Abstract

The current study explores the conflict of home life vs. career as experienced by religious women in Arab society, and the way it shapes their identity. This shaping of identity is examined in relation to the effects of external-interpersonal conflicts, as well as internal, intrapersonal ones. This study focuses on women in Arab society, a society in which women are prominently subjected to gender inequality rooted in patriarchal norms and values, ones posed by society and according to which women are expected to behave. We hypothesized that the characteristics of this society will affect the subject of this research, i.e., the home life vs. career conflict and the shaping of these women's identity. The characteristics of this conflict was explored, as was the way these women handled the conflict, whether externally (interpersonally) or internally (intrapersonally), as perceived by them.

The sample included 15 religious Muslim Arab women aged 30–45, academically trained in various fields, with corresponding careers. Their partners differ from one another in terms of academic and religious background. The women partook in semi-structured in-depth interviews through which data was collected. Such interviews are conversations in which both parties—interviewer and interviewee—uncover and develop meaning together, a series of friendly conversations through which interviewers steer the research subjects as needed and offer new perspectives that help the subjects respond in an informative manner (Shkedi, 2003).

The research questions covered three areas: 1. How religious women in Arab society perceive the conflict of home life vs. career; 2. What mechanisms they employ when coping with internal and external conflicts; 3. In what manner do these conflicts affect the process of shaping their identity?

Following the data collection phase, a qualitative analysis was performed in order to interpret and add significance to the studied phenomenon and to tie the findings to the general theory. This qualitative analysis method helped understand the subjective world of the subjects in the realm of the home and their careers, in addition to understanding external conflicts (between the modern woman and her traditional environment) as well as internal ones (traditional vs. modern identity) that shape the woman's identity. Findings reveal that the conflict between home life and a career originates in the home, where roles and responsibilities are not equally divided between the partners. The home environment reflects traditional, patriarchal attitudes towards women. It appears that external conflicts tend to create internal conflicts and shape internal-psychological and external coping mechanisms. The identity conflict is the result of these internal and external clashes, which together shape the identities of these women. The discussion section proposes reasons for the findings, refers to the limitations of this research, and offers educational implications and possible future research.