiations that women make to deal with different role ideologies, role expectations and social structures. The women in this group redefine their own roles within the boundaries of their significant social context. They are active perpetuators of these expectations and social structures. They support and deny these structures simultaneously. This shows how women navigate their way between existing female role expectations and social structures and their own perception of their situation. A remarkable finding is that a majority of women emphasize that both they and their partners are the economic providers of the family. They emphasize an equality ideology between men and women based on a dual earner model that can be compared with the equality ideology in Western societies (literature review, p. 14).

#### **6.1.2. The View of the Fortunate ‘Outsider’ (Group 2)**

The second group of women has a distinctive position in comparison with the first group. Their ambiguous perceptions are a result of this distinctive position. They describe themselves as fortunate and lucky to be less surrounded with stereotypical female role expectations. Actually, their exclusive family situations allow them to deny primary role expectations and social structures. This consciousness of their fortunate position, indirectly acknowledges the existence of common female role expectations and social structures. The women in this group are less attached to existing social structures and role expectations than the first group. They are confronted with differences between their own ‘non-conform the general norm’ perceptions and their exclusive family situations on one hand, and the reality of existing social structures and (ideological) female role expectations on the other hand. This difference refers to a discrepancy between their own family situation and the ‘outside’ world, more than this inner kind of discrepancy of the first group of women. The women in this second group They are relative ‘outsiders’, they refer much more to their personal believes instead to existing role expectations and social structure, than the other women. This qualifies them ‘non-conform the general norms’. The following topics will unveil the ambiguity of the second group.

### **Primary Role Expectations**

The existence of ideological primary role expectations is denied in their first response. But it becomes clear that, these primary role expectations still exist, they give examples of these expectations from their social surroundings, illustrating the existence of these role ideologies.

### **Family Role**

Women in this 'non-conform the general norm' group identify their economic role as part of their family role. They view themselves as economic providers for their families, emphasizing their economical and instrumental role. But this role perception changes when asked what family means to them. In this context women do emphasize the ideological meaning of family in line with existing role expectations and social structures in Egyptian society.

### **Denial of Female Behaviour**

The women in this group distinguish themselves explicitly from ideological appreciations of female qualities and role specific female involvement in decision making. On the contrary to the first group, the second group of women denies this idea of female qualities or female behaviour. They deny the existence of these female ideologies, by emphasizing personal qualities instead of female specific qualities. They emphasize their individuality as a person, which qualifies them as having a perception separate from existing role expectations of Egyptian women. A perception 'non-conform the general norms'. They refer much more to their perceptions and orientations as a person instead as woman.

### **Patriarchal Structures**

The women also deny the existence of something as female specific role involvement in decisions. They refer to their involvement in decisions as 'just the way things are going'. This indicates that, they are unconsciousness of female specific strategies and role expectations. This can be linked to the non-conformity of their family situations they do not have to deal with stereotypical role expectations and social structures that emphasize their roles as a woman.

### **Islam and Work**

Though this group is identified as 'non-conform the general norms', the women in this group all identify a positive relation between the Islamic faith and the support of their working role. But the Islamic regulations with regard to the performance of their working role are for the majority of these women less leading.

### **Role of Economic Provider**

With regard to the Islamic marriage model they identify their husbands as the main economic provider, but they also underline their own separate financial status within this model. When the focus is directed to the meaning of their working role: outside this Islamic marriage model. All women identify themselves, as well as their partners, as providing and sharing in the family income. They also, emphasize an equality ideology between men and women, a dual-earner model.

### **Conclusion**

These women are relative 'outsiders' referring to their exclusive family situations. They are less confronted with existing role expectations and social structures in their family situation; this allows them to deny existing role expectations and social structures. They are more likely to refer to their personal preferences. This is more in line with the appreciation in Western countries of the ability of women to make their own choices and to follow their own personal preferences, values and attitudes. Though these slight shifts are still very modest it seems too relate to this ideology of the self (literature review, p. 14). The 'self' functions as a mean to justify role behavior, like in Western societies. The slight shifts to more personal

preferences could indicate traces of development towards Western versions of modernity, as identified by Hakim (2005). This kind of modernity represents an increase of the importance and attachment to attitudes, values and personal preferences in the lifestyle choices like this exist on a larger scale in modern and liberal regarded societies.

## 6.2. Component 2:

### Daily Experiences of Multiple Role Performance

This component tried to explore how working women combine their multiple roles in practice. This part described the daily experiences of the role tasks, responsibilities and demands of four different roles. The theoretical model identified three types practical role performances, to identify how women deal with their multiple roles in their every day lives.

1. *Reactive role performance* in this type of role behaviour a woman tries to improve the overall quality of her role performance with this goal to satisfy all of her role demands. This means she values all role aspects with the same importance.

2. *Role redefinition performance* means that someone changes her own perception regarding the role expectations she has from herself. This comes to expression at a practical level by setting priorities among and within rolls.

3. *Structural role definition* this means that a person can alter or resist external, structurally imposed expectations held by others. This resistance of expectations may result in a change of the demands.

After gathering and analysing the qualitative data, it becomes clear that reactive role performance is the most common reaction of women to deal with their multiple roles in practice. It is remarkable that contrary to the first part of this thesis, a rough distinction between two groups of women cannot be made. Even the women who could be identified in the first part as having a 'non-conform the general norm' perception, do not distinct themselves from the other women in this part. This indicates that, though perceptions about ideological role expectations and social structures are varying, daily experiences of multiple role performance, are far more similar. Much similarity can especially be found with regard to the maternal, family and working roles. All of these three roles can be qualified as reactive role performance behaviour. With no further significant variations with regard to the way women are dealing with these roles in practice. We can illustrate this finding of similar role experiences with the following topics.

#### Maternal Role

The maternal role performance can be seen as the most important role. All women share this major preoccupation with their maternal responsibilities, expectations and tasks. They want to be the best possible mother in raising this almost 'perfect' child, which qualifies this role performance as reactive role behaviour. High expectations about their own role performance result in feelings of guilt, worries, and attempts to improve their maternal role performance and role overload. Women priorities their family needs before their own needs, this reinforces this image of a self-sacrificing mother. An interesting detail in relation to the appreciation of certain role aspects of the maternal role is the fact, that 'non-conform the general norm' women seem to have a slight different orientation in the upbringing of their children. They emphasize more the importance of free expression regarding the educational upbringing of their children. On the contrary, women who are more orientated on existing role expectations and social structures do emphasize a more relational orientated view on child-rearing. They emphasize the importance of being a role model for their children. They emphasize themselves in relation to their social surrounding. And they want their children to be good examples of well-educated and well-mannered adults or Muslims.



### **Family Role**

This role relates to all issues in the household and family. There are some slight variations and shifts in the way women experience these responsibilities. The group of women with more 'non-conform the general norm' role expectations in their family situation do experience less pressure, and are able to create more spare time. They experience more support from their spouses. The partners of these women do offer more support in for instance, taking care of the household, until assisting in driving the children to their daily activities. Although these slight variations and shifts in the way women deal with their family role; all women say they try to perform their role tasks as good as possible. Their working role does not mean that, they neglect their family role. On the contrary, their response is that they have a strong desire to meet all role expectations and demands of their family role. In a response to satisfy all demands at home women develop this reactive role performance in which they try to meet all demands and expectations. All women are dealing with a certain amount of stress and lack of energy when they arrive home. Dealing with stress and multiple role demands is an every day repeating experience.

### **Distinctive relational role performance**

Besides these similarities with regard to the development of one type of role performance there is one exception in this. The relational role can be qualified as a role redefinition performance. The relational role is prioritized as the least important one of all roles, which means that women adapt their role performance in this role to the daily circumstances. All their time at home goes to family issues and concerns. As a result the relational role is more orientated towards the family in general. Daily family activities and concerns set the agenda for communication issues between partners. Women redefine this role when they have a family. Their attention changes from time and attention for their relationship, to time and attention for their family. Their relational role has been given lower priority, prior to daily circumstances and needs. Another interesting finding is that a majority of the partners adapt their expectations of the role performance of their wives to the daily circumstances, and the fact that their wives are working. This qualifies this adaptive behaviour as structural role definition performance.

### **Supportive Partners**

The expectations of partners play an important role in the way women deal with their multiple roles in practice. Supportive and understanding partners are willing to assist in for instance, the daily activities with the children, varying from driving the kids to the club, till helping them doing their homework. Reasonable expectations about the performance of household tasks help women to manage everything. For instance: partners, who don't complain much about the state of the house or the fact that their wife is not able to serve fresh food on a daily basis, or partners who are satisfied with take away meals, lower the pressure for working women. The fact that partners are able to adapt their expectations to the circumstances of the competing role demands of their wives, qualifies this behaviour as structural role definition performance.

### **The Working Role**

Contrary to findings of earlier research (Hattar-Pollera, et.al., 1993) the women in this study are very committed to their working role. Their working role serves as a mean to express themselves and to get challenged personally. Their long and short term orientation towards their working role illustrates this commitment. With regard to their working role women also develop this reactive role performance, trying to accomplish all work demands and expectations.

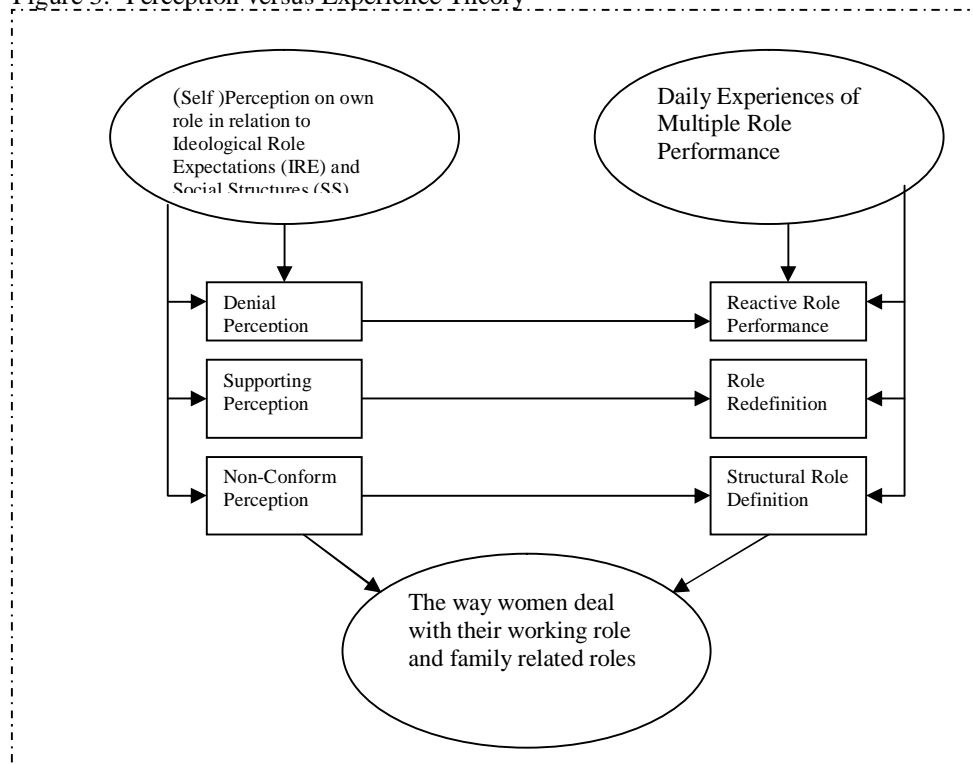
## **Conclusions**

The second component of daily experiences produces much more similarities. In general all women develop this reactive role performance, trying to deal with their multiple roles at the best possible way. They push themselves on a daily basis to fulfil all their role demands and responsibilities. When the focus is more detailed to their experiences, slight variations come to existence. Variations do exist regarding the maternal role concerning the orientation towards child-rearing. Slight variations also occur concerning the practical support of partners. The more support the less pressure for women. But these variations are very inferior to the fact that in general all women develop this reactive role performance behaviour.

## 7. Conclusions: Combining Work and Family-Related Roles

The variation in the data made it impossible to identify the theoretical assumptions as intended in the 'perception versus experience' theory in the below figure (3)

Figure 3: 'Perception versus Experience Theory'



The data produced much more complexity and variations than expected. It was impossible to make such a strict distinction in three role perceptions and three types of role performances. The identified relations between the perceptions and types of role performances could also not be found as intended. Therefore, the assumptions (as formulated in the theoretical chapter p.35-36) could not be found.

The first component produced two different groups of women, 1) one group simultaneously supporting and denying existing ideological role expectations and social structures. 2) A second group of fortunate 'outsiders' 'non-conform general norms'. But with regard to the second component (of daily experiences) all women, developed the same type of role performance, especially with regard to the maternal, family, relational and working roles. The data of the second component showed much more similarity than the first component. This means that in practice, there are not so many differences between the daily experiences of the working women in this study, regardless of their perceptions. Eventually, all women developed the same type of reactive role performance.

The absence of any relation between the personal perceptions and daily experiences of women unveils that the perceptions are only a very limited reflection of reality. The finding of this study contradicts with the findings of Stryker and Macke (1972, theoretical approach, p. 31) who claim that personal orientations are important determinants in solving role conflicts in practise.

That the relations as assumed by the theoretical approach were not found indicate that it will be more interesting to focus on the question why the data produced these results. The final part will try to answer this question. We will first discuss empirical information from the literature review that will be used to explain and frame the findings of this study. This is the result of data that could not be captured in the designed theoretical approach. At the end we will present an alternative explanation.

### **7.1. Relation with the Literature**

This study unveils a discrepancy between perceptions and daily experiences. Women are redefining their own roles within existing (ideological) role expectations and social structures. They try to break with certain role aspects of ideological role expectations and social structures. A minority of women has even distanced themselves from these influences. But regardless of these 'progressive' perceptions, their role performance in their every day lives looks much more the same. Their reactive role performance is implicitly based on the assumption that, multiple role demands are unchangeable, and that the only option is, trying to meet them all. Therefore in practise traditional gender believes still prevail. The sexual division in the domestic sphere results in attempts of women to improve their overall role quality. These findings are similar to a study of Komter (2005). She identifies the inequality in the private sphere of home as a factor of influence in modern societies. She refers to this as a discrepancy between ideals and practise. This discrepancy can be linked to the discrepancy between the perceptions (ideals) and daily experiences (practise) of the women in this study, which in turn can be explained by traditional gender roles.

#### **7.1.1. Traditional Gender Roles**

Egyptian society appreciates the roles of women within the boundaries of the family. Role expectations and social structures are very strong developed within Egyptian society when compared to Western societies: these traditional roles are even institutionalized in Egyptian society. The reluctance to abandon the traditional roles of women can be explained by the preference theory of Hakim (literature review, p. 12-13). The five structural changes as identified by Hakim (2005) did not yet occur in Egypt. Resulting in an inequality of social valuable resources as knowledge, education, work, fertility control and freedom concerning personal choices and lifestyles, this also implies a sexual asymmetry. This sexual asymmetry is supported by the appreciation of traditional gender roles between men and women in Egyptian society. Egyptian working women have to deal with more severe and unequal role expectations and social structures when compared with the West. Because these structures are much more institutionalized in society, it makes the confrontation of their multiple role performance and relating role conflicts more severe. Women respond by trying to improve the quality of their overall role performance. Perhaps this is also the reason why all women, regardless of their personal perceptions all developed the same type of role performance. They developed a multitasking lifestyle to deal with all their competing role demands. Their efforts of trying to meet all their role responsibilities and demands result in different levels of strain. Strain-based conflicts (literature review, p. 11) are part of the daily experiences of the women in this study. The total volume of activities of each role seems to create a certain amount of pressure. In some cases resulting in role overload, but the majority of women responds by trying to push themselves to meet all role expectations. This attempt to push oneself to the uttermost also indicates that, the women in this study deal with a fairly high degree of strain.

When we return to the preference theory of Hakim (literature review, p. 13) and we compare this to the findings of this study. It becomes clear that the women in this study can not be classified in one of the three lifestyle preferences. Instead the women in this study do

have features of two conflicting types of lifestyle. Their commitment and appreciation of their family roles qualifies them as home-centred women. But their commitment to their work, their well-paid jobs in high positions, qualifies them as work-centred women. These conflicting features intensify this idea that, the working women in this study do have a lot of pressures and role responsibilities to deal with. This begs the question whether employment empowers women or enhances their marginalization. Ghorayshi (1996) (literature review, p. 17) argues that Iranian working women were more vulnerable workers because of the combination of their paid employment with their traditional roles in the family. The fact that the women in this study could be included in two conflicting lifestyle preferences of Hakim (2005) intensifies the idea that the working women in this study do have a lot to deal with, in their multiple role combination. It also unveils the specific and distinctive situation of the Egyptian working women in this study.

### **7.1.2. Influence of Gender Role Ideologies**

As mentioned before, ideologies refer to the reasons behind the expectations that someone can have about the performance of different roles. Ideologies are the stories about proper role performance and the justifications of role expectations and role performance (theoretical approach, p. 29). Ideologies do influence the way women priorities between their roles. These ideologies moderate and form the relations between multiple roles (Barnett and Hyde, 2001, literature review p. 12). The ideological justification of roles is organised differently in Egypt as in Western societies. In the West roles are justified with the ideology of equality between men and women and with the ideology of the self that functions as a mean to justify one's own behaviour, contrary to Arab societies where role performance is justified by role ideologies (literature review, p. 14). Instead of relying on the self, the women in this study rely more on their sex-related roles, on religious expectations and the social context. The reference system in relation to the performance of roles is organised differently for the Egyptian women in this study when compared to the West. Despite these differences in dealing with multiple roles, in the West as well as in the Arab world, there all still features of inequalities between men and women and in both societies women are confronted and forced to deal with them.

Examples of these justifications of women referring to role ideologies are for instance; the way women perceive their roles within the ideology of the Islamic marriage model. Women perceive their roles and those of their partners differently within this Islamic marriage model, and outside this ideological model. Another example of the influence of role ideology is the involvement of women in patriarchal social structures. Women developed female specific behaviour to involve in decisions. The relational role is also influenced by role ideology. This role is described in terms of how a woman should be for her husband, but in practise this role is prioritised as the least important. This unveils the influence of gender role ideologies on one hand and the actual reality of this role on the other hand. This also shows that role ideologies are in some cases only a limited reflection of the practise of reality. The identified type of reactive role performance can be seen as a practical solution to cope with all role demands within these particular role ideologies.

### **7.1.3. A Comparison with the Netherlands during the 50's**

The situation of the working women in this study can be compared, to the situation of working women in the Netherlands during the 50's (literature review p. 18). During that period, there was almost complete consensus about a woman's duty to care for her children (Moree, 1992). This belief is reflected among the women in this study. The maternal role is viewed as one of the most important family-related roles. The women in this study, can be identified as enamoured mothers (Shuster, 1993, p.10). These are mothers with a belief of



primary supremacy of mothers as primary caregivers. Being sensitive and caring are central elements of this role. On the other hand the women in this study can also be identified as managing mothers (Shuster, 1993) (literature review p. 11) cause they schedule this maternal role of being caring and sensitive around their work. Women work without neglecting their children: work may not influence their attention and availability for their children. When these women are at home with their children, they switch in their maternal role wanting to provide as much attention for their children as possible.

#### **7.1.4 Nuances**

Here are also some nuances to be added. First of all the overall experience of multiple role combination is not viewed as a negative experience, all women explain that, they value their working role and they cannot imagine themselves not working. They habituated themselves to this preoccupied hectic lifestyle, in which their working role is experienced as a valuable and positive contribution. Women say they develop this sense of self and self agency. This is in line with the findings about the beneficial aspects of multiple role performance from Barnett and Hyde (literature review, p. 11).

The following nuance that should be mentioned, are the specific characteristics of the socio-economic position of this research group. The women in this study are fortunate within Egyptian society. They do have the means and money to combine their work with their responsibilities in their family life. For instance the women in this study are all able to effort paid assistance, like drivers, maids, servants etc. This enables them to spend more time with their children and family. They were able to follow the best educational trajectories, to qualify themselves for well-paid and prestigious jobs; they possess the appropriate socio-cultural capital to access the most fortunate social networks, social clubs and people.

Another important feature of this group of women is the supportive attitude of their partners. Most women describe their partners as supportive and understanding towards their multiple role performance. All these features of their socio-economic position contribute to the fact that these women are able to manage their multiple roles, while having good jobs.

Finally, the last nuance that should be made is that the commitment and appreciation of ideological primary role expectations, and the primary role performance of women, can be regarded as a universal phenomenon. The combination of work and family is a major issue for all working mothers. Yang (1998: 15) “the increased participation of women in paid employment while maintaining their traditional roles is a global phenomenon.” The role of women sharing in the family income co-exists with their primary status as mothers and (house) wives, as well as in the West as in the Arab world. According to the international study of Yang (1998:16) “one of the major differences between male and female employees is that for most women the working day doesn’t end at 5.00 P.M. working women have to cope with simultaneous demands from their work and family domains.” (Yang, 1998:15) “There is little evidence that men are expanding their roles to encompass the domestic and child-care responsibilities traditionally undertaken by women. This is true even in Denmark where fathers have the potential to take paternity and parental leave, but rarely do. “Women are therefore left to occupy two roles, which to some extent are incompatible (Newel, 1996: 36).”

## **7.2. Overall Conclusion**

The combination of multiple roles of the women in this study refers to a careful process of balancing between existing role expectations and social structures. Women are balancing between their roles, to have it all: their work and family. This balancing can be explained by the relational nature of Egyptian society and relational orientation of the self.

### **7.2.1. Relational Nature of Egyptian Society: A Puzzling Combination**

Given the relational structure and the experience of the self, the majority of women in this study developed ways to establish some moderate changes in line with existing Egyptian social structures and role expectations. Only a privileged and fortunate minority of the women is able to remove themselves from these role expectations and social structures, by their exclusive 'non-conform the general norms' family situation. In societies where so much value is placed on the relational nature of social life; people experience their sense of self – or individuality- also much more in relation to others.

The multiple role combination of the Egyptian working women in this study refers to a process of balancing between existing role expectations, and social structures. Modest shifts and variations concerning various role aspects (with regard to their personal perceptions and daily experiences) seem to refer to a puzzling form of role combining, much more in line and harmony with their social environment. This can be compared with a complex game of chess. In general most women are also very aware of the social context they are living in: the role expectations and social structures around them. They developed this strategy according to their situation and context. They decide to deny certain role aspects while supporting and maintaining others: a puzzling way of combining their multiple roles. This puzzling combination refers to this strategy of women, in which they (depending on the situation and context) deny or support certain 'pieces' of their roles. This support and denial is also used to combine their working role and their family-related roles. It enables women to reconcile traditional and professional roles. This conclusion corresponds with the study of Sherif (1993) about higher educated Egyptian working women. She describes (literature review, p. 20) a reality of upper-middle class women, negotiating and balancing between competing role ideologies. Women are using existing role ideologies and role expectations; this provides them with a certain amount of freedom. They rely on their roles and religion to push for moderate changes. Ideological role expectations and social structures serve as a mean to justify one's role performance and perceptions.

### **7.3. Further Research Recommendations**

The puzzling multiple role combination of Egyptian working women, consists of slight variations and nuances with regard to certain role aspects, within this particular ideological framework. These little shifts are only visible when a detailed approach is used. This means that researchers have to develop a sensitive approach to study this particular subject, to unveil these modest and relational orientated strategies of women. The theoretical approach I developed was too rough. The slight shifts and modest variations with regard to the role performance of working women could not be captured in this approach.

I would like to recommend an eye for details and slight variations is extremely important for further research in this area, to justify the experiences and the environment of Egyptian women.

Another recommendation I would like to make is that it will be probably interesting to gather more insights in different experiences and perceptions between working women from different classes. This would create a more divers and real impression of the experiences of reconciling work and family in Egyptian society.

I also would like to recommend focusing on a much larger sample of women; to get much more consistent en valuable information.

### **7.4. Theoretical Implications**

Because of the failed approach of the theoretical approach, the assumed relation between the perceptions and daily experiences could not be found. This finding implicates a

big difference between the personal perceptions and the actual experiences of women. This makes it from theoretical point of view interesting to remind that, a research focussed at one of the two components would produce very different findings. As revealed in this research, the question can be formulated into what extent reality can be observed if a research is only focussed on role perceptions or practical experiences of women? This study implicates that for a real understanding of multiple role combining, different factors have to be taken in account to develop a proper research approach. A one dimensional research could produce very constraint research material. This urges the need to develop more theoretical unity on the theoretical field or role conflict. Because of the variety of used definition in the field of role theory Biddle (1986) argues that the most consistent definition of roles can be summarised as follows: roles can be considered as “characteristic behaviour patterns. They can be explained by presuming that persons are members of social positions and hold expectations for their own behaviours and those of other persons” (Biddle, 1986: 67). This basic vision on role theory refers to behaviour, expectations and social position with regard to roles. This consistent definition of roles could serve as a direction in which more unity of theoretical approach on this field could be accomplished.

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