CONSTRUCTING A PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY:
FACTORS SUPPORTING CHOICE AND EMPOWERMENT
AMONG BEDOIN WOMEN WHO HAVE ACHIEVED SUCCESSFUL
PROFESSIONAL LIVES

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Only a small number of Bedouin women in Kuwait have succeeded in achieving independence professionally and personally in a society with strong normative cultural prescriptions and proscriptions about women making independent decisions about their lives and about women entering occupations traditionally reserved for males. These women appear to be successful professionals, with a university (i.e., coeducational) education and financial independence. At the same time, they seem to have retained the respect of their families and tribes. How did these women succeed in defying the highly circumscribed definition of women's "place" in this very patriarchal Bedouin society? What personal, familial, biographical, or contextual factors contributed to their success? Are there common themes woven through the lives of these women?

The purpose of this research is to identify those factors that contribute to a Bedouin woman's success in moving beyond patriarchal restrictions that prevent most other Bedouin women from realizing personal, educational, and professional aspirations, specifically aspirations to what their society considers “male professions.” We want to find out how this small group of successful women account for the fact that they have not lost the respect of their communities, despite going against prohibitions about appropriate roles and behavior for women, prohibitions that for many women have resulted in strong
community sanctions. And we want to discover if there are any commonalities and themes among these women that might empower other young Bedouin women who seek to go beyond these proscriptions. Results are expected to contribute to Social Work literature on empowerment, especially on the empowerment of women.
Dedicated to my whole family
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FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Social Work
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In Kuwait, as in most other Arab countries, there are many Bedus (known as “Bedouins” in English). The Bedus are a large group of camel herding pastoralists of Arab descent in the Arabian peninsula, who have historically lived a desert existence. Over the last century, they have slowly abandoned their nomadic life in the desert and migrated to the cities, especially following the oil boom. This group comprises a sizeable minority of the population in Kuwait. By and large, Kuwaiti Bedouins, who live primarily in the desert but also now in many cities in Kuwait, continue to adhere to the norms, values, beliefs, and traditions that comprise Bedouin culture. Bedouin society is strongly patriarchal in structure and practice. That is to say, Bedouin culture is a male culture where men have the power over their women and children. In the Bedouin family, the relationship between men and women is highly circumscribed: men are expected to protect the women and women are expected to nurture and support all other family members and to behave in a way that is considered modest and chaste. The women's behavior in this context directly reflects on the family's reputation.

Although in Kuwait "women enjoy many of the same social and civil rights guaranteed to men" (Tetrault & Al-Mughni, 2000, p. 143), most Bedouin women in Kuwait have little freedom in their lives. Bedouin women have to follow Bedouin men. Bedouin women are expected to be dependent on male relatives for support and for
making major decisions. For example, if a Bedouin woman wanted to drive a car, her father has to agree first; and if the father disagrees, she cannot drive the car. If a Bedouin woman had an interaction or social exchange with a man who is not her relative, such an act would be defined as bringing shame to her family and tribe. Bedouins are afraid that when their daughter interacts with male non-relatives, this may lead to her having sexual relationships outside of marriage, which is not allowed in Bedouin culture. Indeed, this would be a serious infraction of cultural rules, because: "A woman who loses her virginity not only brings shame on her own family, but also loses her chance of finding a suitable husband" (Al-Mughni, 1993, p. 14). Similarly, Bedouin women are not allowed to challenge Bedouin values and traditions. If a Bedouin woman engages in an activity that is not allowed in her culture, she is labeled a “bad woman.” Bedouin women may be punished for doing something contrary to their tradition and culture. Thus, in order to safeguard against such possibilities, "parents are opposed to their daughter entering predominately male-controlled occupations" (Al-Dhafiri, 1987, p.19), where she would have contact with males who are not her relatives.

Given this cultural context, most Bedouin women do not attend the university (which is co-educational) or aspire to professions like law, engineering, or medicine, which would place the women in a position to interact with males who are not part of their family. Bedouin beliefs and traditions play a big role in people’s lives, and the cultural and traditional restrictions placed on women stop many Bedouin women from aspiring to and achieving their goals. The women know that if they pursue a course of action that is not allowed in Bedouin society, they will be treated badly by their society.
There are two kinds of responses to these cultural parameters and prohibitions: (a) some people, including some Bedouin women (especially the women who belong to an older generation), strongly support the traditions and values that control women's lives. They argue that the prophet Mohammed said that women were intellectually and spiritually less well developed. Therefore, in their opinion, women are unable to take care of themselves and they are unable to make major decisions on their own. (b) Others disagree with the above interpretation of what the Prophet Mohammed may have meant. This second group argues that what the Prophet Mohammed meant was that women are more likely to use their feelings when they make their decisions, not that they cannot make good decisions. The latter group believes that Bedouin women should have the right to control their own lives, while, at the same time, retaining society's respect. This second group is very much in the minority.

Despite the strong normative cultural prescriptions about women making independent decisions about their lives and about women entering traditionally male occupations, a small number of Bedouin women have succeeded in achieving independence professionally and personally. These women appear to be successful professionals, with a university education and financial independence. At the same time, they seem to have retained the respect of their families and tribes. How did these women succeed in defying the highly circumscribed definition of women's "place" in this highly patriarchal Bedouin society? What personal, familial, biographical, or contextual factors contributed to their success? Are there common themes woven through the lives of these women that might account for their perceived success?
1.1 Goals of the Research

The goal of this research is to identify those factors, as identified by successful women themselves, that contribute to a Bedouin woman's success in moving beyond patriarchal restrictions that prevent most Bedouin women from realizing personal, educational, and professional aspirations, specifically aspirations to what their society considers “male professions.” This research will explore how this small group of successful women account for the fact that they have not lost the respect of their communities, despite going against prohibitions about appropriate roles and behavior for women, prohibitions that for many women have resulted in strong community sanctions. And we want to discover if there are any commonalities and themes among these women that might empower other young Bedouin women who seek to go beyond these proscriptions.

1.2 Historical and Cultural Overview

Kuwait is a small modernizing country. Kuwaiti society is made up of a combination of different communities. According to Richard Kurtz (1985), a number of historical factors have created diversity in the Kuwaiti population. Kuwaiti families come from several different ethnic backgrounds, and the present Kuwaiti population is comprised of people with Bedouin, Iraqi, Saudi Arab, and Iranian origins. Kuwaiti people are distinguished either by their religious preference, such as Shi'a and Sunna (Moslem sects), or by their life style, their beliefs, and even their dialects. Longva (1993) categorized this diversity into two broad groups before the discovery of oil: sea/desert culture and settled/nomadic culture. Those who depend on the sea for their livelihood live in the city, while Bedouins live in the desert and rely on herding sheep and camels. Until
the 1950s, Kuwaiti society treated women in both the sea (city) culture and desert (Bedouin) culture in the same way. According to Longva, until the 1950s:

Kuwaiti women lived under constraining physical and social conditions often associated with orthodox Muslim female conditions of the past: secluded, veiled, and overwhelmingly illiterate. They were married at puberty to a male relative, and their social horizon was limited to the immediate neighborhood of their homes. (Longva, 1993, p. 408)

In 1946, oil began being exported from Kuwait, causing a series of changes in economic, social, and political life in Kuwait (Tetreault & Al-Mughni, 1995). These changes began in the 1960s when Abdalah Al-Salm Al-Sabah came to power as the prince of Kuwait.

About the changes that occurred following the discovery of oil, one writer noted:

The new dynamics of oil wealth has been undermining traditional forms of sociocultural life. Structures and organizational forms like the tribe, the clan, the lineage, and the extended family are no longer major principles in the ordering of social and economic life, although these traditional forms are still operative as ideologies in certain areas. (Khalaf, 1992, p. 59)

As oil income flowed into Kuwait, the government devised a series of five-year development plans in order to protect Kuwaiti political stability against the increased number of foreign workers in Kuwait. The first five-year development plan, which extended from 1967 until 1972, allowed women to enter the labor market. At first, gains for women were small. For example, in 1970, two percent of the work force was female. By 1985, that number had increased to 14 percent. Women made gains in education, as well: for example, by the end of the 1960s the percentage of girls in school was about 43 percent, and about 35 percent of women, at that time, were literate (Longva, 1993).

Longva adds that in 1983, the percentage of women in upper-income level jobs (five percent) was considerably lower than the percentage of women working in low paying jobs (24.5 percent). By the mid-to-late 1980s, women started to make changes by moving
into careers from which they previously had been excluded. The social life of these women changed, and, as a group, women began to realize the benefits of those changes.

By 1989, the number of Kuwaiti women in the university was more than double that of men, and Kuwaiti women became doctors, engineers, deans of Kuwait University, and lawyers. In the private, business sector, women managed companies, invested money, and were on the boards of directors of corporations. Kuwaiti women could be seen in public driving their own cars, and not walking behind men. In fact, according to Longva, there were "no secular jobs that were out of their reach" except for ambassador or cabinet positions (Longva, 1993). According to Tetreault and Al-Mughni, Kuwaiti women were "entitled to participate as voters and as candidates in the administrations of local cooperative stores, "although they still cannot vote for parliament members" (1995, p. 143), which continues to be true today, in the year 2002.

However, the overwhelming majority of these successful women were "city dwellers." Unfortunately, the progress made by Kuwaiti women generally did not extend to most Bedouin women. Bedouin women are still not allowed to do what city women do, because of the Bedouin tradition and beliefs. Although women from the city culture are able to receive higher education, achieve high positions, drive their own cars, and even adopt the Western-style dress, Bedouin women's choices in such matters are still restricted. Bedouin women still have to wear the abaya, a black garment covering the woman's body from head to toe. In Bedouin society, men still have the power and women still depend on the man when they are not allowed to work, and they depend on the government if they never marry, get divorced, or are widowed. Women are not treated as individuals in their own right. They are treated as family members who have rights and
duties defined only in relation to other family members. The men’s duty is to protect and support women (Tetrault & Al-Mughni, 2000). Most Bedouin women cannot choose their husbands on their own, cannot work in certain jobs like lawyer, doctor, or professor, because they would have to deal with men in those jobs. Some Bedouin women work for the Ministry of Education, because in Kuwait, schools for boys and girls are separate. Those Bedouin women who teach in girls' schools have, by and large, received their education at small colleges for women.

Kulwicki (2000) observes that in Islamic society, the traditional Arab family is the foundation because it provides security and a strong and dependable social, economic and emotional support to the individual. In return, the individual is obligated to respect and conform to the norms of his or her family and contribute both emotionally and financially to the needs of the family. This often requires the individual to sacrifice his/her own needs to the needs of the family.

The same is true of Bedouin culture: the tribe, i.e., the extended family, is very important to all Bedouins. The tribe gives those who belong to it honor and strength, and to Bedouins it is critical not to lose their honor. It is especially honorable for a family to have a "good" daughter who obeys all of her father's orders and does what the family expects her to do. For example, if the daughter runs away and marries a man who is not approved by her family, it is regarded as a blow to the family's honor. This may seem to be such a dishonor that there are instances in which the father and all of the male members may feel that they are unable to face the men of other tribes unless they kill the daughter who brought them shame. "In Kuwait, adultery and other instances of sexual intercourse outside marriage are listed in the penal code as crimes against public decency,
leading to a prison sentence of up to five years" (Al-Mughni, 1993, p. 14).

Kulwicki (2000) explains the strong beliefs about honor (sharaf) and shame (ayb) in Arab society. She writes that premarital sex for girls is considered a sin and will hurt the family's honor. Therefore, girls are expected to remain virgins before marriage. For this reason, girls' behavior is much more controlled than the boys'. "If shame is brought upon a family as a consequence of a girl's sexual behavior outside marriage, it may result in severe punishment and in some cases, in death by the members of the patriline, that is, the brother or father" (Kulwicki, 2000, p. 93). It is also shameful if a daughter is free to drive a car or talk to men who are not part of her family. For this reason, many Bedouin women are not allowed by their families to attend the university, since it is coeducational. Furthermore, they are allowed only very limited professional aspirations, because many professional positions (particularly high status positions) expose women to male co-workers. When a Bedouin girl or woman is in contact with men who are not her relatives, it can bring shame to her family. Although Islam guarantees women rights, such as a right to life, to education, to conduct business, to inherit, to maintain property and custody of children, and to keep their names, social customs continue to dominate, rendering these rights unavailable. For example social customs include arranged marriages, dowry, and the abuse of the privilege of divorce (Julia & Ridha, 2001). For all of these reasons, it is remarkable that the women we want to interview are accomplished professional Bedouin women.
1.3 Significance of the Study

In Bedouin society, family honor is very important. When a Bedouin girl or woman is in contact with men who are not her relatives, this can bring shame to her family. The reason that most Bedouin women do not fight their culture's restrictions is because they do not want to lose the respect of their families and society, and they have learned that they must not dishonor their families (as “dishonor” is defined in their culture). For this reason, most Bedouin women do not attend the university, since it is coeducational, and they are unable to achieve high professional positions because those environments would expose them to work and talk with male co-workers.

There are, however, a small group of Bedouin women (perhaps as many as twelve or thirteen) who, despite cultural prescriptions and proscriptions regarding "women's place," have successful professional lives and freedom in personal decision making. The women we want to study still have the respect of their Bedouin society in Kuwait, even though they have crossed the traditional patriarchal boundaries to achieve success in traditional male positions. In other words, they still are able to maintain contact with, and have good standing in, their families. Furthermore, all of the tribe members invite them into their homes as a guest and go to them for professional help, trusting them more than they would trust professionals from outside the Bedouin culture. It is unusual and surprising for Bedouin women to have successfully entered the (co-educational) workforce while simultaneously retaining their respectable position in their culture. Yet, these small numbers of women appear to have done so.

This research will attempt to identify the individual, biographical or contextual factors that may contribute to a Bedouin woman's ability to break patriarchal restrictions
in order to get an education and to have a profession, while, at the same time, surviving within her tradition. This research is significant because if we can identify any factors these women may have in common, then other Bedouin women in Kuwait may be able to use insights from the research to find ways to change their own lives. The United Nations Development Program defines human development as "the process of enlarging people's choices. The most critical ones [choices] are to lead a long and healthy life, to be educated, including what Adam Smith called the ability to mix with others without being "ashamed to appear in public" (UNDP, 1997, p. 15). Women make up half of society; so it is clear that society itself stands to benefit if women are able to exercise a measure of choice on important aspects of their lives.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This is a study of empowerment among professional Kuwaiti Bedouin women who have been successful at asserting control over their lives, especially their professional lives. In my research, I was looking for factors, experiences, and situations that successful professional Kuwaiti Bedouin women had in common that could explain how they were empowered, given the context of the patriarchal Bedouin society. In the Western Social Work tradition, there is a small but well-established body of literature on empowerment. In fact, “empowerment” is a popular word in the Social Work literature. However, the word itself is defined in different ways.

(1) A great deal of the literature stresses empowerment as a strategy that social workers may use to increase the power or sense of power of others, who typically are marginalized or disenfranchised clients. For example, in the Social Work Dictionary, “empowerment” is defined as "the process of helping individuals, families, groups, and communities increase their personal, interpersonal, socioeconomic, and political strength and develop influence toward improving their circumstances" (Barker, 1999, p. 153). Gutierrez (1990) defines “empowerment” as a process that helps individuals to take action to improve their life situations.

(2) Other literature focuses less on what the social worker does for others and more on the impact that gaining or having a sense of power has for individuals. In this
literature, "empowerment" is defined as a companion of a personal feeling of control with the individual ability to influence others (Almeleh, Soifer, Gottlieb, & Gutierrez, 1993, p. 35). For example, Staples (1990) describes the concept of empowerment as "ongoing capacity of individuals or groups to act on their own behalf to achieve a greater measure of control over their lives and destinies" (p. 30). Browne (1995) indicates that empowerment is "the possession of control, authority, or influence over others" (p. 359). Rappaport (1987) understands empowerment as "a process, a mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their affairs" (p. 122).

Rubenstein and Lawler (1990) take a slightly different angle to the issue of empowerment. Using "self-in-relation" theory to talk about women's empowerment, they discuss empowerment as the power to "advance their own development" and "the power to define and determine themselves, both psychologically and socially, and to act in ways that are congruent with this definition" (p. 36).

(3) Most often, scholars and practitioners simply accept without question the differences in the way the term is understood (whether as outside intervention to help others become empowered or as the state of being empowered to control one's life). However, some writers such as Stevens (1998) take issue with the notion that one person can empower another. Practitioners "do not empower the clients, clients empower themselves" (Stevens, 1998, p. 292). Or, as Rappaport (1987) suggests, the very notion of "giving someone" power implies that the receiver is dependent on the giver, hence, paradoxically, less powerful. Thus the idea of client empowerment is called into question, if, by "empowerment," we mean "giving power" to someone else.
Whatever the emphasis on the definition of the term, authors agree that it is a positive element in an individual's life when individuals have a sense that they can be effective on their own behalf or in promoting their own legitimate goals and objectives.

2.1 Women's Empowerment

Within the Social Work literature on empowerment is a smaller literature on the application of empowerment principles on women, particularly women who belong to marginalized or at-risk groups. These include the following: battered women (Busch & Valentine, 2000), black teenage girls (Stevens, 1998), working, unionized women (Almeleh et al., 1993), Hispanic women (Mayo & Resnick, 1996), women of color (Gutierrez, 1990), elderly women (Browne, 1995), Native American women (Morgan, 2001), Bedouin women in Rahat Israel (Al-Krenawi, 1996), and others.

Most of the literature on women's empowerment is treated under my category number one above. That is to say, the emphasis is on intervention strategies with the goal of empowering these women. Thus, Busch and Valentine (2000) stress the need for the worker gaining a better understanding of the woman who is battered and working collaboratively to foster empowerment. These authors emphasize four strategies: (a) enabling (helping people recognize their strength), (b) linking (bringing people with similar histories together), (c) catalyzing (bringing people into contact with more resources), and (d) priming (intervening and brokering in the system to alter unjust practices and to educate other professionals). Both Stevens (1998, pp. 151-52) and Gutierrez (1990, p. 149) define strategies of working collaboratively with clients, accepting the client’s definition of the situation, building on strengths, and engaging the women in a discussion that analyzes power relations in their lives. Almeleh et al. (1993)
emphasize that organizing groups of women around common interests and needs can lead to a sense of empowerment and powerful outcomes. Mayo and Resnick (1996) emphasize that Hispanic women, who come to the USA with a "belief in male superiority (p. 257), can be assisted with interventions at both the micro and macro levels. Browne (1995, p. 362) suggests the importance of using strategies that include "connection and relatedness, community and the collective good...." Al-Krenawi (1996), discussing a group of Bedouin widows in Israel, stresses the importance of helping the widows build new social networks and social support.

It is interesting that so much emphasis in the Social Work literature is given to interventions to empower groups of women, but little of this literature bases its recommendations on actual research. In particular, despite calls to empower women through collaboration, there has been little effort to systematically ask women who are empowered how they account for their own empowerment. There is one exception that the researcher found in a search of the literature: Morgan (2001), writing about Native American women who become successful in avoiding "paths of self-destruction," defines seven themes that run through the lives of these women: (a) importance of strong family, (b) positive role models, (c) spirituality, (d) Indian identity, (e) education, (f) commitment to the Indian community, and (g) guidance to young Native American women. The Morgan article is particularly relevant to the present study, because, like Morgan's research with Native American women, the research reported here sought to identify themes associated with empowerment and success among another group of women, Bedouin Kuwaiti women. Like the research reported here, Morgan suggests that
the themes she has identified in the responses of successful Native American women can inform research-based interventions for others.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methods, generally, and case studies specifically are often regarded as useful when the goal is to explore phenomena about what little is known or when what is known appears ambiguous (Stake, 1978; Kondrat et al., 2002). The research used qualitative methods to answer our research questions because there are no known, published studies on the Bedouin women who achieved control over their lives. The research explored the personal, biographical, and contextual factors that have contributed to the success some Bedouin women have had in achieving empowerment and control in their lives. There are only a few Bedouin women in Kuwait who met the criteria of this study. These women are easily identified within the closed society of Bedouin life.

3.1 Selection Criteria

Interviewees were identified reputationally by using "tribal knowledgeables" as informants from several Bedouin tribes. Informants were asked to use the following criteria in identifying potential interviewees:

- Bedouin women who live in Kuwait.
- Twenty-four years of age and over.
- They all have the freedom to attended Kuwait University (Note: Kuwait University is the only university and the only co-educational institution of higher learning in the country)
• They have a bachelor’s or a higher degree.

• They also chose their careers such as to be doctors, lawyers, assistant professors, professors, etc. (Note: Their careers are considered high status by Bedouin society in Kuwait, and are also considered to be male occupations.)

• They had significant input with regard to choosing their husbands.

To the extent that it is possible to be certain of reputational information, the twelve people identified are the total population of women in the country of Kuwait who match the above criteria. Hence, the twelve people identified using this method are both the population and the sample. As noted, of these twelve, ten agreed to be interviewed.

3.2 Data Gathering

This study used in-depth interviewing and employed both open-ended questions and closed-ended questions. The closed questions included primarily demographic information and family background. The open-ended questions provided the basis for a semi-structured interview. Questions asked the women for a narrative of their lives (their "stories"), with a focus on important (remembered) events, relationships, struggles, successes, support, challenges, and so forth through their life history from childhood to the present day. The questions in the interview asked women for their perspective on their lives and on how they account for their success.

The researcher, a second year masters' student in Social Work at The Ohio State University, visited Kuwait from early December 2001 through mid-January 2002 to interview the Bedouin women who met the criteria of this study. The master's student is from the culture involved and speaks fluent Arabic and English. The interviewees were identified reputationally by using "tribal knowledgeable" from the several Bedouin
tribes. (Note: The term "tribal knowledgeable" is an approximate English translation for a Bedouin tribal role that probably has no direct equivalent in English translation.) Using these "tribal knowledgeables," the researcher was able to identify and locate twelve women who fit the criteria for participating in this study. The student called each participant by phone to invite her to participate in the study. A copy of the script used for the solicitation phone call is included in the appendix of this paper. Ten out of 12 of the Bedouin women who met the criteria of this study agreed to participate, while two declined to participate in this study. All the meetings were at the interviewee's offices or place of employment to insure privacy, make them feel comfortable, and feel secure and free to talk because their family would not be around. The purpose and procedures for the research were explained to each interviewee; interviewees were informed of their right to refuse to answer any question, to turn the tape off at any point, and their right to stop the interview at any point.

The researcher asked each interviewee to sign the "Consent to Participate" form before starting the interviews. The researcher explained the goal and the purpose of the study and also informed the interviewees about their rights--including voluntariness of the interview itself and right to refuse to answer any question or to request that the tape recorder be turned off during any portion of the interview. The interviewee was also informed of steps taken to assure confidentiality of information. The researcher held a second interview with each interviewee to ask interviewees to confirm or disconfirm and correct the accuracy of the researcher's observations and understanding from the first interview; any discrepancies were discussed and amended with the interviewees.
Interviews were conducted in Arabic and were audio taped with permission of the interviewees. Taped interviews were later transcribed. The Arabic transcription was also translated into an English version.

### 3.3 Assuring Trustworthiness of Findings

In standard quantitative research, researchers adopt certain procedures to assure that the findings will be objective, valid, and reliable. These procedures assist the reader to trust that the findings are as they are claimed to be. Qualitative research also requires attention to procedures that allow the reader to trust the data and findings. Miles and Huberman (1994) talk about these procedures as follows: (a) confirmability (equivalent to objectivity in quantitative research); (b) dependability (reliability); (c) credibility (internal validity); and transferability (external validity). I will define each of these concepts, in turn, and then discuss how standards for trustworthiness were treated in this research.

**Confirmability**

According to Miles and Huberman (1994) the concept of confirmability has to do with the assurance that the findings are reasonably free from researcher bias. They assert that the findings should depend more on the subjects of the research and less on the views of the researcher (p. 278). This study used the following strategies to assure "confirmability" of findings.

- First of all, prior to analyzing the data, the researcher reported her "hunches" and expectations for findings in writing and gave the written document to another party to hold until the end of the research. (Note: I will discuss this later in more depth)
• Second, the researcher tried to make as explicit as possible, the procedures used and the questions asked in conducting the research. Based on this information, it would not be difficult for anyone wishing to do so, to duplicate the study.

• All of the data has been retained and could be used for reanalysis by anyone wishing to re-analyze the data (English and Arabic versions).

*Dependability*

The standard "dependability" is concerned with the question of whether the process is consistent and stable across time or at the same time across observations. It is similar to the concept of reliability in quantitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this study, there are multiple ways that the "dependability" was structured into the research protocol.

• In each case, the researcher gave the same written and verbal explanations of the purpose, procedure, and expectations for the data gathering to all of the women she interviewed.

• The exact same questions were used for the semi-structured interviews with each interviewee. Although, of course, each interviewee was free to respond to the questions as she wished, each person started from the same questions in the same interview schedule.

• Data were collected from women who had in common that they were Bedouin, Kuwaiti, and professional women. All had graduated from Kuwait University, a co-educational institution. These were some of the criteria for interviewee selection. At the same time, the ten interviewees taken as a group belonged to six different Bedouin tribes; the women belonged to different professions. They had
different family of origin configurations. Four were married and six were not. They ranged in age from their mid-twenties to their early forties. In other words, there was enough variation among the interviewees to have some assurance that findings found to hold across interviewees would not be idiosyncratic.

- Data were analyzed by two coders, operating independently. One coder, a native Arabic speaker, coded the Arabic version of the transcripts; the second coder coded the English version of the transcripts. To the extent that language is imbedded in culture, this approach had individuals from two different cultures independently examining the transcripts for themes. It is assumed that findings (in the form of themes) identified by two coders from two different cultures working in two different languages could be considered dependable.

Credibility

Here, the issue is whether the findings are credible to the people who have been part of the study. Another word used for this concept is "authenticity." For instance, do the people who took part in the study agree that the findings "make sense"? (Miles & Huberman, 1994). One strategy to assure credibility of findings is to conduct a "member check" with the original interviewees. Member checking refers to a strategy through which interviewers ask interviewees whether the observations or findings are accurate from the interviewee's point of view. It is unfortunate that because of the time line and the fact that the researcher/interviewer had only a limited few weeks in the country to collect data, interviewees were not able to respond to the final analysis. However, the researcher was able to hold a second interview with each interviewee prior to her
departure from the country to ask interviewees to confirm or disconfirm and correct the accuracy of the researcher's observations and understanding from the first interview.

Transferability

Transferability has to do with whether these findings have any larger importance beyond the subjects of the research. If so, how far beyond? (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This issue is similar to external validity in quantitative research. In our study, the population and the sample were the same, for all practical purposes. So the issue of applying findings from a smaller sample to a larger population, of which the sample is representative, is not a concern in this study. However, there are other groups of Bedouin women in the Arab world, other Bedouin tribes in other societies. The researcher does not claim that the findings apply to all Bedouin women, but themes discovered in this study could become a starting point for further inquiry with other Bedouin groups.

3.4 Analyzing the Data

Raw data consisted of transcriptions of audio taped interviews with the ten women. The interviews were conducted in Arabic and later transcribed. The Arabic transcription was also translated into an English version.

Data were analyzed by two coders, operating independently. One coder, a native Arabic speaker, coded the Arabic version of the transcripts; the second coder, a native English speaker, coded the English version of the transcripts. When the initial codings were completed, the two coders held a marathon meeting to discuss findings. Only those overall themes that both coders could agree upon were included among the findings. In addition, only if both coders agreed that a particular theme was present in the
transcription of an individual interviewee was that theme accepted as relevant to that interview.

Discrete themes derived from each interviewee’s answer to each of the questions in the semi-structured interview were grouped and re-grouped into larger categories. These larger categories were further sifted and re-grouped in a discussion between the two coders. The re-alignment of elements into discrete categories continued until both coders were satisfied that the emergent themes represented their understanding of the interviewees’ responses as contained in the transcripts of interviews. Only themes that both coders could agree upon were considered. Main themes were grouped into two broad stages of the lifecycle, and sub-grouped according to whether the theme represented an environmental influence or a personal attribute identified by the interviewee. Because of the many discrete pieces of biographical, attitudinal or opinion data collected, only those themes that were found present in the majority of the interviewees (six or more of ten) were accepted.

3.5 Researcher Self-Reflection

Because I, as researcher, was conducting research with individuals who were from the same country, society and culture as I was, as well as from the same general social class, the same traditions and the same religious orientation/values, it is inevitable that researcher bias could be a factor in the way I defined and asked questions and also in the way I interpreted the findings. Strategies to minimize this kind of bias had to be considered.

One strategy that I used to minimize researcher bias was to consult with another individual who was not from my culture, religion, or society in designing the interview
protocols and in coding and analyzing the data. This person was familiar with qualitative research. I brought to the study my intimate knowledge of the culture; the consultant brought more objective "distance" from the culture.

Another strategy frequently suggested by qualitative research experts is for the researcher to identify ahead of time his or her expectations regarding findings. If there is too much consistency between researcher expectations and the findings, it could be that researcher bias has been a factor in producing the results. Prior to coding the data, I discussed my expectations regarding findings with my thesis advisor, who transcribed my expectations so that we could refer to them at a later point in time, after the data was coded and analyzed. The following expectations were recorded at that time. The expectations were in regard to factors that the successful Bedouin women would report as important to their success or that the data would confirm as common to all the successful Bedouin women.

- I expected that because these women chose unconventional occupations -- specifically occupations that seemed to defy religious prescriptions -- they would not be particularly religious women.

- I expected that the young women would stand out as leaders from the time they were children.

- I expected that the women as they grew up would be determined and persistent, even in the face of opposition.

- I expected them to know their husbands before marriage was arranged and to have choice in the decision
(As we shall see in the discussion of findings, only one of my expectations was supported in the data -- the expectation that the women would be strong, determined, persistent.)
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4.1 Who are the Interviewees?

All of the interviewees are Bedouin Kuwaiti women between the ages 24 and 42. Six out of the ten women are single and have no children. Four are married; two have two children, one has one child, and one has three children. Their husbands are between the ages of 30 and 45. Three of the husbands have a bachelor’s degree and one did not finish high school. Their husbands work as engineer, teacher, and unspecified jobs. Five of the Bedouin Kuwaiti women who are single live with their parents and siblings; one lives with her mother and sister; two of the married women live with their husbands and their husbands’ family; and two of them live in their own separate homes with their husbands and children. All of the ten Bedouin women that I interviewed have at least an undergraduate degree. In addition, five of the women have a master’s degree, two have Ph.D.s, and one is currently working toward her master’s degree. Two of them are lawyers, two are doctors, one is a journalist, four are faculty or researchers at Kuwait University and one is a teacher.

The number of the women’s siblings is between 2 and 10. Two of the women are the oldest child in their families; one is the youngest child in the family; and seven have both older and younger sisters and brothers. In the case of three of these women, their fathers passed away, but their mothers are still alive; and seven of them have both parents
who are still living. Seven of the Bedouin women have parents who are still married and living together. Two of the Bedouin women’s parents were together until their fathers passed away; and one woman’s parents divorced before her father passed away. All of the Bedouin women that I interviewed are Moslem. Although Islam gives the right to men to marry more than one wife, all of the women I interviewed have mothers who are the only wives of their fathers. Their mothers’ level of education is between not educated to a high school diploma. Their fathers’ level of education is between not educated and a bachelor’s degree. Six of the Bedouin women’s fathers are retired, three of them have fathers who are still working, and one of them has a father who is not employed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>24-42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>6 single/ 4 married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational level attained</td>
<td>2 Ph.D. (or equivalent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 MS/MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 BS/BA (one working toward MS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living arrangements</td>
<td>6 live with parents and siblings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 live with husbands and husbands family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 live in nuclear family with husband and children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>BS/BA or higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profession</td>
<td>2 physicians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 university faculty or researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 lawyers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse's Profession</td>
<td>6 no spouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 unspecified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>10 Muslim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother's highest education</td>
<td>1 completed high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 completed 11th grade</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 completed elementary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 not educated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father's highest education</td>
<td>1 BS/BA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 finished 11th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 completed elementary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 not educated or not finish elementary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother's Occupation</td>
<td>10 Housewife/ not work out of the home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father's occupation</td>
<td>6 retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 business or management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 fireman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 unemployed/self-employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent's Marital status</td>
<td>10 mother is father's only wife simultaneously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Muslim law allows up to 4 wives)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 4.1: Interviewee characteristics.
4.2 Themes Revealed in the Interviews

As noted above, discrete themes derived from each interviewee's answer to each of the questions in the semi-structured interview were grouped and re-grouped into larger categories. These larger categories were further sifted and re-grouped in a discussion between the two coders. The re-alignment of elements into discrete categories continued until both coders were satisfied that the emergent themes represented their understanding of the interviewees' responses as contained in the transcripts of interviews. Chart 2 outlines the main themes, grouped into two broad stages of the life-cycle, and sub-grouped according to whether the theme represented an environmental influence or a personal attribute identified by the interviewee. As noted in the methodology section, because of the many discrete pieces of biographical, attitudinal or opinion data collected, only those themes that were found present in the majority of the interviewees (six or more of ten) are represented here.
As a child/adolescent
Environment
(1) Family (mother and/or father) described as supportive, "good hearted," indulgent (8/10)
(2) Strong parental (particularly paternal) support for education (7/10)
(3) Not allowed unsupervised access to world outside the home -- to protect honor (7/10)
(4) Family attached to religious norms -- religion important (8/10)

Personal Attributes
(5) "Good girl"-- i.e., adherence to the norms, prescriptions and proscriptions of Islam and Bedouin society. Also could include "polite" (10/10)
(6) Family saw her as "stubborn" or as a “determined” child (7/10)
(7) Responsible child (almost adult child) -- took care of siblings, served as role model (7/10)
(8) Saw self and believes others saw her as introverted or quiet (6/10)

In adult life
Environment
(1) Source of family pride (9/10)
(2) Has respect of her tribe (9/10)
(3) Attachment to religious values and norms (9/10)
(4) Attributes success to family support/family environment (6/10)
(5) Experiences of mortality (death/serious illness of family member) that influenced her person/choices (8/10)

Personal Attributes
(6) Goal-directed/persistent (10/10)
(7) "Protect myself"--keeping family honor, setting limits, held trust of family about good behavior (10/10)
(8) Success comes because of own ability, effort and/or determination (10/10)

* The numbers after each item refer to the number of interviews (out of a total of ten) whose comments reflected the identified theme.

Chart 4.2: Themes occurring in biographical information from six or more of the ten interviewees.
In the following section, I am going to discuss each of the prevalent themes in turn, offering examples that illustrate each theme, as well as counter-thematic examples, where available.

Childhood/Adolescence

(1) Supportive/Indulgent parents

Nine out of the ten women discussed their relationships with parents (one or both) as one in which the parents were supportive, or particularly kind-hearted, or even indulgent.

Example 1:

One interviewee remarked that if she asked her mother a question to which the mother did not know the answer, her mother would seek out an answer to be able to respond to the child.

Example 2:

Interviewee #2 commented: "When I wanted something and insisted on it, he [father] tried to do it even if his family disapproved. He did it for me even if he was tired or had no time. He said this is my child and I have to give her whatever she wants."

Example 3:

Interviewee #5 recalled: "When he [father] took us to school, he always took us first to the grocery store to buy what we wanted. My father worked at night, so when he came in the morning he always brought breakfast with him. So when we woke up we found breakfast."

(2) Strong parental (particularly paternal) support for education

Seven out of ten of the women interviewed reported that their parents supported and promoted higher education. If the interviewee did not say that "both parents" supported her educational achievements, the father was mentioned more often than the mother in regard to support for educational attainment.
Example 1:

Interviewee #9 remembered her father this way: "He [father] was very strict about our education. If we got bad grades he punished us....[W]e knew that he did that because we made a mistake. Most Bedouin fathers at that time didn't care if their kids failed or succeeded in schools. He always told us that we have to have a bachelor's degree or better because that will protect us...."

Example 2:

Interviewee #1 observed: "My parents were concerned about our education.... My father never accepted any excuse for absence while I was in school."

Example 3:

Interviewee #3 commented: "My father paid attention to our grades. It was unacceptable to fail in school."

(3) Not allowed unsupervised access to the world outside the home -- to protect honor

The theme of "protecting" one's own and family honor was a strong theme throughout the interviews. In one section of the interview, the women were asked about values they received as they were growing up. One of the themes most frequently noted was the carefulness and strictness of parents in protecting the girl's [and family's] honor. This showed up in the protectiveness around the young girl's access to non-family-supervised experiences outside home and school.

Example 1:

Interviewee #10 related: "I remember that when I was young, all our neighbor kids (boys and girls) played together in the street.... One day, I wanted to play in the street with my friends, and because my family didn't let me, I went out the back door. My mother was standing at the front door, and when she saw me she yelled at me, and that was scary. After that day I knew that to go outside was not allowed. So I never went outside like that again."
Example 2:

Interviewee #4 commented: “The values I most remember being emphasized at home was that the girl is not allowed to go outside... I remember that when my sister graduated from high school she was awarded a scholarship from the government to study in Egypt. My family refused to let her accept the scholarship because they did not want her to travel and live alone in Egypt.”

Example 3:

Interviewee #2 recalled: “The best place for a girl is her home and if she wants to go outside, the only place should be the school. Even if we wanted to visit our relatives, we couldn't visit them a lot.”

(4) Family attached to religious norms -- religion important

Eight out of ten women interviewed discussed the importance of religion in their families and how their parents were very careful about teaching Islam to their children. The women reported that their parents told them that they [parents] believed that religion would protect their children from doing wrong and from getting into trouble.

Example 1:

Interviewee #5 recalled: “The important norm at home was to pray. My father knew that I like to do what he did so he taught me how to enjoy praying....When I was six years old my father woke me up at dawn to ask me to pray with him. My father raised me to be a good Moslem.”

Example 2:

Interviewee #8 remembered: “Of course it was expected that we had to pray. Being a religious person would protect you from doing the wrong things. When I was in elementary school we had exams so I prayed a lot and I was asking God to help me succeed.”

Example 3:

Interviewee #3 observed: “My parents wanted us to be good Moslems by teaching us what Islam is about. My parents made sure that we were praying and fasting. My parents were very strict at this time in my life [i.e., childhood].”
(5) "Good girl"-- i.e., adherence to the norms, prescriptions and proscriptions of Islam and Bedouin society, polite, careful in speech

All of the ten interviewees used the term “good girl” to describe how they thought they were viewed by others or how they thought of themselves as children. In the context of Kuwaiti Bedouin culture, “good girl” does not necessarily mean "religious," but means more like "moral." That is to say, the girl follows the moral prescriptions of Islam. It means that the girl is careful to follow the norms about preserving her family honor, avoids proscribed behaviors such as drinking alcohol or associating with men who are not relatives. It also means she is "polite" or careful to observe proper courtesies in speech. Everybody respects a girl who is described as a “good girl.”

Example 1:

Interviewee #10 observed: “I had to protect my honor. I paid attention to my behavior and my speech, because I didn't want anybody to find a mistake in what I did or said. My mother told me that a 'good girl' has to protect her family’s honor and doesn't destroy it (i.e., by what she does).”

Example 2:

Interviewee #9 commented: “You have to respect your parents and others. You have to watch your mouth in order not to say impolite words in front of others or not to make a mistake. You have to think before you talk... These traditions and values are the basic principles that children [especially girls] should know. If there was an occasion like a big dinner, it is impolite for young girls to eat in front of the older women guests. The first thing that I learned from my mother was that I have to think before I talk.”

Example 3:

Interviewee #6 indicated: “Girls have to be polite. Also they should avoid interacting with men. My father tried to teach us to be polite and be strong. As women we have to respect men, but this doesn't mean that we should be afraid of men or that we are not on the same level.”
(6) Family often referred to her as a "stubborn" or determined child

Seven out of ten individuals reported that their family saw them as a stubborn or determined child because once they made up their minds that something was the right or good or desirable thing to do, they insisted on it. Sometimes this meant that they did not obey their parents, such as when they were told to go to a family gathering or when they were told to dress in a particular way.

Example 1:

Interviewee #9 commented: "My mother described me as a stubborn person... I did what I wanted."

Example 2:

Interviewee #4 remembered: "My mother described me as a stubborn person. My mother always asked me to go and dance in the weddings and I always refused, because when I went to weddings that impacted [i.e., took time away from] my study." (Note: In some tribes in Bedouin society, girls must go to their relatives’ wedding and dance at the women’s party to show their support for their relatives.)

Example 3:

One interviewee remembered her father describing her: "My father said to my mother that I am a very stubborn person. He said, ‘No one can force her to do something that she doesn’t want to do. If she marries someone who doesn't have the same kind of personality, she will end up taking him to court and asking for a divorce.’" (Note: In Kuwait, women cannot ask men for a divorce; the father here was emphasizing what a strong-willed daughter he believed he had.)

(7) Responsible child (almost adult child) -- took care of siblings, served as role model

Seven out of ten of the women interviewed indicated that when they were 13 to 18 years old, they took care of their siblings and their siblings looked to them as a model that they wanted to follow.
Example 1:

Interviewee #5 observed: "When I decided to become a religious woman, all my sisters and brothers also became religious."

Example 2:

Interviewee #9 remembered: "When my father died, all of my brothers and sisters were young. My mother was a strong woman but she couldn't handle all of the responsibilities at our family business...I used to work with my father in his business so I took on all the responsibilities at the office and kept the business going."

Example 3:

Interviewee #2 commented: "My sister described me as the person who she most wants to be like, because I stand up for what I think is right and do not back down."

(8) Saw self and believes others saw her as introverted or quiet

Six out of ten individuals reported that their parents or their siblings describe them as a quiet person or an asocial person when they were young.

Example 1:

Interviewee #4 remembered: "My mother described me as a very quiet child. When my mother sees my children now, she always says that I was totally different when I was young, because I was so quiet and didn't appear very needy."

Example 2:

Interviewee #1 recalled: "My father described me as an asocial child...when I was young I didn't go outside, I sat in the house most of the time."

In adult life

(1) Source of family pride

Nine out of ten of the women who participated in this study explained that either their family, their tribe, or even all Bedouin society were proud of them or proud of what they accomplished in their lives.
Example 1:

Interviewee #1 recalled: "When I told them (Bedouins) about my job and how I met with people who have power in the government, they are very proud of me."

Example 2:

Interviewee #4 indicated: "My family is proud of me. They like my life. They always talk about me [how successful I am] with other people."

Example 3:

Interviewee #5 explained how her family feels about her life today: "They are proud of me. They like what I am doing. They want me to do more in my career and not stop where I am now. When I got my masters' degree, my family celebrated with a big party."

(2) Has respect of her tribe

Most of the women whom I interviewed (nine out of ten) believed that their tribes respect them and respect their work.

Example 1:

Interviewee #2 observed: "Bedouin society respects me. People always ask my mother about me."

Example 2:

Interviewee #6 commented: "They [Bedouins] respect me. When we are at a party, women always ask which one of you is the [name of profession]." (Note: I have to protect the participant’s identity and therefore cannot name her profession.)

Example 3:

Interviewee #7 explained: "Bedouins respect me. They accept my money if I give it to them." (Cultural explanation: Even Bedouins who are poor and who beg for money are careful about whom they take money from. For example, they will not take money from a prostitute or from a drug dealer, because they believe it is haram (money earned in a sinful way). But this interviewee said that poor Bedouins who need money will accept her money because they accept that her money is helal (legally and honestly earned).

(3) Attachment to religious values and norms
Nine out of ten discuss the importance of being religious for women because if a person has a strong belief, it is assumed that this will protect her. Some of these women explained how they would raise their daughter in the Islamic way.

Example 1:

Interviewee #6 commented: "I wish I had studied Islam more intensely. I think I would have benefited more. I am a success in my life in this world, but I want to succeed also in the next world [i.e., life after death]. I want to know how to be a perfect Moslem."

Example 2:

Interviewee #7 reported: "I will raise my daughter to be a good Moslem. This is very important thing for me."

Example 3:

Two interviewees reported that they and other students at the university in a particular class were wearing a "nekb" [a veil covering over the face worn by many religious Bedouin women]. The dean of the College forbade the women to wear the nekab. However, these students refused to take off the nekab on religious grounds and actually went to the Kuwait parliament and to the prince of Kuwait to protest their right as religious women to wear the nekab. As one of the women related, "The important thing is that I didn't fail the class, and I didn't take off my nekab."

(4) Attributes her success to family support/ family environment

Six out of ten individuals attributed their success in their lives to their family support and their family environment.

Example 1:

Interviewee #4 commented: "I have a good environment and my family gives me what I need. The [supportive, loving, safe, happy, caring, and nurturing] environment that I lived in helped me a lot."
Example 2:

Interviewee #8 remembered: "I wanted to work at (name of profession). All my family supported my decision." (Note: I have to protect the participant’s identity and therefore cannot name her profession.)

Example 3:

Interviewee #1 explained the factor that helped her to succeed in her life: "My good environment, and my family’s understanding. They gave me the right to choose any major that I wanted to study at the university."

(5) Experiences of mortality (death/ serious illness of family member) that influenced her person/ choices

Many of the women that I interviewed (eight out of ten) believe that they had an experience of illness or death of someone close, which influenced the way they looked at their life and life choices.

Example 1:

One interviewee remembered: "When I was young, my mother always got sick. So I always said that when I grew up, I would become a doctor and treat my mother so she would not need any other doctor."

Example 2:

Interviewee #9 recalled: "My brother's death made me very determined to be successful in my life."

Example 3:

Interviewee #7 explained: "I faced death ... death made me think of the kind of life that I should live."

(6) Goal directed/ persistent

All of the individuals reported that they put their goals first and they persisted until they achieved their goals. Most of them indicated that they did not give up but they tried several times until they achieved their goals.
Example 1:

Interviewee #8 recalled: "I know myself. If I want to do something, I do it even if it takes me ten years."

Example 2:

Interviewee #10 remembered: "When I was young, I learned how to set goals and how to achieve them. Also I was very patient to achieve what I wanted."

Example 3:

Interviewee #6 recalled: "I set my goals and started working to achieve those goals."

(7) "Protect myself"--keeping family honor, setting limits, trust of others about good behavior

All Bedouin women who participated in this study explained how it is important for Bedouin families that their daughters protect their family's honor by proper behavior. Also they discussed their relationships with their male co-workers and how they kept these relationships "very professional," and they explained how it is important for them to be trusted by others, such as by their families or tribes.

Example 1:

Interviewee #5 explained: "In our society (Bedouin) we believe that a daughter is very valuable and her honor is very sacred, so parents always want their daughters to protect their honor so they can feel that they did something meaningful [by raising good and honorable children]."

Example 2:

Interviewee #8 observed: "Well, when I was young, my parents gave us the right to attend the university. My parents trusted me to protect myself. Some people are afraid that if they allow their daughter to attend the university, they will bring dishonor to the family because there are men at the university."
Example 3:

Interviewee #1 described her relationships with male co-workers: “I work with them [men] only in a professional way. I respect them.”

(8) Success comes because of our own ability, effort, and/or determination

Ten out of ten individuals indicated that they are successful in their personal and professional lives because of their own abilities, their hard work, and their determination and persistence.

Example 1:

Interviewee #2 strongly commented: “I possess the ability to succeed in my life.”

Example 2:

Interviewee #9 observed: “I want to say that whenever I failed, I always made that failure a step toward success. For example, when I did not like the government job, I found a part-time job that I did like.”

Example 3:

Interviewee #5 advised Bedouin women: “They [Bedouin women] can achieve their goals by insisting on continuing their education.”
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS
FOR EMPOWERMENT PRACTICE

The purpose of this research was to discover the factors that have empowered a few Bedouin women in Kuwait to enter professions typically reserved for men and to exert some control in their lives in a male culture without losing the respect of their Bedouin society. The data were derived from the women's self-reports about major influences in their lives and of ways that they themselves account for their successes. The participants were all Bedouin women who lived in Kuwait. The women were identified reputationally using "tribal knowledgeable" as informants from several Bedouin tribes. The research design included questions that helped guide the dialogue with these women to encourage them to tell their stories.

5.1 Findings in Relation to Expectations

Earlier, I reported a set of four expectations I had in regard to findings. In quantitative studies such expectations would have formed the basis for hypotheses. In most kinds of qualitative research, such expectations are reported as a potential source of researcher bias.
I expected that because these women chose unconventional occupations -- specifically occupations that seemed to defy religious prescriptions -- they would not be particularly religious women.

In point of fact, all of the women reported a great attachment to religion and religious values that had shaped their lives and the lives of their family. Several saw this as critical to their success.

I expected that the young women would stand out as leaders from the time they were children.

Again, I was incorrect. In fact, most of the women interviewed described themselves as quiet or introverted as children and believed that their families saw them this way too.

I expected that the women as they grew up would be determined and persistent, even in the face of opposition.

This proved to be a major factor in the interviewees' self-report of how they account for their own success and what advice they could give to other women who would want to successfully pursue professional success.

I expected them to know their husbands before marriage was arranged and to have choice in the decision.

Only four of the women were married. All of them had more or less traditionally arranged marriages.

**5.2 Major Findings and Implications for Social Work**

The Social Work literature on women's empowerment has not systematically pursued the question of how women themselves who are empowered account for their successes.
Without such an empirical base, most of the practice literature on how to assist with women's empowerment develops strategies from sets of assumptions and hypotheses about what ought to work. The present research contributes to the literature by reporting how one group of successful women in a highly patriarchal society understands their own educational and occupational empowerment.

(1) Importance of both environment and personal traits

Per report of these women, environment, particularly family support and encouragement AND personal traits of tenacity and determination were crucial in their successfully pursuing a co-educational university degree and a profession/occupation in which they routinely would be interacting with men. Though their patriarchal society discouraged and sometimes even punished such pursuits, it appears that the support of family to reach for their goals coupled with a rather (to use the women's words) "stubborn" nature were helpful in overcoming strong cultural proscriptions.

This finding supports the person-in-environment perspective long adopted by Social Work practitioners in various societies.

(2) Important role of religion

Frequently, religion is used to support male prerogatives in male-oriented societies. Within such traditions, breaking away from such proscriptions is frequently associated with non-religiousness or even anti-religious sentiment. Indeed, this researcher accepted the common assumption in her expectation that women who achieved success in male-dominated occupations would also tend to have less attachment to religion. Quite the contrary, these women all insisted on the importance of religion in their lives, followed religious practices, and even resisted moves to prevent them from engaging in
practices they saw as part of their religious duty. Some stated that they wanted to be even more religious and that religion was the most important thing in their lives.

There could be several interpretations for this finding, including the following:

(a) First of all, it may be precisely because these women were so religious in obvious ways that they were allowed to engage in activities denied to most women. The presumption might be that because these women were so attached to their religion, they could be regarded as knowing how to follow Islamic Law without compromising either their chances to succeed, or their honor. The rationale might go, "If these women who are so religious want to go to the university, how can that be a wrong decision for them? Religious women would not choose to do something that compromised religious values."

(b) Alternatively, it may be that spirituality associated with their religion and its practices were a source of personal strength to the women. This would be an interpretation similar to Morgan's (2001) finding that spirituality played a key role in the success of Native American women in avoiding destructive behavior.

Whatever the interpretation, this finding cautions us to avoid facile assumptions about the role of religion in "keeping women in their place." It is likely that the relationship between women's empowerment and religiosity is much more complicated and multi-layered than is assumed either in the popular literature or in interpretations by religious leaders themselves.

3) "Good girl" theme

One persistent theme reported by the interviewees—that is, persistent across interviews and for each interviewee across the life span from childhood to adulthood—was that of being a "good girl." The critical issue here is moral behavior as distinct from
religiosity. The precise behaviors that operationalize the definition of "good girl" in the various tribes may differ somewhat, but it primarily focuses on the concept of family and personal honor. Much of this is linked to practices in regard to males outside the family. Even as children, the girls reported that they were sheltered (with one exception) and were kept at home. The theme emphasizes girls knowing how to behave in a way that boundaries are kept, behavior is discrete (e.g., care in words one uses), actions are polite. Thus, the girl retains her honor and that of her family. Regarding these restrictions, all of the women interviewed spoke about the importance of "honor" and behaving in a way that causes no dishonor. Yet, attending a co-educational institution could, for some women, constitute a breach of rules about proper conduct. How is it that these particular women, who were so careful to underscore their attachment to the behaviors associated with "honor," were able to go beyond those proscriptions with regard to university and occupation? How could they violate these prohibitions and still be considered "good"?

One interpretation may be found in the way honor is operationalized by these women. For example, it is not the presence of men in one’s environment that is a source of dishonor, but what one does with that reality. By carefully interacting with men only around professional issues, these women have constructed interpersonal boundaries that allow them to be present in the same activities with men, while remaining safe from allegations that they are behaving in ways that compromise "honor." Most of the women emphasized their own responsibility for setting appropriate boundaries and for "protecting themselves." They also emphasized that their families trusted that they would protect themselves in this way.
Indeed, just as I speculated above under the discussion of religion, it may be that the fact that these women followed prescriptions about how to keep their honor and the family intact meant that they could be trusted in environments where they would be in interaction with men. It may even be precisely because of the ability to act within interpersonal boundaries that external boundaries separating men and women spatially were "relaxed." This allowed the women access to a university education and to high status occupations.

This finding suggests that social workers and others who want to empower women must carefully consider all aspects of culture when deciding on approaches to take. The cultural outsider, indeed, even individuals from the "city culture" within the same society, may inadvertently cause problems if change is proposed at multiple levels simultaneously and too quickly. For example, the College dean who insisted that women students remove the "nekab" in class provoked a resistance in the female students. Undoubtedly, the dean thought that in pursuing a policy of having students remove the nekab, he was promoting women's rights. However, though these women may have been willing to challenge societal prohibitions about Bedouin women's attendance at coeducational institutions, they were not willing to challenge a practice they believed was important to their religious identities. Indeed, it is even possible that these and similar religious practices actually protected the women from difficulty and abuse while they pursued an unconventional (for Kuwaiti Bedouin women) educational and occupational path.
4. Role of Education

Education and its importance in opening up opportunities for women was stressed over and over again by the interviewees in relation to their childhood and adult experiences.

When these women were children, a constant theme was the extent to which parents, perhaps especially the father, stressed the importance of education. This is the case, despite the fact that none of the mothers had a college education, and some had no formal education, and despite the fact that most of the fathers did not have a university education. Parents not only emphasized the importance of educational success and attainment, but also did so for their girl children, in a society in which educational attainment for girls was not a high priority and indeed was often treated suspiciously. Many of the girls report how they themselves set educational goals and worked hard in school.

Asked what advice they would give to other young Bedouin women who wanted to be a success, most of these interviewees stressed the necessity of persisting in their educational pursuits. They clearly saw education as a route to their empowerment.

5) Sense of Personal Agency

What was absolutely remarkable in these women was the sense of agency they all expressed about their lives. When asked to talk about how they would explain their success as university educated and professional women, almost all of them talked about their own abilities (as one interviewee expressed it: "I possess the ability to succeed!") and their refusal to give up on their dreams.
Ability, determination, persistence -- inner qualities of strength that these women "possess." Where did this come from in a society that is male dominated and that holds few professional opportunities for Bedouin women in Kuwait? If I were to do the interviews again, I would pursue this question more directly with the women. However, at this point, one can only speculate that part of this "strength" and resilience could come from growing up in families where what the girls wanted was counted as important (the theme labeled above as “supportive/indulgent” parents), where there was a sense that their education was at least as important as that of boy children, and where they were allowed to be "stubborn" and resistant to certain parental demands. The challenge for social workers and others who want to provide educational and occupational opportunities for other women in this society will be to find ways to help women gain this sense of personal agency if they have not had families so supportive of their educational and occupational dreams.

5.3 Implications for Research

In this study I tried to identify those factors that successful Kuwaiti Bedouin women identified as contributing to their empowerment in moving beyond patriarchal restrictions that prevent most Bedouin women from realizing personal, educational and professional aspirations, specifically aspirations to what their society considers “male professions.” Because the study was confined to Bedouin women from Kuwait, the findings would not apply to all Bedouin women. The literature will benefit from further research with successful Bedouin women who live in Gulf countries such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates to see if findings hold across different societies.
In this study, we explored for the first time how successful women account for their empowerment. However, we are not able to say definitively that the factors these women identified are unique to the successful Bedouin women in Kuwait. What is needed is a comparative study including both "empowered" Bedouin women in Kuwait and those Bedouin women in Kuwait who have not been able to exercise control over their lives. If researchers were to find factors that appear in the narratives/responses of empowered women and not in the narratives/responses of non-empowered women, one would have even more confidence in the identified factors as relevant to the women's success.

The research questions focused on the immediate family of these Bedouin women, who have control over their lives, but did not ask the women about their extended family -- for example, their grandparents. Many of these women grew up in homes with several generations of extended kin. Extended family and tribe are central to identity formation among the Bedouins. A potentially fruitful direction for investigation would be to expand the inquiry to elicit information about the relationships that these women have had with their extended kin.

Even with all of the preconditions and safeguards for confidentiality, Bedouin women may still be afraid to give an honest answer to a Bedouin person, because Bedouin society in Kuwait is a small society where everyone knows everyone else. This fact may have made the women who participated in my research afraid that if they gave more details about their personal lives to someone who may know them or who may know their family, there may be negative consequences. Thus, despite the benefits of the researcher's position as an "insider" in the culture, it may be that Bedouin women who
participated in this research could be free to be more open to a researcher who comes from a different culture. This is another avenue to explore.
APPENDIX A

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS
There are some Arabic terms that are not in the English language, and it is important to clarify them at the beginning of this research. Below are definitions for the terms that come up most frequently in this thesis.

Bedouin = English term for the Arabic word *bedu*.

**Bedu**: The *Bedus* are a large group of camel herding pastoralists of Arab descent, who raise, maintain and sell livestock. They have historically lived a desert existence in the Arabian peninsula. Over the last century, they have slowly abandoned their nomadic life in the desert and migrated to the cities, especially following the oil boom. The *Bedu* comprise a sizeable minority of the population in Kuwait.

**Abaya**: "Women's long black cloak, worn over the dress and covering the entire body" (Al-Mughni, 1993, p. 7).

**Hijab**: "Women's veil, consisting of a headcover" (Al-Mughni, 1993, p. 8).

**Nekab**: A kind of cloth that religious women wear in Kuwait to cover their faces completely or the whole face except the eyes.

**Protect honor**: In Moslem culture, a girl must protect her honor, which directly reflects on her family’s honor. In Islam, girls have to remain virgins until they get married. In many other cultures, a girl’s virginity may not be as important. There are degrees of losing your honor. For example, if a Bedouin woman had an interaction or social exchange with a man who is not her relative, such an act would be defined as bringing shame to her family and tribe, even if the girl did not lose her virginity. But the worst thing that destroys the family’s honor completely and bring shame to all of the family members would be if their daughter lost her virginity before she got married. But that may not be true in other cultures.
Good girl: A girl who follows the moral prescriptions of Islam. It means that the girl is careful to follow norms about preserving her family’s honor, avoids proscribed behaviors such as drinking alcohol or associating with men who are not her relatives. It also means she is "polite" or careful to observe proper courtesies in speech. Everybody respects a girl who is described as a "good girl" and everybody wants their daughters to be good girls. The term "good girl" is defined by Bedouins differently than in other cultures. The above characterization may not describe a "good girl" in other cultures.
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Demographic and Background Questions:

To begin with, I am going to ask a few questions about your own background and current situation. If there is any question you do not wish to answer, just tell me so. Answer only those questions you feel comfortable answering.

1. How old are you?
2. What is your marital status?
3. If you are married:
   - How old is your husband?
   - What is your husband’s highest educational degree?
   - What does your husband do?
4. With whom do you live?
5. Do you have children?
   - If yes, how many children do you have?
   - What is their gender?
6. What is the highest educational degree that you hold?
7. What profession are you in?
8. What is your title at your job?

Now, I am going to ask you a little bit about your family of origin (parents and brothers and sisters). Again, if you don’t wish to answer, just tell me. You don’t have to answer any questions you don’t wish to answer.

9. Do you have any brothers or sisters?
   - If yes: How many brothers? How many sisters?
   - If yes, what are their ages? Who is the eldest?
10. Are your parents living?
    - If your parents are living, are they still together?
    - Is your mother your father’s only wife? If not, how many wives does your father have?
11. What is the highest educational degree that your mother holds (or if deceased, what is the highest degree she held)?
12. Does (did) your mother work? If so, what work does (did) she do?
13. What is the highest educational degree that your father holds (or, if deceased, what is the highest degree he held)?
14. Does (did) your father work? If so, what work does (did) he do?

Open Questions:

In the next set of questions, I will ask you to describe some of your early life experiences and early relationships, especially to your parents. Tell me as much or as little as you wish in answer to these questions. Again I want to remind you that you have the right to not answer any question.

1. When you think about your life as a child (until age 12), what were the most important values, traditions, and norms you remember being emphasized at home.

   How did you know that these values and traditions were important? Can you give a concrete example of an incident in which these values were stressed to you or someone else?

2. When you think about your life growing up as a child in your family, what do you remember most about your father? How would you describe his personality to someone who did not know him?
Can you recall a concrete example (an incident or event) which would illustrate these characteristics.

3. When you think about your life growing up as a child in your family, what do you remember most about your mother? How would you describe her personality to someone who did not know her?

Can you recall a concrete example (an incident or event) which would illustrate these characteristics.

The next few questions will ask you to exercise your imagination and observe your childhood through your parent's eyes and through the eyes of your brothers and sisters:

4. If someone were to ask your mother about you as a child, how do you suppose she would describe you?

Can you describe an incident to illustrate?

5. If someone were to ask your father about you as a child, how would he describe you?

Can you describe an incident to illustrate?

6. Now about your brothers and sisters: How do you suppose they would have described you as a child?

Can you describe an incident to illustrate.

8. When you think about your childhood, are there any special events or incidences that you believe were important in its impact on your family---this can be some special difficulty the family had to confront or some special success or positive event. In any event, something most family members are likely to remember as special.

9. When you think about your childhood are there any events or circumstances that you feel now were important in shaping the person you have become?

The next few questions will ask some of the same questions as the ones above, except that we will be wanting you to reflect on your adolescence. Again, you are free to answer as much or as little as you wish.

10. When you think about your life as a child (until age 12), what were the most important values traditions, and norms you remember being emphasized at home.

How did you know that these values and traditions were important? Can you give a concrete example of an incident in which these values were stressed to you or someone else?

11. When you think about your life growing up as a child in your family, what do you remember most about your father? How would you describe his personality to someone who did not know him?

Can you recall a concrete example (an incident or event) which would illustrate these characteristics.

12. When you think about your life growing up as a child in your family, what do you remember most about your mother? How would you describe her personality to someone who did not know her?

Can you recall a concrete example (an incident or event) which would illustrate these characteristics.

The next few questions will ask you to exercise your imagination and observe your adolescence through your parent's eyes and through the eyes of your brothers and sisters:
13. If someone were to ask your mother about you as an adolescent (between 13 and 18 years of age), how do you suppose she would describe you?

Can you describe an incident to illustrate?

14. If someone were to ask your father about you as an adolescent, how would he describe you?

Can you describe an incident to illustrate?

15. Now about your brothers and sisters: How do you suppose they would have described you as an adolescent?

Can you describe an incident to illustrate.

16. When you think about your adolescence, are there any special events or incidences that you believe were important in its impact on your family---this can be some special difficulty the family had to confront or some special success or positive event. In any event, something most family members are likely to remember as special.

17. When you think about your adolescence are there any events or circumstances that you feel now were important in shaping the person you have become?

The next group of questions will ask you to talk about events and relationships in your adult life, particularly with regard to choices about education, a profession, and marriage.

As you know, generally speaking, every society has some implicit or explicit prescriptions and proscriptions about men's and women's roles. Specifically, Bedouin Society has some fairly clear specifications about women's roles and women's place. I am interested in your experiences as a Bedouin woman who appears to have achieved more educationally and professionally than most Bedouin women have been able to do.

18. Now that you are an adult, how would members of your family describe you?
   Your father?
   Your Mother?
   Your brother(s)?
   Your sister(s)?

Specifically, what do members of your family think about your life today?

Can you describe an incident or two that illustrates how they feel about the life you are leading?

19. It is only a small minority of Bedouin women who complete the university and an advanced degree. Can you talk a little bit about your decision to attend the university.

   How did that decision come about for you?

   Who supported that decision? Who, if anybody, spoke against that decision to attend the university?

20. Can you describe a bit about your decision to choose ______ profession?

   How did that decision come about for you?

   Who supported that decision? Who, if anybody, spoke against that decision to pursue ______ profession?
21. The profession you have chosen and the education you have received is not typical for Bedouin women. Can you talk a little about how you believe you are regarded and treated by Bedouin society generally? Can you describe one or two incidents that illustrate your answer?

   How do you explain your level of education and profession to others in Bedouin society who may hold more traditional views of women?

22. As you know, in Bedouin society, women are not supposed to interact with men who are not family members. Yet, in your job you DO have to interact with male colleagues.

   Can you talk a little about how you feel about working in a position where interactions with men not your relatives is an inevitable part of your work interactions?

   Can you describe how your male co-workers interact with you? Can you give an example of a typical interaction OR an example of an interaction that illustrates your relationships to male co-workers?

   **Another important decision in the life of young Bedouin women is the choice of a marriage partner.**

23. Please describe, if you would, how your marriage partner was chosen and how you met.

   What were the major factors in this decision?

   Can you tell me a little about your input into this decision? How much weight was given to your opinion in the matter of a marriage partner?

24. Using your imagination again, how do you suppose your husband would describe you to someone who did not know you?

   How would you describe him to someone who did not know him?

25. If someone were to say to you that you appear to have achieved a great deal more control over your life than most other Bedouin women, how would you respond to that observation?

   If you agree with that observation, how do you explain to yourself the ability to exercise control over life choices when other Bedouin women may have more difficulty doing so? What factors do you believe help explain your success in this regard?

   If you disagree, discuss a little bit about ways in which such observations are not accurate (give an example or two to describe what you mean).

26. Again, using your imagination: knowing what you know now, if you were once again yourself as a 10 year old child are there any choices you would make differently?

27. If you have a daughter (or if someday you do have a daughter) what kind of concrete advice would you give her about her future directions in life (education, profession, marriage?)?

   Would you want her to follow in your footsteps, for example?

28. Is there anything else that you think is important for me to know about your life as a Bedouin woman who has succeeded in pursuing higher education and a profession?
REFERENCES


