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The American University in Cairo
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**Knowing the Ropes:
Autonomy in the Everyday life of Egyptian
Married Women**

A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, and Egyptology

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

In Sociology - Anthropology

By **Neveen Bashier**

Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the American University in Cairo

Under the supervision of **Dr. Marisa Ensor**

Spring 2010

The American University in Cairo

**Knowing the Ropes:
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Married Women**

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Has been approved by

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ABSTRACT

The American University in Cairo

Knowing the Ropes: Autonomy in the Everyday Life of Egyptian Married Women

Neveen Bashier

Committee Members: Marisa Ensor, Nazek Nosseir, and Ashley Ruodelph- Simons

The rationale behind this thesis has been to construct different frames of married women's autonomy in Egypt. Such frames are meant to describe different patterns of behavior in the everyday life of Egyptian married women. In order to construct such frames, a research has been conducted and twenty five in-depth interviews alongside a discussion group with five participants were held with self identified Egyptian married women. The research sought answers to questions on married women's definition of autonomy, how it is expressed in the various roles they play in their everyday lives, the constraints facing such autonomy in married women's view, and how their sense of autonomy may affect the gender identity of their children. This thesis employs feminist post-structuralist theory, the gender difference discourse, a feminist discursive approach on the development of gender identity, the theory of cognitive dissonance, and the concept of individual agency. This thesis also draws on studies conducted on gender-role attitudes among Egyptian adolescents, women's reaction to their domestication in the U.S.A, and married women's levels and indicators of autonomy in Egypt. Having been founded on the premise that women's situation in Egypt is greatly influenced by how they conceptualize their autonomy and their role in the family, this thesis deconstructs the notion of married women's autonomy to reconstruct it into five frames that illustrate women's different behaviors in the family. The five frames of autonomy coined in this thesis are: Subordination by Consent, Restrained Autonomy, Disguised Autonomy, Progressive Autonomy and Radical Autonomy. These frames constitute the contribution of this thesis to the study of women in Egypt.

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I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the research problem, research questions as well as the theoretical framework employed and background to the problem. Afterwards, this chapter presents the research methods, human subjects' considerations, the research significance and, finally, the thesis structure.

Research Problem

Determinants of a woman's autonomy can include her level of education, her socio-economic background, her socialization processes, her exposure to the world, her employment, her decision-making ability, and her hopes for her future. When married, determinants of a woman's autonomy can also involve her role in the family, the number of children she has and their ages, and her husband's educational and socio-economic background. While forming their gender identities, both females and males are socialized into the roles expected of them by their family and the society; hence, they grow up to have some already set ideas of what they expect of each other. The level of autonomy that females have can shape their lives, both when they are single or married. In male-dominant societies like Egypt, the man, in most cases, is raised to be granted his autonomy, while the woman is raised either to submit to the male dominance- be it her father, her husband, or her male relatives, or to gain her autonomy through having decision-making ability in regards to her life choices. Such ability can be obtained through her education, her employment, her control over her own financial resources or others. Married women's position in the family can greatly affect their children while they, the children, are forming their gender identities, and who in turn will influence their children in the future. This thesis is based on the premise that women's situation in Egypt is greatly influenced by how they conceptualize their autonomy and their role in the family. I focus on married women because the way they perceive their autonomy and their role in the family will provide an understanding of the environment in which their children are nurtured, and, hence, an estimation of the future of women's situation in

Egypt. Although women who are divorced or widowed also have a great impact on their children, I have chosen married women for this thesis to take into account the role and effect of the husband on women's autonomy. This research will answer the following questions.

Research Questions

1. How do Egyptian married women define autonomy?
2. How is autonomy expressed in the various roles Egyptian married women have in their everyday life?
3. What are the constraints facing women's autonomy in the view of Egyptian married women?
4. Whether (and how) Egyptian married women's sense of autonomy affects the socialization and gender identity of their children.

Theoretical Framework

This study on married women's conceptualization of autonomy and their definition of their role in the family draws on feminist post-structuralist theory in order to unveil the ways in which "the socio-cultural hegemonies of dominant groupings are acquired and challenged" (Kenway et al, 1994: 190). Under the post-structuralist theory, according to Scott, one can be:

analyzing constructions of meaning and relationships of power that called unitary, universal categories into question and historicized concepts otherwise treated as natural (such as man/woman) or absolute (such as equality or justice) (Scott, 1988: 33-34).

Hence, by adopting an *emic* perspective on the ‘truth’ behind married women’s autonomy through the eyes of married women themselves- that is the meaning of autonomy as it applies to those women’s lives, I have sought an opening to also understand the male hegemony in Egypt, not on the structural level, but rather on the conceptual level, as perceived and understood by Egyptian married women. According to feminist post-structuralist theory, women need to “overcome the forces of circumstance” (Ollenburger and Moore, 1992: 25), if they’re ever to escape the limitations that the patriarchal society has placed on them (*Ibid.*). Thus, deconstructing existent notions, such as women’s autonomy- in the case of the thesis in hand- is an important process that needs to be conducted away from the biases of the “patriarchal language” (*Ibid.*: 26).

Moreover, following the gender difference discourse, particular attention is given to the distinction between females and males both on an individual level and on a group level (Volman and Ten Dam, 1998: 540). Thus, coexistence that is based on understandings of meanings- such as gender- which will be displayed in several cultural representations, will shape the way in which relations between females and males are constituted and apprehended (Scott, 1988: 37). This leads females and males in a marital setting to pursue their roles, and to interact according to their difference and ‘special’

qualities- the ones assigned to them by society. Further, when interaction between females and males reflects their socially ascribed differences, which ultimately guide their roles and responsibilities in the family, constructing an understanding of a woman's autonomy will manifest her image of herself as well as the group to which she belongs.

A feminist discursive approach on the development of gender identity ascribes gender identity to socialization processes, while both boys and girls from early stages of childhood manifest their own selves in relation to the different discursive practices in which they participate (Volman and Ten Dam, 1998: 531-532). It is important to consider the effect of such two elements, the socialization processes and the discursive practices, on how a female grows to understand her gender identity and, for the purpose of this thesis, her autonomy. Nevertheless, in a male-dominant context, these elements can be employed to socialize the female into the societal hegemonic understanding of masculinity and femininity and to engage her/prepare her for engagement in gendered practices, which guides her toward conforming and being in harmony with traditional norms of the society of which she is a member. This process can be examined through Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962), where the individuals' need to maintain harmony between cognitive elements- such as opinions, attitudes, knowledge and values- can lead to the pressure to resolve or reduce any present dissonance through change in one of the elements by adding new ones or decreasing the importance of others (*Ibid.*: 18-22). In the case of married women's autonomy, some women's definitions and reflections on the importance of autonomy in their lives might be affected by gender stereotypes on the female role in the family. For example, in order to reduce cognitive

dissonance that results from traditional expectations of gender roles within the family and a woman's hopes for a career outside of the house, a woman may give up/postpone her career plans in order to attend to her family while adopting more traditional views that do not consider her action to be a sacrifice, but rather a duty.

Finally, a concept that was not employed prior to entering the field, but was used afterwards, is individual agency. I draw on agency to analyze the different definitions of married women autonomy. While doing so, I have presented the several expressions of individual agency provided by respondents in order to help construct the different frames of autonomy intended by this thesis. On such terms, I have not investigated individual agency in its abstract sense, but rather as it applied to the everyday life of Egyptian married women, based on women's actions and responsibilities.

Literature Review

A recent study on gender-role attitudes among Egyptian adolescents (Mensch et al. 2003) has revealed that both girls and boys in Egypt have a traditional view on the roles of women and men. The survey collected data on girls and boy's education, work roles, daily activities, and asked those aged 16 and older questions, amongst which were their preferred gender roles within marriage (Mensch et al. 2003: 13). A gap in gender role attitudes was observed between girls and boys. For example, in relation to girls and boys' preferences for their future spouses, results showed that girls mostly preferred someone with a strong character, of a good nature, wealthy or with a good job, and who would treat them well. Boys, on the other hand, preferred someone from a good family

who is well mannered, religious and ‘virtuous’ (*Ibid.*). The discrepancy in girls and boys’ preferences for their future spouses indicate their compliance with the expected roles in their adulthood that is “men are providers and women are nurturers” (*Ibid.*). Moreover, in terms of decision-making, while girls are more likely than boys to support a mutual exchange of opinion between their future spouses and themselves, as well as having a share in decision-making in matters such as spending and childbearing, the majority of both girls and boys expressed their belief that a husband’s permission is needed for everything (*Ibid.*: 13-14). Such results provide evidence of a lack of ‘re-definition’ of gender roles in the Egyptian society, as was urged by Hatem (1987), who declared the challenge for the Egyptian family in the ‘future’ to be “the renegotiation of gender relations between men and women” (Hatem, 1987: 301). Hatem’s declaration followed her attempt to explain the psychodynamic of gender relations in patriarchal societies, where mothers react to the sex differences of their children according to the patriarchal definitions of gender in society, which are then transmitted to the children as their “gender expectations” (*Ibid.*: 299).

On a different- but also relevant- level, a study on women’s tolerance of their domestication (Poloma and Garland, 1971) has investigated the relationship between marriage and discrimination between men and women in the U.S.A. Although this is not a recent study, the importance of its findings cannot be overlooked. Also, it is particularly critical to the insights of this thesis because it introduces a concept that I have called ‘disguised autonomy’ - as will be explained below- which constitutes one of the frames of autonomy established by this thesis. Most women in the study made the decision that

their husbands' career was more important than their own. Women in many occasions made the choice of quitting their jobs to relocate with the husband because of his career demands, or accepting low-paying jobs since the husband is perceived as the sole/main breadwinner; even if the woman is paid full-time, her pay is either used for luxuries- such as having better vacations, the interior decoration of the house or getting the kids into better schools- or it is saved exclusively for the woman's leisure (Poloma and Garland, 1971: 535, 537-538). Also, many women made decisions about interrupting their careers for years when their children were young, or choosing a part-time job to attend to their family, which prevented them from having a career that required professional commitment and sequel development (*Ibid.*: 538). Moreover, some women made the decision to sacrifice their chance of a higher position because it required more responsibilities and interfered with their perceived familial obligations. As a result, some women's absence in the professional ladder made them reluctant to acknowledge discrimination between them and their male counterparts because women did not consider themselves as equally involved professionally (*Ibid.*). In relation to Egyptian married women's definition of autonomy and their position in the family, Poloma and Garland's account sheds the light on some important element to be considered in the thesis in hand, which is the 'disguised autonomy'. By this I mean that although a woman may feel autonomous and share in the decision-making process in the family, the decisions she shares in making follow some already set rules and/or regulations that are bound to her husband's decisions or her familial circumstances/affiliations. Thus, under 'disguised autonomy' married women may feel autonomous, not recognizing the ways in

which their autonomy is expressed in the roles and/or decisions that follow those already set forth by the husband.

In Egypt, studies on women's autonomy, such as that of Nawar et al. (Obermeyer, 1995)¹ and Kishor (1995) address Egyptian married women's autonomy and decision-making within the family, women's freedom of movement (Kishor, 1995), as well as the various dimensions of women's personal autonomy (Obermeyer, 1995). Different levels of autonomy, as stated by Rugh (1984) both in the domestic and non-domestic spheres are a natural result of the differences between women in their level of education, socio-economic status, exposure to non-traditional thinking, as well as kinship arrangements (As cited in Kishor, 1995: 1). Furthermore, modernization and cultural influences can impact a woman directly through her characteristics and indirectly through the characteristics of both her household and her husband (*Ibid.*: 5). Research has shown that modernization influences- such as industrialization, urbanization, the increased access to education and exposure to mass media- can have a role in changing the woman's idea on her role in decision-making (*Ibid.*: 6, 28-29). According to Nawar et al.,

The concept of personal autonomy is multifaceted, encompassing elements of individual temperament, past experience, and social conditioning. Autonomy is likewise displayed in a variety of contexts,

¹ This study was initially presented as a paper at the 1994 Population Council Symposium on Family, Gender and Population Policy: International Debates on Middle Eastern Realities, Cairo (Govindasamy and Malhotra, 1996: 143).

ranging from decision-making within the family to personal independence of judgment and action (Obermeyer, 1995:151).

The above statement indicates that a married woman's autonomy will not only be affected by her character, her experience in life, and her circumstances, but also by her decision-making ability within her family- or lack thereof, the importance she places on such ability, and her individual practices of whether or not she takes responsibility for her own self and actions- such as in terms of employment, earnings, choosing friends, etc. Moreover, considering that economic and institutional systems, social norms, and personal interconnections all affect human behavior, achieving autonomy, with its various levels, is thus conditional on a person's social context (Kishor, 1995: 152).

In 2008, the Egypt Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS)² introduced a nationally representative sample of 16,527 ever married women: currently married, widowed, divorced, and separated, at the age of 15-49 years (El-Zanaty and Ann, 2009: 3). Amongst these women, around 93 percent were currently married, about 80 percent were between 25-49 years of age, almost 17 percent were living in urban governorates- Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said and Suez, and about 44 percent with secondary or higher education (*Ibid.*: 28). In relation to the thesis in hand, this survey provided information on the decision making process within the household in areas such as women's own health,

² This survey is the ninth demographic and health survey conducted Egypt to "provide estimates for key population indicators including fertility, contraceptive use, infant and child mortality, immunization levels, coverage of antenatal and delivery care, maternal and child health, and nutrition" (El Zanaty and Way, 2009: xxiii).

large household purchases, daily household purchases, and visits to friends or relatives (*Ibid.*: 41). Table 3.12 exhibited the following. Concerning household chores, over a third of the women made decisions concerning daily household purchases alone, while another third made decisions jointly with the husband. In relation to large household purchases, almost half of the women made decisions jointly with the husband, while over a third stated that their husbands made such decisions alone. In terms of women's own health, around a quarter of the women made decisions on their own, while over a half of them made decisions jointly with their husbands. As for visits to family or friends, over two thirds of the women made decisions jointly with their husbands, while less than a quarter stated that decisions were made by only the husband, and even a smaller number of women made such decisions alone (*Ibid.*). These findings demonstrate the level of women's participation in household decision making, and hence some aspects of their autonomy. It must be noted, however, that there are other aspects of married women's autonomy that include her ability to make decisions in relation to her family as well as her self. Such aspects include, but are not limited to, her ability to work, to share in household expenses- or not, to be exposed to the world- directly through connecting with people or indirectly through the media, to decide on issues related to her children's health- such as circumcision, education, labor, and marriage.

In light of the previous discussion, the thesis in hand acknowledges Egyptian married women's differences in education, socio-economic background, and life experiences as the main factors affecting women's sense of autonomy, or lack thereof. Nevertheless, in order to reach a more comprehensive view on married women's

autonomy, as opposed to views of women from certain educational or socio- economic backgrounds, this thesis takes into account the differences between women while seeking their definitions of autonomy. Furthermore, this thesis contributes to family and women studies in Egypt through connecting between women's conceptualizations of their autonomy and their situation in society. The frames constructed by this thesis will show the consistency- or lack thereof, between women's perceptions of autonomy and the roles defined for them by the society, which leads to understanding more about the nature of women's situation in Egypt today and its possible effect on the future.

Methodology

It must be noted that this study aims at constructing a conceptual framework of Egyptian women's perceptions of autonomy. It does not, however, aim at measuring married women's autonomy. For this reason, although determinants that shape/help shape a woman's autonomy- such as her education, employment status, her children's age and the husband's character and his job requirements will be incorporated into the data analysis according to the definitions of autonomy given by Egyptian married women selected for the research, such determinants will not be used to compare between the different levels of autonomy that women have. The frames suggested in this thesis are drawn from the data collected through in-depth interviewing and one focus group with self-identified Egyptian married women, who currently live in Egypt. Residence in Egypt is mandatory because this thesis deals with married women's autonomy within an Egyptian context. Also, only women whose husbands are present- as opposed to residing abroad- were considered for this thesis in order to give way for the husband's role in

those women's definition of autonomy. Moreover, for reasons related to examining the effect of married women's perceptions of autonomy on future generations, only women within the age group of 25 to 50 years will be selected for interviewing because they constitute the majority of mothers for today's children and adolescents, and tomorrow's parents.

Face-to-face interviewing was selected because it was expected, according to pretests, that interviewees will want to know more about the topic before answering personal questions such as their relation with their husbands and their familial circumstances. Also, face-to-face interviewing allows for nuanced responses about complex social phenomenon such as autonomy. Furthermore, face-to-face interviewing helps build trust between the interviewer and the respondent, which paves the way for asking follow up questions as well as acquiring information that help rationalize the respondents' answers according to their lifestyle, circumstances and environment. For this purpose, a list of questions was prepared to guide the process of question and answer including questions on the woman's background, family structure, power differentials within her family, and her definition of autonomy and how it is expressed in her everyday life (check Appendix A for the English version and Appendix B for the Arabic version).

Case studies have also been conducted on women with regards to their perception of autonomy in relation to their situation and circumstances. These case studies helped compose a more specific view on the subject matter through giving personal accounts

that reflect the reality of the situation through the eyes of those living it. These case studies provided examples on the insights of this thesis.

While selection was according to availability of subjects, mobile subjects- such as women on the street, in public transportation or in shopping malls- have been excluded because participants need to be at ease while answering questions about themselves and their family; and the estimated time for each interview, according to pretests, varied between 20 to 45 minutes. As a result, finding research participants was limited to the researcher's accessibility to certain public and private spaces, such as social clubs, and workplaces, especially private institutions. Purposive selection, based on the researcher's judgment, was also used for optimization of results. For example, married women with their spouses present were not selected because women may not be entirely at ease, or have not given complete answers on questions pertaining to their marital life in front of their husbands.

Snowball sampling was also used in order to find more respondents who matched the criteria for sampling. By snowball sampling I mean finding potential participants via asking the respondents to suggest more women for interviewing. Snowball sampling has proven to be effective particularly at a later phase of the interviewing process, as will be further elaborated on in the following chapter. Moreover, a group discussion was conducted with five women discussing married women's autonomy in general and their situations in particular. The group discussion did not follow the set of questions prepared for face-to-face interviews; instead, an open discussion was conducted while I played the

role of the moderator. Further information on the group discussion will also be provided in the following chapter.

The analysis of data for this thesis sought meaning in women's responses to the interview questions; and because the sample population was constituted of twenty five women, the analysis of data presented matches the aim of the thesis, namely, discovering different women's approaches both toward their personal and familial lives through investigating and unveiling the different meanings of autonomy in those women's lives. Moreover, in reference to Ambert et al. on qualitative research, the research methods used here have been "sensitive to the cultural distinctiveness of families and their diverse definitions, meanings, and subjective experiences of family life and the social, economic, and political environments in which they live" (Amber, Anne-Marie et al., 1995: 882). By this I mean that the insights provided by this thesis as a result of analyzing the acquired data are based on careful consideration of the different experiences of research participants as well as the various roles they play, the power differentials within their family, and how they construct their realities. Achieving such consideration has been through evaluating women's responses on the different interview questions as well as the accounts they have given on their lives during the interview. Through investigation the notion of autonomy, women's responses to the interview questions have revealed the dynamics of women's relations both with themselves and with their family. Such responses were thus used to construct the different frames of autonomy presented in this thesis.

Human Subjects Considerations

Participation in the research was completely voluntary; there was no compensation for participation. Selection depended on the researcher's ability to approach people who are not on the move, either in public or private areas, where people would not feel uncomfortable while being interviewed. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the expected duration of the interview (20-45 minutes), and they were asked permission to be interviewed. Major key terms regarding the study were explained; namely, Egyptian married women's autonomy and the different definitions attributed to it. Respondents were not asked to provide their full name, in order to protect their confidentiality. Also, for the purpose of keeping participants away from any harm, particularly psychologically in the case of this research- through revealing information that may not make them comfortable, they were notified of the kind of information they would be asked about throughout the interview in relation to autonomy and their familial circumstances and they were notified of the possibility to withdraw from the interview if/when they please.

Participants expressed their consent orally; no Informed Consent Form was handed to the participants in order to maintain an informal setting where they will be comfortable both with themselves and with the interview process, without worrying about giving their names or signatures to the researcher. A recording device was available with the researcher and participants were asked permission to use it; in some cases,

participants denied permission to use the recording device, so writing notes was taken instead to preserve the spontaneity between participants and researcher.

Research findings will be shared with participants, upon their request. The researcher's contacts were provided when needed in order for participants to follow up on the research process or provide further information on their situation. No potential risk, other than psychological as mentioned above, was anticipated, as the participants do not constitute a vulnerable group, nor are the questions to be investigated of a particularly sensitive nature.

Research Significance

A woman's conceptualization of her autonomy can project an image of the woman's personal experience and the balance of power within her household. It can also feature the woman's understanding of autonomy and the boundaries of her responsibilities and capabilities inside and outside of the household. The proposed study explores women's understanding of autonomy in the Egyptian marital setting. It does not, however, seek to draw a cross-cultural comparison between these women and their counterparts in other societies. This thesis aims at constructing frames that convey the different conceptualizations of women's autonomy presented by Egyptian married women themselves.

While collecting data, attention was paid to women's indication of their positions in the family and in society, through providing questions on women's familial circumstances, their relationship with their husband and children and the effect of their

exposure to the world- or lack thereof. The woman's exposure to the world, either through the media or through participating in discursive activities outside of the household, and the woman's self-worth will demonstrate her belief in her capabilities or lack thereof. Also, it is necessary to consider the woman's circumstances and environment when rationalizing her perception of autonomy and how it relates to her everyday life in order for the results of this thesis not to be (mis)lead by general perceptions that lack applicability.

Prior to conducting the fieldwork, the insights of research, were expected to lead only to two frames of autonomy. The first frame was expected to reflect 'disguised autonomy', where married women's autonomy is restrained by what the society has to offer them and where autonomy is defined according to the influence of hegemonic norms of society on women's socialization. Disguised autonomy reflects the woman's belief that she is part of the decision making process while her decisions fall under the bigger frame of the husband's influence and choices. The second frame was expected to reflect a 'progressive autonomy' where the woman is able to take decisions for her life and future- apart from her family- such as being employed, continuing education, and changing her job/career. Also, the woman can share in the decision making for her family in areas such as health, education, labor and marriage. Furthermore, prior to the fieldwork, such frames were expected to be derived from women's definitions of autonomy. However, after analyzing the data, the different frames of autonomy were established through participants' responses on the various interview questions, especially that some participants have defined autonomy in its ideal sense as opposed to how it is

applied to their lives, which created contradictions between women's situations and their definition of autonomy and, thus, constructing the different frames of autonomy could not depend on the participants' definitions alone.

After conducting the fieldwork, three more frames were founded alongside the two mentioned frames; these frames are 'subordination by consent', 'restrained autonomy', and 'radical autonomy'. Under 'subordination by consent', the woman willingly submits to the husband following her preset ideas on the role of the male as the head of the household. Under this frame, women are followers by choice; they abide by the traditional societal expectations that guide them through being under the authority of the husband. While women's autonomy might be considered restrained under this frame, the other frame 'restrained autonomy' is different in terms of the woman's rejection of her situation. Nevertheless, the woman is unable to create change and she adapts to her circumstances. Under 'restrained autonomy', the woman does not abide by the husband's rule by consent; she is rather urged to do so for reasons such as the survival of the family. The final frame 'radical autonomy' depicts the kind of autonomy where the woman makes her own decisions and abides neither by the husband's rule, nor her familial circumstances. Under this frame, the woman makes decisions on the expense of her household or family responsibility.

Such frames are the contribution of this thesis; they provide manifestations of Egyptian married women's autonomy as the research data suggest, and as autonomy is

embedded in the participants' lives, which is indicated in their responses throughout the interview process.

Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Having introduced the research problem, background, theoretical framework, methodology and significance in this chapter, the order of the following chapters is as follows. Chapter two will demonstrate the methods used in the field as well as analyze the acquired data through presenting the different research variables and making relations between them while giving examples from the collected data. Chapter three will introduce the different definitions of autonomy provided by respondents and make connections between the theoretical framework employed and women's definitions of autonomy. Chapter four will present the contribution of this thesis represented in the five frames of Egyptian married women's autonomy, as the data has indicated. In that chapter, cases studies will be used to support each frame. Finally, chapter five, the concluding chapter, will entail the fieldwork challenges, limitation, a summary of the main points of the thesis as well as future research implications.

II

FIELDWORK DESCRIPTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the research methods and the data acquired in the field; it is both descriptive and analytical. The first part of the chapter describes all aspects related to the field such as the selection process, the sample population, the interview process, the nature of questions and the research variables. The description provided in the first part of the chapter paves the way for understanding the thesis outcome. The second part analyzes the data in relation to the research problem and makes relations between the different variables and women's responses regarding autonomy.

Methods Used

Face-to-face interviewing was the method I used in the field after conducting a pilot study which indicated that this strategy was an effective approach for nuanced responses and follow up questions. When introducing the topic to my interviewees, it was mostly met with a laugh or a smile, and sometimes with a comment indicating their familiarity with the topic. Most of the women I approached showed willingness to answer the interview questions.

Participants were chosen according to the convenience of the situation. By this I mean that while seeking women for my interviews, my intention was to find women who were not in the company of their husbands in order for them to have the freedom they needed while answering the interview questions without reservations. However, two interviews were for a couple of female friends whose husbands joined the interview after it had started and showed complete eagerness to participate and to know more about the questions asked while giving their wives space for answering the interview questions on their own without particular interference or the curiosity to listen to every answer or detail. But this was not always the case; one of the situations I faced was approaching a woman and asking for her consent to be interviewed, and after her consent was granted and the interview had begun, her husband joined the setting and, despite the open-mindedness that he tried to convey, his wife appeared uncomfortable and she answered the remainder of the questions with brevity, especially after the husband started mocking some of her answers or answering some of the questions instead of her.

I also interviewed a small number of friends and acquaintances with varying situations, who matched the criteria for sampling, while bearing in mind the

similarity/difference between their educational and socio-economic backgrounds in order not to be biased toward a specific category of women. Moreover, in the field, I selected women from different social, economic and educational backgrounds; so, finding research interviewees was not limited to one place in an effort to seek respondents from a variety of circumstances. Moreover, I visited each place at different days and times, seeking as diverse a sample population as possible. Places visited include the Shooting Club in Dokki, Al Shams Club in Heliopolis, and the American University in Cairo in Katameya. While participants at the Shooting Club and Al Shams Club were mainly members or visitors of the clubs, participants at the American University in Cairo worked there, and were either staff members or had janitorial positions. When meeting friends, acquaintances or friends of friends for interviewing, the interview either took place at their home or at a public place like a coffee shop.

Acquiring a collaborator was necessary at times to establish trust between the respondents and myself and to pave the way for follow up interviewing when needed. In such cases, the collaborator was a woman who knew the respondent, introduced her to me and sometimes sat in during the interview. I had two collaborators, one of them I met at the American University in Cairo as a potential respondent but she was not married and she offered her help to introduce me to her married friends. The other collaborator was a friend whose niece matched the criteria for sampling. When the collaborator joined the interview setting, respondents were encouraged by the collaborator to answer questions about their lives and circumstances and also to allow me to record the interview, except for one case where both the collaborator and the respondent preferred to take notes instead of recording the interview for the sake of protecting the confidentiality of the

respondent. With that particular interviewee, I had asked to meet her after hearing about her life and circumstances from her aunt, the collaborator, who then arranged for our meeting at the aunt's place, which added more confidence both to the respondent and myself during the interview.

The interviews took place where the participants worked, where they socialized or where they lived. My approach to women was the same in terms of introducing the subject and purpose of research and the nature of questions. I strived to create a friendly environment for the participants in order to find an easy access to their lives and situations. Although some women were more willing to provide information on their families and elaborate on their situations than others, almost all women were eager to participate in the interview. The time for each interview differed from one woman to the other, ranging from twenty to forty five minutes, depending on where the interview took place (in the work place or at the social club), the time the woman could spare for participation in the interview, the woman's interest in answering the questions, and her eagerness to talk more about her circumstances or about autonomy in general.

Additionally, a discussion group was arranged with five women friends whom I had access to through a collaborator, who was the sister of one of the five women, and who had helped me arrange the group with her sister (whom I had not met before the discussion group). The discussion group was held at Al Shams Club, where the group was already gathering one afternoon. When I arrived at the group's table, the five women were sitting in a group of two and three. I was told later on that two of the five women were new to the group, as they were friends with only one of the women while they didn't know the other two quite well. At the beginning of the discussion, women showed

some degree of reservation in answering questions. Nevertheless, as time went by, they were more willing to share information on their lives and to elaborate on their different experiences with their families. I started the discussion by introducing the theme and purpose of my research. I then answered questions from the five women on my degree and reasons behind investigating women's autonomy. After giving me their consent to be interviewed, I tried to follow the list of questions I had prepared but such strategy failed as women started revealing different scenarios in their lives and responding to each other's experiences. The five women were of different stages of their married lives; the range between the years of marriage among the five women was from seven to seventeen years. The discussion lasted around two hours; and although the discussion group did not conform entirely to the list of questions prepared for the interview, the discussion ranged between women's autonomy, their roles in the family, their household responsibility, their relationship with their husbands and children, and their perception of themselves and their situation. While I used my tape recorder during the discussion, I also took notes.

During the group discussion, I took the role of the moderator, giving space for each woman to express her opinion and share her situation with the other women. Several issues were raised during the discussion, such as the importance of work in a married woman's life, where two women were in favor of working outside of the house while three women acknowledged their heavy loads inside of the household, which has kept their minds off seeking employment. Moreover, during the discussion, the five women agreed to a point raised by one of them indicating that "there is no one good example of an ideal wife"; this point was raised in support of the idea that a married woman needs to adapt to her circumstances and plan her life according both to what she wants and what

her circumstances can offer her. I found this point particularly interesting because it has helped me not to seek an ‘ideal’ pattern of women’s behavior, but rather one that resembles how women deal with their everyday life and how they adjust themselves to their circumstances (or attempt to change such circumstances). Another interesting point that was raised during the discussion was the familial bond; this point will be explained in the following chapter while elaborating on the importance of autonomy in a married woman’s life.

At the end of the discussion, and as three women had left the table, the remaining two women stated that the group discussion had brought them closer to each other, as it allowed them to share their experiences and situations. After the group discussion was ended, I contacted one of the women again for an in-depth interview, as she had offered to provide me with a more detailed view on her situation. The group discussion took place at a later stage of the fieldwork; had there been more time, more groups could have been arranged, but due to the time limitation, only this group was conducted.

The Nature of Questions

The list of questions prepared for the interview covered a range of topics in a woman’s life. It started with questions on the woman’s background- in terms of education, place of residence during childhood, employment status, and source(s) of income. Then, the questions addressed the woman’s definition of autonomy and its importance and potential impact on married women’s lives. After that, the questions focused on the decisions taken within the woman’s household concerning herself and her family and whether such decisions were taken by her, by the husband or by both the

husband and wife, the differences the woman perceives between herself and her mother as a married woman, and the effect of her situation in the family on her children now and/or in the future. Finally the interview closed with hypothetical scenarios that women would reflect upon regarding different situations that women could face. Such scenarios were helpful in expressing the woman's position on certain matters that she had not clearly stated or elaborated on at an earlier phase of the interview.

The questions employed are mostly derived from the pilot study which was conducted few months earlier with fifteen participants. The pilot study was significant as it helped me form the list of questions that I used during the actual research. While many questions used in the pilot study were integrated in the actual interviews, several questions that were not previously asked during the pilot study were used as a result of follow up questions and some of the answers that have shed the light on different areas of women's lives. Examples of such questions include reasons behind unemployment for women who are not working outside of the house, whether autonomy is restrained, decision making within the household on matters relating to the woman and the family, the similarities and/or differences between the woman's situation in her family and her mother's, and women's reflections on the hypothetical scenarios.

Research Variables

The size of the population sample was twenty five women who currently reside in Egypt, and whose husbands are present, as opposed to residing abroad. This number was reached according to the responses given by women to the interview questions; when the responses provided became redundant, suggesting that the range of variation in women's

understandings of autonomy had already been sufficiently explored, I decided to move on to the data analysis phase.

There were seven independent variables that I had expected to influence women's answers on questions concerning the definition of autonomy, whether autonomy is important, whether autonomy is restrained, how those women see themselves and their situations compared to their mothers as married women, and whether or not those women's situations in the family affect their children. The seven variables were: age, woman's education, husband's education, city/country of residence in the first fifteen to twenty years of a woman's life, a woman's employment status, financial (in)dependence, and having children. Therefore, I will present the sample population according to the seven independent variables as follows:

Age: I chose women between the age of twenty five and fifty because they constitute the majority of mothers for today's children and tomorrow's parents. Thus, women were neither too young (that is younger than twenty one), nor too old to be mothers for young children (that is generally over fifty). Among the twenty five women, eight were in their mid and late twenties, thirteen in their thirties, three in their forties, and one in her fifties.

Education: While I had not held it as an *a priori* that a woman's educational background would affect her insights on the definition of autonomy and its importance in a married woman's life, I have considered it as a factor that would affect my participants' responses. Among the twenty five women, one woman was illiterate, one had a high school diploma, one graduated from an institute, one dropped out from college, fifteen

were university graduates (including one who was finishing her university degree), and six had a master's degree (including three who were finishing their degrees)

Husbands' educational background: I also investigated the husbands' educational background to give way for any influence that the husbands' educational background might have on women's lives and/or responses. One woman's husband had preliminary education, three had a high school diploma (including one who was working on his diploma) fifteen were university graduates, two had a master degree, four had a PhD (including two who were working on their degrees).

Woman's city/country of residence during the first fifteen to twenty years of her life: in order to investigate the role of the environment in affecting the way a woman's character and network of beliefs are formed, I considered the place where the woman had spent the first fifteen to twenty years of her life, which may or may not have an effect in her responses, and which will show in the relations section later on. Amongst the twenty five women, fifteen spent the first fifteen to twenty years of their lives in Cairo, two spent them in other governorates in Egypt, four went on short visits abroad, three spent all or long periods of those years entirely abroad in some Arab country and one woman did not indicate precisely.

Employment status: in terms of employment status, ten women worked outside of the house, one worked as a freelancer, and fourteen did not work outside of the house, including one who was on an unpaid leave.

Financial (in)dependence: considering that financial (in)dependence is a factor that can have an influence on a woman's attitude inside her family, nine (working) women

depended both on their salaries and their husbands financially, and two (working) women did not depend on their husbands at all but rather their work alone. Also, six (unemployed) women fully depended on their husbands financially, seven (unemployed) women depended on their husbands and other resources such as bank investment and own family, and one (unemployed) woman depended entirely on her own financial resources.

Having children: in terms of having children, twenty two of the twenty five women had children while three women did not have any children. Although two of these women who had no children were in their mid twenties and had been married from a few months to a couple of years, the third was in her thirties and had been married for over seven years. As for the number of children that the other women had, four women had one child, nine had two children, seven had three children, one had four children and one did not indicate.

The above variables will be used in the following section to analyze women's situations and find out the different determinants that can affect their autonomy. Finding out whether or not there are relations between the seven mentioned variables and women's responses on the importance of autonomy, whether or not autonomy is restrained, how women see themselves in comparison with their mothers as married women and whether or not women's situation in the family affects their children is what the following section will discuss.

Relations and Analysis

Due to the ethical responsibility I had toward the women I interviewed in terms of protecting their confidentiality, all participants were given fictitious names. Also, throughout this section and what follows, the data acquired in the field, represented in participants' responses, will be presented with the honesty and precision that would express their situations as revealed through the information they had provided on their lives.

This section establishes connections between women's descriptions of their situations and autonomy-related questions. Regarding women's definitions of autonomy, they will be discussed in the following chapter. Also, in terms of women's responses on whether they are autonomous or not, such responses depended on women's initial definition of autonomy. For example, a woman who saw herself autonomous may define autonomy as the woman's ability to make decision concerning her family, her ability to do whatever she pleases behind her husband's back, or her ability to have a life of her own apart from being a wife and mother (through work, friends, hobbies, etc.). Thus, women's responses to whether or not they are autonomous did not relate to any of the previously mentioned variables, but rather with how they perceived autonomy. Therefore, women's responses to whether or not they are autonomous will not be stressed upon since it does not contribute to the outcome of the thesis. Below are the possible relations between the independent variables and women's responses regarding autonomy (check appendix C for tables).

Whether or not autonomy is important

According to my data, no particular variable had a specific influence on women from different ages, backgrounds, employment status, etc., when deciding whether or not autonomy is important in a married woman's life, twenty women believed autonomy was important, one believed autonomy was somewhat important, three indicated that autonomy should be limited, while one woman simply stated that autonomy cannot be achieved. The answers provided by women on the respective question depended on their initial definition of autonomy and power differentials within their household. For example, from two women who associated autonomy with the freedom of choice, one considered autonomy to be unnecessary because making decisions, according to her, was the husband's role, while the other woman considered it to be necessity in a married woman's life because it is up to the woman to make her own choices.

The three women who stated that autonomy should be limited worked outside of the house; one was illiterate, one had a high school diploma, while one, Radwa, had a university degree specializing in English literature. Radwa is thirty-three-year-old, works outside of the house as an interpreter and depends financially both on her husband and her own salary. Radwa indicated that the man was more knowledgeable than the woman who is innocent and doesn't know much about life. Radwa works outside of the house despite her husband's opinion, who considers working outside of the house to be unnecessary; according to her, work adds to her character and she manages to keep her work despite several inconveniences that face her every once in a while.

Samira is forty years of age, works outside of the house as a school section head, depends financially on her salary alone, and considers the woman's strength to lie in her weakness in front of her husband. Although Samira considers married women autonomy to be important, she believes that abiding by the husband is a woman's obligation. Samira's situation, expresses the dichotomy between a married woman's perception of herself as a person and her situation as a married woman. Samira sees herself as an achieved prestigious person whose children are proud of; nevertheless, when it comes to her husband, she stated that her husband must have the final say, as it satisfies her as a woman and makes her feel supported by her man.

Ghada is thirty years old; she graduated from the institute of secretariat, does not work outside of the house and lives with her second husband, on whom she totally depends financially. Ghada believes that autonomy is somewhat important in a woman's life because it is necessary for the woman to have important things in life other than her household and family responsibilities; on such terms, Ghada stressed on the importance of having friends in her life. Concerning the decision making process, Ghada stated that in some cases the woman needs to make decisions concerning her children, but when in most cases, the decision making process is the responsibility of the father.

Whether or not autonomy is restrained

In terms of whether or not married women's autonomy is restrained, my data suggests that no particular variable had a specific influence on women. Twenty women believed autonomy is restrained, while four stated that such restrains are relative from one woman's situation to another, and one, Laila, ruled out the possibility of any existent

autonomy in a married woman's life. Laila is thirty nine years old, has a university degree specializing in fine arts, does not work outside of the house, totally depends on her husband financially and has three children. Laila believes that motherhood is all about sacrifice; she stated that a married woman cannot be autonomous because "the part mixes with the whole and blends into it". Such statement expresses Laila's opinion on what it is like to be a married woman. There was no bitterness in Laila's voice when she talked about her situation; her voice was rather filled with confidence and acceptance of her status quo as she stated what seemed more to her to be 'facts' rather than perceptions.

Concerning the women who believed that married women's autonomy is restrained, the restraints they mentioned varied between the husband, societal rules and expectations, and the family responsibility. One woman, Dalia, mentioned the psychological restraints resulting from the differentiation between the man and the woman in society by imposing the image of the man as head of the family. Dalia is twenty five years old, has a master's degree in sociology-anthropology, has one daughter and she depends financially both on her husband and her own resources. According to Dalia, such socially imposed psychological restraints do not affect her or her husband because they are both 'open-minded'. Dalia spent the first sixteen years of her life in Cairo with continuous visits abroad then she resided in the States from the age seventeen to twenty one. Dalia considers the importance of a married woman's autonomy to lie in its effect on the woman's well being and the way she raises her children. Dalia's display of her awareness of her situation was remarkable. She portrays the image of a woman who embraces her individuality as well as her womanhood.

Another woman, Yosra, indicated the importance of a woman's ability to do whatever she wants in a manner that would not be interpreted as 'manly' because of the nature of society that poses restraints on married woman. For this reason, according to Yosra, some women do whatever they please discreetly. Yosra is fifty years old, she works as a freelance architect, has three children and she depends financially both on her husband and her income. Yosra did not consider autonomy to be all advantageous, as she stressed on the importance of the family in a married woman's life, which indicated her belief that a married woman's autonomy can be contradicting to family. Her husband, according to Yosra, gives her the freedom to do what she likes as long as it does not contradict with her household and family responsibility. Yosra believed that whether or not married women's autonomy is restrained differs from one woman to another according to the husband's character and whether or not he is domineering.

How the women see themselves in comparison with their mothers as married women

The comparison between how women perceived themselves in comparison to their mothers related to how women saw themselves as married women and how they understood their situation as well as their perception of their power both inside and outside of the household. From the twenty five women, two saw themselves completely similar to their mothers in terms of their situation in the family, fifteen saw themselves completely different, six found some similarities and differences between their mothers and themselves, while two women's cases did not apply to the question due to the death of a parent. The majority of those who considered themselves to be different from their mothers were university graduates and their husbands had a university degree; in terms of employment status, half of those who worked believed they were different, while nine out

of fourteen non-working women believed they were different. Concerning the two women who saw themselves completely similar to their mothers, one of them worked outside of the house, Hend, while the other did not work outside of the house (Laila).

Hend is thirty years old, has a high school diploma and holds a janitorial job. She has worked for about twelve years, for financial needs; hadn't there been the financial necessity, according to Hend, she wouldn't have worked outside of the house. Hend exhibited awareness of her situation as a 'working-class' woman; she differentiated herself from other women who work for reasons other than the finances. Hend depends mainly on her own salary but also depends on her husband's income for some of her expenses. When it comes to decision making, according to Hend, she trusts her husband's decisions, as he has better judgments. Hend's expression on the similarity between her mother and herself was "as if the days repeat themselves". Hend's mother also works outside of the house and her luck in marriage, according to Hend, was just as Hend's- which means that she wouldn't have to work if she had been 'luckier'.

One of the women who consider themselves to be different from their mothers, Soha, is also thirty years old; she has an MBA and is currently on an unpaid leave from her administrative job. Soha indicated that the difference between her mother and herself is due to the 'freedom' that women in the past (represented in her mother) had, as opposed to women today. Soha criticized the conservative thinking present within her generation that is, according to Soha, differs from her mothers'. Soha differentiated between the husband's solidarity in making decisions and the dominance of such decisions. Meaning, she stated that "the husband should not make all decisions alone, but his decisions may have more dominance over the woman's."

Arwa, who finds both similarities and differences between her mother and herself is twenty six years old who is currently working on her master's degree specializing in economics in international development. Arwa depends financially both on her husband and her own resources and does not have children yet. Arwa justified her decision not to work outside of the house until she finishes her degree with her desire not to take further responsibilities that might lead her to compromise her roles both as a wife and a student. Arwa emphasized the role played by a woman's psychology in the stability of the family; on such matter, she stated that when a woman feels comfortable with herself, it is reflected positively on both the husband and the wife. Concerning the similarities between her mother and herself, Arwa stated that she is as devoted to her house and husband as her mother. However, Arwa added, she wouldn't give in completely to her married life the way her mother has done; for that, Arwa takes advantage of her husband's support for anything she may want that would not conflict with his needs or with the house responsibility.

Whether or not women's situation in the family affects their children:

Last but not least, in terms of women's responses concerning their belief in whether or not their situation in the family affects their children, of the twenty two women who had children, twenty women indicated their belief in the mother's impact on the children; nevertheless, not all of them indicated the importance of the woman's autonomy on the formation of the children's characters and/or identities. Only nine of the twenty women indicated that the woman's responsibility, image and autonomy affect the children's growing identities; while the other eleven referred generally to the mother's inevitable impact on her children, whether positively or negatively. Out of the remainder

two women who had children, one did not see that her situation in the family affects her children because they are still in their early childhood years, while another, Sherifa, indicated that one of her major impacts over her children should be represented in her continuous attempts to keep the image of the father as the head of the household. Two variables affected women's answers, namely, employment status and financial (in)dependence. Six out of ten women who worked outside of the house referred to woman's responsibility, image and autonomy as impacting the children's growing identities. Also, four women out of seven who depended financially on their husbands and their own salary, three out of seven who depended on their husbands and other resources, and the two women who depended financially on their work alone mentioned woman's responsibility, image and autonomy as influencing the children's growing identities.

Sherifa expressed her belief that the father should continue to be viewed as the head of the household so as to provide what she viewed as a 'proper' role model for children. Sherifa is thirty five years old, has a master's degree (while pregnancy and children prevented her from pursuing her PhD), has four children, works as a graphic designer, and depends financially both on her husband and her own salary. Sherifa stressed on the importance of children's finding their idol in the male- that is the father, who is also the head of the household. Sherifa achieves her purpose by always having her children get back to the father instead of herself for decisions concerning their lives. Sherifa's situation shows the dichotomy between the woman's role in the family and her pre-set ideas on the role of the father. To elaborate, while sherifa willingly took an inferior role in the family to that of her husband, she made sure that her children

supported such setting by referring to their father instead of her in matters concerning decision making.

On the other hand, Lydia, a twenty-nine-year-old mother of one daughter, has just started her master's degree specializing in psychology, works outside of the house in a secretarial position and depends financially both on her husband and her own salary. Lydia believes that her personality affects her daughter's, whom she believes will grow to be proud of her mother and will want to be like her; but, according to Lydia, she will encourage her daughter to be stronger than she is. Lydia stated that in her life, she has nothing that belongs completely to her except her studies; and although she has decided to postpone studying for her degree at the time being, she wishes to get back to it the following academic year. Lydia's husband supports her work, although she stated that if she went back in time, she wouldn't have worked in order to have more time to spend taking care of her daughter.

An example of a woman's belief in the general impact she has on her children is Amina, a forty-six-year-old mother of three children who does not work outside of the house and depends on her husband financially. Amina quit her job and agreed to be fully devoted to her family, upon her husband's request, after having children. She admitted to be a stubborn woman who keeps after what she wants until she gets it. Amina stressed on the notion of a woman's dignity, which should not be compromised, in her opinion. In terms of her influence over her children, she believes she has a great impact on them whether positively or negatively due to the fact that they remain with her at all times when they are not at school, which in turn affects her dealings at times.

Discussion

As analyzed above, two main variables affected women's responses on autonomy-related questions, namely, employment status and financial (in)dependence, particularly in relation to women's view of themselves in comparison with their mothers and women's situation in the family and its impact on their children. While women's major at college, type of job, number of children and their husbands' jobs did not have any particular impact on women's responses, one woman indicated that the husband's travel for work throughout the year makes her more autonomous in terms of her capacity to bear responsibility and her decision making ability. Women's sharing in household financial responsibility did not seem to affect their autonomy. Three out of eight women who shared in the household financial responsibility indicated the importance of the woman's share in the decision making process, while the remaining five women stressed on the man's dominant character and the importance of his decisions over the woman's.

The importance of the family and children in women's lives was highlighted by several women. Nadia who was a participant in the group discussion held at El Shams club stated that the most important thing for a woman is *al tarabut al 'osari* or the familial bond. She explained how a woman's most important consideration, which in many cases overrules several other important considerations- including her own needs and desires, is for her family to always stay as one entity, for better or for worse. There is a fact, according to Nadia, which is that the woman is the most active member in the family, in terms of her household and family responsibility and her consistent efforts to keep the family together on the same page. To Nadia, it is the woman's role to create and maintain the familial bond, which ultimately constitutes the most appreciated value in a

married woman's life. Although Nadia stressed on the necessity of a married woman's autonomy in her life, she saw the importance of such autonomy in the woman's ability to employ it to further strengthen the bond between the family members. Nadia's example emphasizes that married women's autonomy can sometimes have a purpose that is not associated with themselves in particular, but rather with the well being of the family.

Several women elaborated on the difference between their mothers and themselves to be a result of the submissive situation of the mother, which led to their decision not to accept such scenario in their own married lives. On the other hand, one woman indicated that because of the power and responsibilities her mother had inside of the household and outside of it through her job, the woman did not want to be like her mother and, instead, she lived a life of submission to her husband who has a domineering character and makes all decisions himself concerning the woman, the household and the children. Such woman is currently working on making her daughter stronger than she has been in order not to face the same destiny.

During the interviews, some women admitted to have compromised their ability to make decisions concerning their lives, while other women admitted to have made other compromises for the purpose of the continuity of life, or as expressed by one woman: "in order for the boat to sail along". While most women who submit to their husbands blamed their husbands' characters and societal restraints for their situations, only one woman emphasized the importance of her impact over her son to bring him up in a manner that would make him understand the value of the woman in society and the importance of her role in the family that is by all means no less than his.

Having analyzed the data I collected in the field, the next chapter will use the collected data to help construct the different frames of married women's autonomy. In order to do so, I will focus on married women's definitions of autonomy and their relation with the theoretical framework that this thesis employs. I will first introduce participants' definitions of autonomy; then, I will establish connections between those definitions and the theoretical framework explained in chapter one.

III

MARRIED WOMEN'S DEFINITIONS OF AUTONOMY

This chapter presents the different definitions of married women's autonomy as provided by the twenty five participants. Afterwards, the chapter investigates the relationship between theory and real life and the implications of the theoretical framework employed on the different phases of the research, as well as the state of affairs leading to the construction of the different frames of autonomy provided in the following chapter.

The different Definitions of Married Women's Autonomy

The different definitions of autonomy provided by participants have varied according to women's situations and circumstances. In the following lines I will first introduce participants' definitions of autonomy using their fictitious names (check appendix D for elaboration on women's profiles). Afterwards, I will analyze such perceptions and discuss their emphasis.

A list of married women's definitions of autonomy by name:

Amany: Autonomy is having a life apart from the husband and family in which the woman would have her own world and her own friends and she can keep up with the world.

Amina: Autonomy is a woman's freedom to seek whatever she desires until she achieves it. She must take her own decisions herself, and nothing should jeopardize her pride.

Arwa: Autonomy is the woman's independence and freedom in terms of work and not being fully dependent on her husband neither financially nor socially; she must have a life of her own.

Dalia: Autonomy is a woman's ability to be the leader of her own life. The woman is a personality and intellect, she needs to be independent and must make her own decisions in relation to her life and work (the husband's opinion needs to be taken in consideration but it must be her own decision).

Esraa: Autonomy is the state where the woman is not taken for granted; while all decisions within the family should be the outcome of the discussion between the husband and wife, my husband can make me do all he wishes without making me feel obliged to do it.

Farida: A woman's autonomy is almost impossible; it needs to be achieved early on during marriage and the woman should strive to remain autonomous, or else autonomy will never be attained, noting that harmony is something ideal as opposed to real.

Ghada: Autonomy is the woman's ability to have a life of her own apart from her family's. An external center of interest such as friends is very important in a woman's life.

Hanaa: Autonomy is the woman's ability to have opinions and contributions, but she is not like the man, who can be inflexible about the decision making process.

Hend: Autonomy is knowing what's right from what's wrong. But women's autonomy needs to be limited.

Laila: There is no such thing as a married woman's autonomy. The part mixes with the whole and blends into it.

Lydia: Autonomy is the woman's ability to feel achieved whether through her work, her home, or through raising up her children. Without such sense of achievement, she will not be positive in her approach to her life.

Manar: An autonomous woman is a strong independent character who makes her own decisions despite the fact that regarding her family, the husband is the main pillar and if his decisions are more righteous, they are to be followed.

Nadine: Autonomy is the woman's ability to make decisions on her own and be responsible for herself apart from her family, noting that the woman's responsibility as a wife should not negatively affect her decisions, since such responsibility can only constitute a frame for her decision making and her interactions, as opposed to driving her entire life.

Nora: An autonomous woman has a strong personality and is able to make her decisions on her own; it is very important that such woman is financially independent from her husband.

Ola: A woman's autonomy is represented in her financial independence from the husband, which gives the woman self confidence and a say in the decision making process. Such autonomy must be established early on during marriage, or else, it will be difficult to attain.

Radwa: Woman's autonomy means independence and it is not practical, because a woman's children are the most valuable thing in her life. A woman cannot impose her opinion on the husband; the husband's authority is both socially and religiously based and he is more knowledgeable than the woman on life matters.

Rana: An autonomous woman is the cultured one who has self confidence.

Randa: The woman is either an introvert if she is a housewife or an extrovert if she works outside of the house. To have a share in the family responsibility is very important especially that the woman is knowledgeable about the family's needs.

Sama: An autonomous woman can think and express her ideas as well as express herself.

Samira: Autonomy has several representations amongst which the woman's ability to do several things at the same time and balance between her home and work responsibilities, since work provides the woman with the psychological stability that makes her feel desired by the society on the condition that it is not on the expense of her family and household responsibility.

Sayyeda: A woman's autonomy is limited, as the woman is under the auspices of her husband.

Sherifa: Autonomy is the woman's ability to have sound opinions that are effective either directly or indirectly.

Soha: Autonomy means having independent thinking and not being easily affected by others' opinions. A woman's autonomy is represented in her areas of expertise such as her household and family responsibility, where she has more authority than the husband does.

Yasmeen: A woman's autonomy lies in her continuous attempt to be up to date with the world around her. The woman's ability to adapt to her life is necessary for the survival of the family.

Yosra: Autonomy is the woman's ability to affect herself and her children. Independence may not be a plus because family comes first.

The above definitions provide women's view on autonomy as a concept. Some of those definitions apply to women's lives while others define autonomy in its ideal sense. As a result, the five frames of autonomy established by this thesis will not depend solely on women's definitions of autonomy, but rather on their responses regarding their situations, how they perceive autonomy and how they perceive their roles in their everyday life. Moreover, when asked about their definitions of autonomy, the notion of autonomy appeared to be new to several participants, which indicates that it is not encountered in their everyday dialogue. This illustrates the contradictions in women's responses outlined in the previous chapter, which depicts many participants' perception of autonomy as an ideal scenario and the shift in their responses to other interview questions between ideal culture and real culture.

As a result, I have explored the notion of autonomy in terms of whether or not it can exist in Egyptian married women's lives. A view on the consistency (or lack thereof) between women's definitions of autonomy and the theoretical framework I have employed is presented below.

Theory and Real Life

I have utilized the feminist post-structuralist theory throughout the early stages of the research while developing the questions related to autonomy in the lives of Egyptian married women. By seeking definitions of autonomy through the eyes of married women themselves, I have employed the feminist post-structuralist theory to find ways in which the hegemony of the male domination in Egypt (represented in the husbands) is acquired and challenged. Thus, I have aimed at deconstructing the notion of autonomy and investigating the lives of participants to unveil the 'reality' behind their perceptions of their situations and power differentials in their families.

Having interviewed women from different ages and different educational and socio-economic backgrounds, constructing the different frames of autonomy (introduced in the following chapter) turned not to depend only on women's definitions of autonomy as expected at an earlier stage of the research, as the reality of women's lives could be different from their definitions of autonomy. Thus, while constructing the different frames of autonomy I was aware of other determinants including women's preset ideas on the role of the husband in the family as well as women's values, beliefs and their exposure to the world- or lack thereof, which can be related to the gender difference discourse also employed in this thesis.

The purpose behind employing the gender difference discourse was to emphasize on the differences between females and males both on an individual level and on a group level. This discourse elaborates on both female and male perceptions of their gender as characterizing them differently from each other. Thus, while providing their definitions

of autonomy, some females' perceptions of themselves are ultimately different from their male counterparts and are highlighted and articulated. This discourse is in line with women who have preset ideas on the husband as the head of the household who must have the final say, while the women, although she may have a share in the household financial responsibility, is a follower who needs to refer to the husbands on almost all matters- even if this is not entirely the case in the woman's everyday life.

Such attitudes can be associated with the feminist discursive approach on the development of gender identity, where gender identity is the outcome of both children's socialization process and the discursive practices they participate in. While engendering the practices that both boys and girls from early childhood partake in- such as playing with a doll for the girl as opposed to playing with the gun in the case of the boy or letting the boys play outside of the house while the girl remains indoors- such practices prepare both boys and girls for what they later will understand to be their expected role in the family, that is the male as the leader and the female as the follower. Such leader-follower approach is not only transmitted through social practices, but also socialization processes that involve both boys and girls. For example, simple statements of "don't cry because you are a man" and "don't speak loudly because you are a girl" are examples of typical phrases that can be heard in the everyday life of boys and girls respectively and that emphasize their gender identity from early on. As a result, a married woman with such socialization may grow with an eminent feeling of inferiority, while the man may grow with the feeling of superiority.

Furthermore, the cognitive dissonance theory which investigates the consistency, or lack thereof, between one's beliefs and practices has played a role in identifying the

compatibility between women's responses and their lifestyles, as provided through their illustrations on their situations. For example, a woman who defines autonomy as the married woman's ability to make decisions on her own was not always consistent with her situation in terms of having preset ideas on the role of the husband in setting rules for the family or having the final say in the decision making process. In such case, the woman may establish harmony between how she understands autonomy in its ideal sense and the woman's situation in the family through believing that she plays a role in making decisions within/under the framework of the husband's authority. As a result, how the woman's understands her importance in the family can play a great role in accepting some practices from the husband that do not initially get along with her ideal perception of her autonomy. By this I mean that a woman who is the sole responsible for the household and children becomes involved in her responsibilities that- whether consciously or subconsciously- she submits to the husband's commands in other areas such as decision making, which hence becomes the husband's area of expertise- especially if the woman is not very exposed to the world and/or she depends financially on the husband. Therefore, autonomy becomes idealized and the division of labor becomes promoted.

Egyptian Married Women and Individual Agency

The concept of individual agency, which was employed at a latter stage of this thesis- particularly after having met with the interviewees and investigated their definitions of autonomy, is associated with the woman's ability to play an active role in her life. The concept of individual agency surfaced as a result of women's responses to autonomy-related questions, as women expressed the importance of having an active role

in their individual life and/or their family life. Considering a certain aspect of agency, that is one's ability to act *per se*, this thesis stresses more on the action rather than on the power to act as elaborated by Giddens (see Giddens on structuration theory).³ Expressions of individual agency differed from one woman to the other, such expressions revolved around one of the following areas.

Division of labor: one area for expressing agency by respondents was the household and family responsibility. Holding such responsibility was the main role perceived by some women such as Soha who stressed on household and family responsibility being the area of a woman's expertise and Radwa, who believed that children are the most valuable thing in a woman's life. In such cases, women played the role that was expected of them by family or society or the one that they 'chose' to play; thus, women expressing this form of agency focus on their family and household responsibility as their main area of influence.

Self Expression: another area of women's expression of their agency was their ability to express themselves and to have their opinion taken in matters relating to their family- whether or not such opinions are listened to or merely heard was not addressed by women. An example of a woman expressing this form of agency is Esraa, who stated that although she does not mind her husband making any decision he wants in an indirect way that does not make her feel manipulated or ignored, the decision making process should be shared between the husband and wife. Having her voice heard, thus, is the main action played by the woman under this form of agency.

³ Ritzer, George. (1996). Sociological theory. 4th. Ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.

The feeling of achievement: a third form of agency involves the woman's feeling of achievement- regardless of the source of such achievement, being her work or her family, and the woman's ability to adapt to her life. By adaptation I mean the woman's ability to adjust herself to all circumstances that might not be in harmony with her expectations and/or her aspirations. Examples include Lydia, who pointed out that the sense of achievement is important in a woman's life; otherwise, Lydia added, the woman will not be positive in her approach to her life. Also, Yasmeen stated that the woman's ability to adapt to her life is necessary for the survival of the family. In both cases of Lydia and Yasmeen, the feeling of achievement and adapting to life circumstances indicate their active participation either on the personal level or on the family level.

Own decisions: another form of agency expressed by respondents was the woman's ability to make her own decisions regarding her life, while sharing in the household decision making process. Women expressing this form of agency include Dalia, who emphasized the importance of the woman being the leader of her own life; while considering the husband's opinion, Dalia indicated that the woman must make decisions herself regarding her life and work. The ability to make decisions, thus, is the main expression of this form of agency.

Having a private life: the final form of agency is represented in the woman's ability to have a life of her own apart from her family. This form of agency was depicted by Amany and Ghada, who believe that friends are very important in a woman's life. Also, Arwa stressed on the importance of a woman's work in making her independent from her husband both financially and socially. On such level, the action involved in this form of

agency is indicated by the woman's ability to have a private life apart from her family, where she can express herself and be independent from the husband.

Rationale

The rationale behind this chapter has been to establish connection between women's definitions of autonomy and the theoretical framework employed by this thesis. Having done so, the concept of agency emerged as a result of analyzing women's definitions, as opposed to being introduced and integrated as an *a priori* concept to be derived from the field. The five expressions of individual agency exhibited by respondents- represented in the division of labor, self expression, the feeling of achievement, making one's own decisions, and having a private life apart from the family- convey the different interests of Egyptian married women and their different approaches in life.

Such expressions of agency suggest the different faces of Egyptian married women's autonomy. By this I mean that there are different variations for autonomy in the lives of Egyptian married women. Chapter five adopts such suggestions, constructing the different frames of married women autonomy as expressed by married women themselves. Such frames constitute the contribution of this thesis to the study of women in Egypt. Each frame expresses a certain kind of autonomy as exhibited by respondents and as will be explained in the following chapter.

IV

THE FRAMES OF MARRIED WOMEN'S AUTONOMY

This chapter presents the frames under which married women's autonomy falls according to the definitions provided by women during the interviewing process. There are five frames for married women's autonomy that represent respondents' situations, except for the fifth frame, which was introduced by respondents but did not conform to any of their situations. In the following lines, the five frames of married women's autonomy will be introduced and supported by case studies to illustrate on each frame by real life scenarios.

Drawing on Women's Definitions of Autonomy

Through analyzing women's responses, certain patterns were established in relation to autonomy in Egyptian married women's lives. Such patterns were founded not only via women's definitions of autonomy, but also their responses to various questions throughout the interview. Those patterns have laid the foundation for the five frames of autonomy that I formulate in this chapter. Each of the five frames suggests a pattern of behavior in women's lives in representation of their perception of autonomy. The first frame describes women's submission to the husband by consent, where the woman believes in the male supremacy over the woman and lives by her husband's decisions. The second frame depicts women's restrained autonomy, where the woman is aware that her decisions are restrained by her husband and/or family responsibility; under this frame, the woman complains about her situation, while adapting to it. The third frame outlines women's disguised autonomy, where the woman thinks she is free to make decisions; however, such decisions fall within the framework of some already existent rules and/or circumstances. The fourth frame introduces women's progressive autonomy, where the woman shares in the decision making process within her household- not in a disguised way, but rather in a sophisticated way that's represented in the existence of a dialogue between the husband and wife. The fifth and final frame delineates women's radical autonomy, which is an extreme scenario that did not conform to any of the respondents but was rather mentioned and discussed during several interviews. Such frame reflects women who, according to respondents' explanations, either do not submit to their husbands or seek a life apart from their family at the expense of their household and

family responsibility; under this frame, the family and home responsibility come at a second place for the woman. Had there been more time, cases that conform to such frame could have been sought and interviewed, but because of the time limitation, such cases will only be discussed theoretically in this chapter.

Frame 1: Subordination by Consent

One woman expressed that men are wiser because they have more experience on life than women do. Another woman stated that '*al rijal qawwamoon 'ala al nisaa'*' which is a phrase excerpted from a *Quranic* verse⁴ and means that men are in charge of women. Such women set the example for the first frame of married women autonomy- that is submitting to the husband by consent. Under this frame, the woman believes that the man is a better decision maker and a better judge. In most cases, the woman submits to the husband because of some already set ideas on his role as the head of the family. Responsibilities of the husband under this frame include, but are not limited to, the household financial responsibility and decision making for matters concerning the wife and children.

Under this frame, the woman can be working outside of the house or not. In most of the cases when the woman is working outside of the house, her reasons will be financial. Some women stated that they work without the husband's full consent. One woman elaborated on this by stating that although the husband does not entirely support

⁴ Qur'an 4:34.

her work, her role in helping support the family financially cannot be denied, and so, the husband cannot prevent her from working. Other women work by the husband's consent and they are bound to share in the household financial responsibility in order to ameliorate their family's standard of living. In terms of decision making ability, the woman under this frame can be making decisions concerning her family's everyday life. Nevertheless, decisions concerning the woman, children's schooling, household expenditure, and sometimes visiting family, friends or the medical doctor are all left to the husband.

Not all women under this frame conveyed a situation that represented concrete submission. Although the wife can, intentionally or unintentionally, submit totally to the husband, she may not perceive herself to be (completely) suppressed. The perceived role of the wife under this frame is mainly to attend to her household and family responsibility, which, in her view, is her main role as a 'woman'. Everyday life decisions, as mentioned earlier, are mostly the responsibility of the wife, either because the husband is not always informed of the everyday life details while he is 'bread-winning' outside of the house, or because the wife is well able to take care of everyday matters on her own. In both cases, the wife must be qualified to take responsibility for her house and children while the husband is working, which necessitates that the wife be a manager and decision maker. Nevertheless, under this frame, the woman's ability to manage the house should abide by the general rules set forth by the husband, who is the ruler of the family.

As indicated in the previous chapter, even if the woman shares in the household financial responsibility, it does not necessarily give her a share in the decision making process. Women under this frame who participate in the household financial responsibility while having pre-set ideas on the male as the head of the household will not have the urge to change the status quo. In such cases, women's tribute to the household finances can even be considered a fair share in the responsibility. These women, most likely, will want to quit their jobs someday and concentrate on attending to their families. Whether or not they will be able to achieve such target depends on their standard of living; and although they might not be able to reach such status in such a long time, their main complain will remain focused on the amount of work they have to deal with inside and outside of the house (one example of these women is Sayyeda, whose situation is explained in the following lines). As a result, not only does autonomy not play a role in the everyday life of these women, but autonomy also is not even on their agenda as such.

The cases of Sayyeda and Laila

Sayyeda is twenty seven years old. She is illiterate and she works as a janitor in a Cairene house where her husband is the doorman and driver. Sayyeda is from Fayyoum and she had spent all her life there before she got married seven years ago. She has three children, two girls and a baby boy. Having been working for about four years to help with the household financial responsibility, Sayyeda stated that her husband does not fully support her work because, according to her, he is like many other men who would not

like the wife to be working outside of the house. Nevertheless, when home, as stated by Sayyeda, her husband helps take care of the house and children while she works. Although she believes that married women's autonomy is important, she indicated that it is limited because 'a woman is under the auspices of her husband'. Sayyeda also associated married women's autonomy with her character inside of the house, more specifically, with how she acts in front of her husband.

Sayyeda consults her husband in all matters, although she realizes that in regards to the house and children, the woman is more aware of their needs. Sayyeda indicated that the best kind of woman is the one who abides by her husband in all matters. She also stated that a woman needs not to always have a say when it comes to making decisions because the man is wiser.

Laila⁵, referred to briefly in chapter two, has been married for twelve years. She used to be an interior designer after graduating from the university and before having children; but due to her household and children responsibility, she decided to quit her job. Unlike Sayyeda, Laila is from Cairo; she's grown and always lived there. Laila, whose responsibilities are represented in taking care of her house and her three children, believes that because she is a part of the family, she cannot separate herself from it. Therefore, to Laila, a married woman does not need to be autonomous because it would defy the basic idea of having a family. Laila indicated the inevitability of the mother's sacrifice for her children, in which respect she takes after her own mother.

⁵ Laila is thirty nine years old, has a university degree specializing in fine arts, does not work outside of the house, totally depends on her husband financially, and has three children.

Similar to Sayyeda, Laila believes that a woman abides by her husband's decisions. In Laila's own words, "a man is a man; he is the head of the household even if we both have a share in the responsibility". Laila's words indicate her understanding of her role in the family and her having a role in the responsibility, while emphasizing the importance of the husband's ruling. She also indicated that if she has control over her husband's decisions, she would not have respect for him.

Both Sayyed and Laila, despite their many differences, amongst which their educational and socio-economic backgrounds, they represent women who refuse to take the lead because they do not believe in the necessity of their doing so, as long as the husband is present. The two examples, as illustrated above have exhibited their management of their responsibility towards their household and family, alongside their confined views on their limited powers in comparison with their husbands', with no particular discontent regarding the subject matter.

Frame 2: Restrained Autonomy

Introduction

There are three main characteristics of the woman under this frame. First, the woman is conscious of her restrained autonomy; second, the woman complains about being restrained, and third, the woman adapts to her situation. Unlike the previous frame, autonomy under this frame is not denied by the woman; however, the woman abides by the husband's decisions for several reasons including, but not limited to, the following: initially, the continuity of life can play a great role for a woman under this frame; the

woman's fear to terminate her marriage and start a new life leads her to the decision of preserving her marriage and adapting to her situation. In such case, a woman's choice to preserve her marriage and family life may not be peculiarly hard, especially with the society's dubious view of the divorced woman, and depending on the woman's belief in herself and her capabilities (as stated by Yasmeen, whose situation is explained below). Also, the economic rationale can impact woman's submission to her existing conditions, particularly when she is (fully) dependent on her husband financially and/or she realizes that she will not be able to afford the same standard of living for her children without the father. In such cases, the woman chooses the 'well being' of her family/children over her own comfort and satisfaction.

It is more likely that most women under this frame are not working outside of the house, especially if the reason behind their submission to their status quo is financial. Changing their situation will most likely not depend on the women, under this frame; it will rather rely upon the husband. If the woman manages to change her situation in the family, the type of autonomy she will have will depend on the decisions she makes and her new conditions. Under this frame, decisions made by the women are within the jurisdictions of her husband. Has the husband given her a span of freedom to act, she will act accordingly; and if the husband does not allow for the woman's action outside the boundaries of his influence, she will also follow.

The cases of Yasmeen and Ola

Yasmeen is a thirty three year old woman who has been married for ten years. She has three children, two boys and a girl. She got married after graduating from the university and during the trauma of her mother's death. Although young at that time, Yasmeen stated that her family encouraged her to get married because of their fear for her after her mother's death. Her husband who seemed almost impeccable before marriage changed completely afterwards; he turned to be very domineering and backward, according to Yasmeen. During the interview, Yasmeen was very talkative, energetic, mellow, and exhibited some sign of flexibility and open-mindedness. She explained the contradiction in behavior and lifestyle by stating that she has rebelled over her situation; and although her rebellion, according to Yasmeen, has limits because of her fear for her children, she now does whatever she wants behind her husband's back.

After years of not working outside of the house, Yasmeen has started working with her husband, who is a partner at a company. As the husband senses that Yasmeen's personality has dramatically changed- in terms of being more confident, she stated that he's started belittling her in front of their colleagues as an attempt to make her feel uncomfortable while working outside of the house. Moreover, Yasmeen is now financially dependent on both her husband and her salary; she uses her salary to buy what she likes without requiring the husbands' consent and she also pays for her kids' sports practice- which the husband does not support. Yasmeen will not be able to be completely dependent on her salary financially because her husband has the greatest share in the

family's financial responsibility; according to Yasmeen, her husband's taking care of the children financially is what keeps her within bounds.

Yasmeen's attempt to be autonomous, according to her, is through associating herself with advanced technology and following new trends; she also tries to broaden her horizon and talk to her children about all that interest them- she has even taken parenting courses. Yasmeen has adapted herself to her situation by following her own desires without the knowledge of the husband; she even stated that not only does her husband understand that she lies to him, but he's also asked her to do so. Another source of adaptation in Yasmeen's life is her children, in whom she finds great joy; also, getting to know people and meeting friends makes her "survive", especially that, she added, "I realize that my situation is not the worst."

Ola, a thirty five year old woman who has a university degree sets another example for restrained autonomy. Following her husband's decision, Ola did not work outside of the house; and although she depends on her husband financially, Ola also has other sources of income. She affirmed that a married woman's autonomy lies in her financial independence, which gives the woman confidence in herself and decision making ability; such autonomy, Ola stated should be attained early in the marriage, otherwise, it will be lost forever. Not having such financial independence, Ola indicated that had she gone back in time, she would have worked outside of the house.

According to Ola, her husband makes all decisions concerning the family, including herself, and does not give way for any argument from her part. She even

schedules her doctors' appointments according to her husband and family responsibility, which is vanquishing, as stated by Ola. She adapts herself to her situation by spending time with her friends, which, Ola indicated, is very important for her as it is the only time she can be free from constraints. Similar to Yasmeen, Ola also seemed outgoing and engaging, such characteristics, although contradicting to her situation as she explained it, Ola was interviewed while in the company of her friend and sister, with whom she was completely herself.

Thus, both Yasmeen and Ola have portrayed autonomy in its restrained sense. Despite their awareness of their situations, their exposed dissatisfaction is undeniable, as well as their ability to adapt to their circumstances. In such manner, the condition of well being in Yasmeen and Ola's cases is represented in preserving the continuity of their family life, as well as finding ways to accommodate their predicament.

Frame 3: Disguised Autonomy

Introduction

By disguised autonomy I mean the kind of autonomy that is processed in such a way that the woman feels autonomous while in fact she is acting within the limits offered to her by the forces of circumstance. Under this frame, the woman is most likely not aware of her confined autonomy because she is given a certain amount of freedom to act, usually by the husband as opposed to being inherent in the woman herself (and hence the word disguised). Such freedom is gladly receives and acted upon by the woman. Thus, the amount of freedom given to the woman either follows some already existent rules set

for her by the husband or is bound by her familial circumstances. In such case, the woman's (mis)perception of her situation is a result of her absorption in her everyday life and her reliance on her preliminary (mis)understanding of the 'reality' of her situation. It must be noted, however, that most women under this frame are satisfied with their status quo and they feel no need to change their 'realities' due to the lack of necessity that would prompt them to do so.

Furthermore, this frame describes a kind of autonomy that was not previously established in the earlier two frames, that is the woman's existing autonomous character within the framework of her household, (work) and family responsibilities. To elaborate, a woman with disguised autonomy perceives herself as an 'autonomous' woman, which is partially true, because she has the ability to express herself and be responsible. When compared with her counterparts from the earlier two frames, the woman under this frame will be the most autonomous, considering that under the first frame women willingly submit to their husbands and under the second frame women are forced to submit to their husbands.

One shared quality among most women under this frame is their belief both in their autonomous character as well as the husband's imposition of a final say. Whether agreeable to them or not, women under this frame abide by their husbands' decisions and/or familial circumstances regarding the 'general' terms of women's freedom to act and the boundaries of such freedom. Along these lines, when making decisions regarding themselves, women would consult their husbands and then do what 'they' find

convenient- the ambiguity of 'they' here manifests the obscurity of responses given by women resembling this frame concerning their decision making ability on matter concerning their own selves.

The cases of Manar and Amany

Manar is thirty nine years old. She's been married for twelve years and she has two sons. She used to work as a flight attendant after she acquired her university degree, then she worked at an investment company until she had children. Manar depends financially both on her husband and her own resources. According to Manar, it is very important during the early childhood years that the mother attends solely to her children- which she did. And although Manar does not currently work outside of the house, she's indicated the importance of work and financial independence in a woman's life. She stated that she had tried to become a working mother but due to the inconvenient working hours in her line of work, she was unable to balance between her work and home responsibilities. Manar also indicated that one of the most convenient professions for a mother would be a school teacher, because of the convenient working hours; and although her sister worked as a school teacher, Manar did not because she did not find in herself the ability to teach.

In her definition of married women's autonomy, Manar associated autonomy with independence; she stated that "an autonomous woman is one who is strong, independent and makes her own decisions". Manar stated that she was an autonomous woman; she also stated that her most basic concern would always be her family. Moreover, Manar

indicated that her husband is the main pillar of her family; and when it comes to making decisions, she added, if the husband's decision is more "righteous", it will be followed. Manar admitted that "household and family responsibilities must come first in a woman's life; and that is the bitter reality", according to Manar. She referred to the importance of a woman's having a life apart from her family, whether by working or having friends; but she also expressed the importance of balancing between both the woman's personal life and family life so that her personal life would not be on the expense of her family responsibility.

Similarly, Amany is in her late thirties; she does not have children, she does not work outside of the house and she depends on her husband financially. She worked during her first year of marriage, about six years ago then she quit her job. Amany's husband had encouraged her to pursue a teaching career because of the convenient hours, but, like Manar, Amany did not see herself as a school teacher. Manar's definition of married women's autonomy revolved around the woman's ability to have a life apart from her family, in which she would be having her own friends and interests away from the husband's influence. Amany indicated that she's managed to be an autonomous woman according to her definition, given her husband's support and respect for her autonomous life.

Amany indicated that married life must be built and sustained by both the husband and wife; and so, she added, they both must have a say in the decision making process. Despite that, Amany stated that the reason behind her unemployment status was

her husband's dissatisfaction with the late working hours and her inability to balance between her work and household responsibility. Although Amany stated that she hoped that in the future she could be able to work and create such balance, she has not referred to her seeking a job at the moment. Amany understands her autonomy and the boundaries within which such autonomy falls- mainly laid down by the husband, which emphasizes the disguised nature of such autonomy and her status under such frame.

Both Manar and Amany are satisfied with their situations. Also, they both referred to the differences between their mothers and themselves, mainly represented in the mothers' inability to participate in the decision making process of their families because of the fathers' domineering nature. Although Manar and Amany get back to their husbands when it comes to making decisions concerning their own lives as individuals, they both stressed on their freedom of choice- that is within the jurisdictions of the husband's 'flexibility'.

Frame 4: Progressive Autonomy

Introduction

Moving to a more advanced kind of autonomy, this frame exhibits women's ability to act more freely than in the previous frame. The term progressive employed here reflects women's capacity to embrace their freedom to act, and expresses an advanced- rather than disguised- kind of autonomy. This frame may serve as a median- that is neither restrained as in the prior frames, nor exaggerated as in the forthcoming frame. It must be indicated, however, that there is a thin line between disguised and progressive

autonomy. While under disguised autonomy women have relatively limited powers and abilities, women with progressive autonomy are far less restrained either by their husbands or their circumstances; instead, they enjoy full-fledged governance over their actions- not on the expense of their household and family responsibility, but rather with balancing both and reaping the fruits of their work (inside of the house and outside of it).

An existent dialogue between the husband and wife is a requirement for this frame. The representation of such dialogue is usually in the ongoing sharing of ideas and decisions that neither the husband nor the wife has the upper hand in the decision making process. Having established such situation, both the woman and the man will enjoy a ‘shared’ life that circumvents the traditional power differentials existent in other households that are characterized by the male’s supremacy; in such sense, this frame is not traditional by any means. In addition, the woman under this frame has the confidence that enables her to participate in the development of her household and positively influence her children’s growing gender identity in such a way that they will become even citizens who are capable of creating and managing the developing process in society.

The case of Dalia and Sama

Dalia⁶, who was briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, sets a good example for progressive autonomy. Having been married for almost three years, Dalia managed

⁶ Dalia is twenty five years old, has a master’s degree in sociology-anthropology, has one daughter and she depends financially both on her husband and her own resources. Dalia spent the first sixteen years of her

from the beginning of her married life to create a base for understanding between her husband and herself especially that, as she stated, they are both open minded individuals who are not influenced by common hegemonic ideas of masculinity and femininity in society. A married woman's autonomy, according to Dalia, affects her well-being, and it is an important factor influencing her way of bringing up her children, which is one main reason behind the necessity of autonomy in a married woman's life, as indicated by Dalia, in order for the woman to set an example for her children.

Dalia defined autonomy as the woman's individual and intellectual freedom, which enables her to be "the leader of her own life". Although it is important that the husband shares in the decision making process because he and the wife both share a life together, as elaborated by Dalia, the woman has to make all decisions concerning herself and her work on her own. Dalia also stated that the husband consults her on matters that concern him as much as she consults him on matters that concern her. Dalia's current unemployment is due to her commitment to her baby girl; Dalia expressed the importance of such commitment in her life by stating that "to invest in a human being is as important as investing in working or studying and even more important". Dalia elaborated on the importance of a married woman's share in the decision making process by stating that preserving the woman's entity is very essential as much as preserving the man's.

Another example for progressive autonomy is Sama, who is over thirty years old and has a son and a daughter. While Sama had spent her childhood and teenage years in

life in Cairo with continuous visits abroad then she resided in the States from the age seventeen to twenty one years.

the United Arab Emirates, she joined the university in Cairo, but she got married before getting her degree and she dropped out by the third year. After spending almost eleven years as a house wife, with no previous work experience, Sama decided to join the work force and she acquired a job as a coordinator in some training center. She explained that her decision to refrain from working in the past sprang from her dedication to her family and her belief that her responsibility towards her children should not be compromised. As a working mother, Sama admits the importance of work in her life in adding to her personality, as she stated; today, Sama depends financially on her salary alone.

Sama defined autonomy as the woman's ability to think, create ideas and express her ideas as well as herself coherently. Sama also explained that both the woman and the man should be sharing in the decision making process, where there would be a mutual exchange of ideas connecting both partners and leading them towards the logical thinking necessary for reaching a common ground. Identifying herself as an autonomous woman, according to the definition Sama has provided, Sama stated that although the process of conversing with her husband is not always an easy task due to his inflexible character, she does not give up, especially when the matter of concern is critical to her and/or her children. In terms of her effect over her children, Sama was the only woman in the sample, as mentioned earlier, to stress on her influence over her children in a way that would make her son understand the value of the woman's role in the family and in society and her daughter to realize her self worth from early on and grow to be a strong woman.

Despite the obvious differences in their situations, both Dalia and Sama follow the same route when it comes to their understanding of their role in the family and their effect on their children. Their progressive autonomy is expressed explicitly, yet differently, in their readiness to take charge of their own lives, especially in relation to their ability to make decisions and contribute both to themselves and their families.

Frame 5: Radical Autonomy

Introduction

The final kind of autonomy that is depicted by this frame is radical autonomy. Radical autonomy represents the kind of autonomy where the woman makes her own choices on the expense of her household and family responsibility. As indicated earlier, none of the twenty five respondents have expressed this kind of autonomy. However, it was referred to by several participants while providing their definitions of autonomy. In doing so, participants expressed discontent towards this kind of autonomy because it intervenes with the traditional understanding of the family that is based on the existence of the family bond introduced earlier- hence the term radical.

Some participants have described women under this frame as ‘independent’, who neither dress modestly nor do they care for their traditional role in the family which is to take care of household and family responsibility. Other participants added to such picture the late hours that such radically autonomous women spend outside of the house, which also do not conform to traditional societal expectations. On such terms, radical autonomy was not agreeable to participants; it was rather criticized.

While the husband was absent in such picture portrayed by participants on radical autonomy, mentioning of the family occurred while they noted that such autonomy is not healthy for raising children, as it does not provide the kind of care that is required for them. Thus, the main focus of this frame was on the woman, who goes beyond traditional norms and behavior expected of a mother with her confidence and her actions with no calculation of their impact over her household and her family.

Discussion

The five frames coined in this chapter have described five kinds of autonomy exercised by Egyptian married women as my data has indicated. Such frames have suggested different patterns of behavior in married women's lives starting with the woman's decision to submit to the husband for reasons such as following the traditional norms of society upon which the woman was raised, and ending with total neglect to family responsibility by means of favoring the self over any other obligation as in the radical autonomy. The variations that fall between such two patterns describe the different levels of autonomy as expressed by respondents, which suggest more patterns of behavior to which they adhere.

While answering the interview questions, two women have mentioned the term *kayan al mar'a* or a woman's entity/existence while demonstrating the importance of autonomy in a woman's life. *Kayan* is something that is achieved; by this I mean that in order for a woman to have a *kayan*, external and/or internal factors have to first exist such as self respect or being respected, the feeling of achievement, having an active role in

her/other's lives, etc., which is more like Heidegger's *dasein* (see Heidegger on Being and Time)⁷ that requires consciousness. Despite the fact that only two women have mentioned this term, its importance cannot be overlooked since it raises the problem of women's consciousness of their situations and whether or not it is necessary to have such consciousness. The twenty five participants whose responses have helped construct the above five frames, have all exhibited an understanding of the major rules by which their lives are governed. Whether this reflects consciousness of their situations inside of the family is not the issue here; the point rather is that women's understanding of their area(s) of influence and sometimes the limits of such area(s) was clearly established. Even in the case of women with disguised autonomy, they have also shared with me the limitations they have on their power to act and/or make decision, whether such limitations were the result of the husband or their family and household responsibility.

In the following chapter I will present the challenges that I faced in the field and the research limitations. I will also provide a summary of the key points of the thesis and an emphasis on my contribution to the study of women in Egypt.

⁷ Heidegger, Martin. (1962). *Being and Time* (John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson, Trans.). New York: Harper.

V

CONCLUSION AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

This chapter provides summary and conclusions of the main points of this thesis and presents the challenges faced in the field. Also, this chapter elaborates on the thesis contributions to the study of women in Egypt and its future implications.

Fieldwork Challenges

The major challenges I faced in the field was reaching an adequate term in Arabic to express the meaning of autonomy. The literal meaning of autonomy in Arabic is *istiqlaliya* or independence. Nevertheless, using the term independence during the pilot study proved to have a negative influence on these women. To elaborate, women perceived the term independence to mean the woman's freedom to do whatever she pleases at the expense of her responsibility toward her family, which defies the basic respect for family that women bestowed. Thus, the term I used during the actual interviews was *al shakhsiya al fardiya*, which literally means the individual character. While few women positively associated the term *al shakhsiya al fardiya* with the term *istiqlaliya* or independence during the actual research, they were only five women and so, they did not constitute a significant minority.

It must be noted that the fears that might be inflicted upon women by the family, society, or even by some indirect experience(s), and their exposure to the world could be one of the reasons behind many women's disagreement with the term autonomy to mean a woman's independence. Such impact may also drive several women to seek the continuity of life and the survival of the family over what may be considered as their own hopes and aspirations. Despite the fact that I have made it clear during the interviews that autonomy does not have to be in conflict with women's familial obligations and responsibilities, not all women perceived autonomy as such.

Because of the unfamiliarity of the term *al shakhsiya al fardiya* in the everyday life of many of my interviewees, I sometimes had to first elaborate on the term by detaching

it from the 'negative' reflection of independence that it may hold for these women and then ask about what it means for the woman to have an individual character apart from her family. Respondents' definitions of autonomy had different levels that led to the construction of the different frames of married women's perception of autonomy intended by this thesis.

Limitations

Differences between women in terms of education and socio-economic status were reflected on their answers and the information they provided on their situations. For example, while answering the question on the reasons behind the woman's work outside of the house or lack thereof, several women stated that they worked only because of financial need, while others stated that they did not work because they were financially (well) provided for. Moreover, although some women found difficulty in answering the question on their definition of autonomy, many of them got back to elaborating more about their understanding of autonomy at a later stage of the interview. Women's answer on such question particularly and the vocabulary they used to explain their perception of autonomy reflected their sophistication or lack thereof- sophistication in terms of their educational background, their exposure to the world, their understanding of their situation, and their awareness of their capabilities within their circumstances.

Furthermore, I have noticed a discrepancy in responses between women whom I had met for the first time in the field and those who knew my person- either directly or indirectly through a collaborator- in terms of responding to questions with the openness and elaboration that would reflect their situations and lifestyles as opposed to describing

an ideal scenario that does not apply to their lives. In such situation, I strived to create an environment of enthusiasm where women with whom I had met for the first time would open up to me and respond to the research questions according to the 'reality' of their situation. My ability to do so has differed from one participant to another according to her character and her readiness to open up to a stranger, especially that the time for interviewing was between twenty to forty five minutes, which was usually the time that women could dispense in order to respond to the interview questions and that was not always enough to build sufficient trust between participants with whom I had met for the first time and myself. For future research on this topic, participant observation can help provide more in-depth analysis of married women's situations and everyday life as well as establish rapport between participants and the researcher, which can add to the outcome of the research. In some situations, I faced contradicting answers while interviewing participants, particularly in the beginning and after the middle of the interview, which indicated their different stands before and after being at ease with the interviewing process and with giving accounts to a stranger on their personal lives, perceptions of married women's autonomy and their own autonomy as married women.

Conclusion

The aim of the thesis has been to unveil the different expressions of married women's autonomy in Egypt. By tracing married women's responsibilities and power differentials within their families, this thesis has succeeded in answering questions on the different definitions of married women's autonomy, how it is expressed in their everyday life, the constraints facing such autonomy and whether it can affect their children's growing gender identities. Moreover, this thesis has constructed different frames of

married women's autonomy that suggest different patterns of behavior in women's personal and familial lives. Due to the fact that it cannot be ascertained whether women's responses on the interview questions related to their individual personal experiences or rather referred to their expectations in an 'ideal culture' sense, this thesis did not depend solely on women's responses on the interview questions but also on relating to women's situations and lifestyles as provided through women's accounts on their lives.

In the field, I had twenty five in-depth interviews and one discussion group with five Egyptian married women. The data collected in the field has led to the understanding that married women's autonomy lies in their everyday roles and practices, unlike the previous assumption that women's perceptions of autonomy would lead to the kind of autonomy that those women had in their everyday life. Seven independent variables were expected to affect women's responses on autonomy related questions; those variables were: age, woman's education, husband's education, city/country of residence in the first fifteen to twenty years of a woman's life, a woman's employment status, financial (in)dependence, and having children. However, only two of these variables- employment status and financial (in)dependence, seemed to affect women's responses.

By taking a look at women's definitions of autonomy and their responses to the interview questions, this thesis has established that individual agency can be expressed differently according to women's circumstances. Such expressions of agency are articulated by women themselves through their understanding of their role in the family and/or in society. While some women, for example, perceived their role to be raising their children and attending to their household responsibility, others indicated their role to be making their own decisions regarding their lives and sharing in the household decision

making process. Such indications of women's role in the family have assisted in the construction of the five frames of autonomy, while women's definitions alone, as mentioned above, do not provide sufficient grounds for the construction of married women's frames of autonomy. The five frames of autonomy suggested in this thesis are 'subordination by consent', 'restrained autonomy', 'disguised autonomy', 'progressive autonomy' and 'radical autonomy'.

Having been determined to provide information on married women's lives as expressed by women themselves, I have faced several complexities while rationalizing several women's definitions of autonomy with their situations and lifestyle. My complexities were unfolded having arranged the different expressions of women's agency according to their definitions of autonomy. Although the different expressions of women's agency are separated from the different frames of married women's autonomy in this thesis, the purpose of such division was not to create confusion, but rather an understanding of women's expressions of themselves that may vary under each frame. To elaborate, two women with a restrained kind of autonomy may express their agency differently; while one woman may find comfort in the division of labor, another may seek a feeling of achievement. Similarly, two women with progressive autonomy can have two different expressions of agency, the first merely being the woman's making her own decisions regarding her life, while the other may also seek a private life apart from her family.

Finally, the five frames of married women's autonomy that this thesis suggests are: Subordination by Consent, Restrained Autonomy, Disguised Autonomy, Progressive Autonomy and Radical Autonomy. Such frames are my contribution to the study of

women in Egypt. They suggest that although the concept of autonomy might be perceived by some women as an ideal scenario, women's everyday life and the roles they play express their kind of autonomy according to their lifestyle. Thus, this thesis has deconstructed the concept of autonomy and re-constructed it in the different frames presented above. By doing so, this thesis has reached an understanding of the different participants' lives through the kind of autonomy that their situation reveals. This does not suggest, however, that married women tend to live their lives with an articulation of the kind of autonomy that their situation expresses; this thesis, rather, has aimed at comprehending the different patterns of behavior in married women's lives as a means to establishing connections between the different modes of behavior and the different patterns in society.

Contributions and Research Implications

This thesis contributes to the study of women in Egypt through the presentation of the five frames of married women's autonomy. Such frames provide more understanding of married women's situations and responsibilities in the family. By exploring the different frames of married women's autonomy, an in-depth investigation into the lives of married women is introduced and women's situation in the family is less blurred. Thus, this thesis adds to the literature on married women's autonomy in Egypt and fills the gap between women's situation in the family and their perception of their autonomy. To elaborate, having established in this thesis that women's perceptions of autonomy do not necessarily reflect their 'real' situation, this thesis has solved such predicament through analyzing women's demonstrations on their situations as a whole and, hence, concluded the five mentioned frames of autonomy. Therefore, such frames are the result of

understanding participants' situations through the information they have provided on their lives as opposed to participants' view of autonomy in its abstract sense.

Thus, this thesis may constitute the starting point for future research on Egyptian women in different directions. For example, the different frames of married women's autonomy can be an opening for further research on the impact of women's situations on their psychological wellbeing, the wellbeing of the family and its effect on the coming generation(s) of women in Egypt. Also, this thesis can help establish connection between women's autonomy and the labor force, which can be done through employing the different frames of married women's autonomy to analyze women's approaches towards their jobs and/or careers and how such approaches can add to the knowledge of women's ability to be active participants not only in the family but also in the labor force. Finally, this thesis can provide the basis for more in-depth investigation into the impact of married women's different frames of autonomy on the continuity/change of traditional societal norms and expectations and their relation to political change in Egypt.

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APPENDICES

Interview Questions

Introduction

My name is Neveen Bashier. I am an MA student at the American University in Cairo, doing research for my master's thesis on married women's definitions of autonomy and how it is expressed in their everyday life. Participation in this interview is voluntary and no full name is required. The information asked about will range between individual background, family structure, power differentials within the family and individual perceptions of autonomy. The interview will take from 20-45 minutes, with the possibility to withdraw from the interview at any stage, upon preference. A recording device will be used to record the interview; if non agreeable, however, writing notes can be taken instead.

Background information, family structure and power differentials within the family:

1. Are you married? - Yes - No
2. If yes, does your husband live with you? - Yes - No
3. Do you currently reside in Egypt? - Yes - No
4. If yes, what neighborhood do you live in _____
5. What's your age? _____
6. What is your highest educational degree?
 - University degree - Masters degree - Doctorate Degree
7. What was your major? _____

8. What is your husband's highest educational degree?

- University degree - Graduate degree - Other

9. In which city/country did you spend the first 15-20 years of your life?

10. What is your employment status?

- Unemployed -Employed (_____)
- Self employed (_____)

11. If working, when did you start?

12. Does your husband support your work?

13. Why? Or why not?

14. What do you do with your earnings?

15. If unemployed, whose decision was it? And why?

16. If you go back in time, would you have liked to work? And would you have had the power to do this?

17. What's your source of income?

- My husband - My job -Both my husband and my job
- Other (E.g. assets, personal bank account, inheritance, real estate, etc.)

18. Do you have any children? - Yes (How many? _____)

- No - Expecting

The definition of autonomy and how it is expressed in the everyday life of

Egyptian married women:

19. How do you define your autonomy as a married woman?

20. How important do you think is a married woman's autonomy in her life?

- Very important - Important - Not important

21. Do you think married women's autonomy is constrained?

- Yes - No

22. If yes, what are the constraints facing married women's autonomy?

23. In your household, who decides on the following:

a. The kind of schools the children go to?

- The husband - The wife - Both the husband and wife

b. Where the family goes on holiday?

- The husband - The wife - Both the husband and wife

c. Whether you continue your education or change your job/career? And why?

d. Reproductive issues such as having (more) children and the pace of childbearing?

24. What would you do if you are offered a position/job with more responsibilities than you already have? And why?

25. Do you devote time all for yourself? -Yes - No

26. If yes, how often do you do that? And why?

27. Are you an autonomous woman?

- Yes - No

28. How do you see yourself in comparison with the situation of your mother as a married woman?

- Similar:

- Different:

29. How do you think your situation in the family affects your children? Why?

30. How would you describe a married woman in the following situations with one or more words:

a. Quits her studies due to her husband's desire:

b. Quits her job to attend to her family:

c. Attempts to control her family's decisions:

d. Discusses all matters with her husband:

e. Wouldn't accept her husband's decisions:

f. Never says No to her husband on any decision:

g. Tries to have a private life apart from her family's:

31. Do you have any comments or additions?

Thank you very much for your time and effort

أسئلة البحث

مقدمة:

أنا نيفين بشير، طالبة ماجستير بالجامعة الأمريكية بالقاهرة، أقوم ببحث يتعلق بالمرأة المتزوجة من حيث تعريفها لمعنى الشخصية الفردية و كيفية التعبير عنها في مختلف أنشطة الحياة اليومية للمرأة. المشاركة في هذا البحث تطوعية و البحث يضمن الخصوصية للأفراد المشتركين فيه حيث لا يتطلب الإدلاء بالإسم كاملاً. أسئلة البحث تتراوح بين خلفية المرأة و تكوين أسرتها، و توازن القوى في منزلها، و تعريفها للشخصية الفردية. وقت المقابلة يتراوح بين عشرين و خمسة و أربعين دقيقة، مع إمكانية الإنسحاب من المقابلة في أى وقت حسب الرغبة. سيتم استخدام مسجل لتسجيل المقابلة، و إذا لم يقابل بلاستحسان، سيتم كتابة ملاحظات عوضاً عن ذلك.

خلفية المرأة و تكوين أسرتها، و توازن القوى في منزلها:

1. هل أنت متزوجة؟ نعم لا
2. إذا كانت الإجابة نعم، هل زوجك يعيش معك؟ نعم لا
3. هل تعيشين في مصر الآن؟ نعم لا
4. إذا كانت الإجابة نعم، في أى جزء من مصر تعيشين؟ _____
5. ما عمرك؟ _____

6. ما أعلى شهادتك؟

شهادة جامعية ماجستير دكتوراه

7. ماذا كان تخصصك؟

8. ما أعلى شهادات زوجك؟

9. و ماذا يعمل؟

10. فى أى مدينة أو بلد قضيتى الخمسة عشر أو عشرين سنة الأولى من عمرك؟

11. هل تعملين؟ نعم () لا () لدى عملى الخاص ()

11. إذا كانت الاجابة نعم، منذ متى؟

12. و هل يدعم زوجك عملك؟

13. لم؟ و لم لا؟

14. و ماذا تفعلين بدخلك؟

15. فى حالة عدم العمل، من أخذ هذا القرار و لماذا؟

16. إذا عاد بك الزمن، هل كنت ستفضلين العمل؟ و هل كان سيعود القرار لك؟

17. ما هو مصدر دخلك؟

زوجى عملى زوجى و عملى

مصادر دخل أخرى (حساب بنكى، ميراث، أسهم، عقارات، و غيرها)

18. هل لديك أطفال؟ نعم (كم عددهم _____) لا حامل

تعريف الشخصية الفردية و التعبير عنها فى مختلف أنشطة الحياة اليومية

19. كامرأة متزوجة، كيف تعرفين الشخصية الفردية؟

20. فى رأيك، ما أهمية الشخصية الفردية للمرأة المتزوجة فى حياتها؟

مهمة للغاية مهمة ليست مهمة

21. هل ترين أن الشخصية الفردية للمرأة المتزوجة مقيدة؟

نعم لا

22. إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم، ما هى القيود التى تواجه الشخصية الفردية للمرأة؟

27. هل لك شخصيتك الفردية؟

نعم لا

28. كيف ترين نفسك مقارنة بوالدتك كإمرأة متزوجة؟

أشبهها:

أختلف عنها:

29. في رأيك، كيف يمكن أن يؤثر وضعك داخل الأسرة على أبنائك؟ ولماذا؟

30. كيف تصفين زوجة ما في الأوضاع التالية بكلمة واحدة أو أكثر:

حين تترك دراستها إرضاءً لرغبة زوجها:

حين تترك عملها للإهتمام بأسرتها:

حين تسعى للتحكم بالقرارات الخاصة بأسرتها:

حين تناقش زوجها في كل شيء:

حين ترفض الإنصياع لقرارات زوجها:

حين تتصاع لقرارات زوجها في كل شيء:

حين تسعى وراء تكوين حياة خاصة بها إلى جانب أسرتها:

31. هل لديك أى تعليقات أو اضافات؟

شكراً جزيلاً لوقتكم و مجهودكم

APPENDIX C

Table 1: Age and its relation with women’s responses on the importance of autonomy in their lives.

Women’s responses on the importance of autonomy in their lives	Age				
	Mid-Late 20s	30s	40s	50	Total
Autonomy is important	7	10	3		20
Autonomy is somewhat important				1	1
Autonomy should be limited	1	2			3
Autonomy cannot be achieved		1			1
Total	8	13	3	1	25

Table 2: Age and its relation with women’s responses on whether or not autonomy is restrained.

Women’s responses on whether or not autonomy is restrained	Age				
	Mid-Late 20s	30s	40s	50	Total
Autonomy is restrained	7	11	2		20
Autonomy’s restraints are relevant from one woman to another	1	1	1	1	4
Autonomy cannot exist		1			1
Total	8	13	3	1	25

Table 3: Age and its relation with women’s responses on how women see themselves compared to their mothers as married women.

	Age				
	Mid-Late 20s	30s	40s	50	Total
Women’s responses on how they see themselves compared to their mothers as married women					
Completely similar		3			3
Completely different	6	7	1	1	15
Similar in some aspects and different in other aspects	1	2	2		5
N/A	1	1			2
Total	8	13	3	1	25

Table 4: Age and its relation with women’s responses on whether or not women’s situation in the family impacts their children.

	Age				
	Mid-Late 20s	30s	40s	50	Total
Women’s responses on whether or not their situation in the family impacts their children					
Agreement on the general impact of the mother on children whether positively or negatively	3	5	2	1	11
Awareness of the mother’s responsibility, image and autonomy on shaping children’s developing identities	3	5	1		9
Disregard of the impact of the mother on the children (especially during early childhood)		1			1
Emphasis on the mother’s crucial role toward keeping the image of the father as the head of the household		1			1
N/A	2	1			3
Total	8	13	3	1	25

Table 5: Women’s education and its relation with women’s responses on the importance of autonomy.

Women’s responses on the importance of autonomy in their lives	Women’s educational background						
	Illiterate	High school diploma	An Institute	College Drop-out	University degree	Master’s degree	Total
Autonomy is important			1	1	12	6	20
Autonomy is somewhat important					1		1
Autonomy should be limited	1	1			1		3
Autonomy cannot be achieved					1		1
Total	1	1	1	1	15	6	25

Table 6: Women’s education and its relation with women’s responses on whether or not autonomy is restrained.

Women’s responses on whether or not autonomy is restrained	Women’s educational background						
	Illiterate	High school diploma	An Institute	College Drop-out	University degree	Master’s degree	Total
Autonomy is restrained	1	1	1	1	10	6	20
Autonomy’s restraints are relevant from one woman to another					4		4
Autonomy cannot exist					1		1
Total	1	1	1	1	15	6	25

Table 7: Women’s education and its relation with women’s responses on how women see themselves compared to their mothers as married women.

Women’s responses on how they see themselves compared to their mothers as married women	Women’s educational background						Total
	Illiterate	High school diploma	An Institute	College Drop-out	University degree	Master’s degree	
Completely similar		1			2		3
Completely different				1	9	5	15
Similar in some aspects and different in other aspects			1	3	3	1	5
N/A	1				1		2
Total	1	1	1	1	15	6	25

Table 8: Women’s education and its relation with women’s responses on whether or not women’s situation in the family impacts their children.

	Women’s educational background						
	Illiterate	High school diploma	An Institute	College Drop-out	University degree	Master’s degree	Total
Women’s responses on whether or not their situation in the family impacts their children							
Agreement on the general impact of the mother on children whether positively or negatively	1		1		8	1	11
Awareness of the mother’s responsibility, image and autonomy on shaping children’s developing identities				1	6	2	9
Disregard of the impact of the mother on the children (especially during early childhood)		1					1
Emphasis on the mother’s crucial role toward keeping the image of the father as the head of the household						1	1
N/A					1	2	3
Total	1	1	1	1	15	6	25

Table 9: Husband’s educational background and its relation with women’s responses on the importance of autonomy.

Women’s responses on the importance of autonomy in their lives	Husband’s educational background					
	Preliminary education	High school diploma	University degree	Master’s degree	PhD	Total
Autonomy is important		2	12	2	4	20
Autonomy is somewhat important			1			1
Autonomy should be limited	1	1	1			3
Autonomy cannot be achieved			1			1
Total	1	3	15	2	4	25

Table 10: Husband’s educational background and its relation with women’s responses on whether or not autonomy is restrained.

Women’s responses on whether or not autonomy is restrained	Husband’s educational background					
	Preliminary education	High school diploma	University degree	Master’s degree	PhD	Total
Autonomy is restrained	1	2	12	1	4	20
Autonomy’s restraints are relevant from one woman to another		1	2	1		4
Autonomy cannot exist			1			1
Total	1	3	15	2	4	25

Table 11: Husband’s educational background and its relation with women’s responses on how women see themselves compared to their mothers as married women.

	Husband’s educational background					
	Preliminary education	High school diploma	University degree	Master’s degree	PhD	Total
Women’s responses on how they see themselves compared to their mothers as married women						
Completely similar		1	2			3
Completely different		2	9	2	2	15
Similar in some aspects and different in other aspects			4		1	5
N/A	1				1	2
Total	1	3	15	2	4	25

Table 12: Husband’s educational background and its relation with women’s responses on whether or not women’s situation in the family impacts their children.

Women’s responses on whether or not their situation in the family impacts their children	Husband’s educational background					
	Preliminary education	High school diploma	University degree	Master’s degree	PhD	Total
Agreement on the general impact of the mother on children whether positively or negatively	1	1	8		1	11
Awareness of the mother’s responsibility, image and autonomy on shaping children’s developing identities		1	7		1	9
Disregard of the impact of the mother on the children (especially during early childhood)		1				1
Emphasis on the mother’s crucial role toward keeping the image of the father as the head of the household					1	1
N/A				2	1	3
Total	1	3	15	2	4	25

Table 13: Women’s city/country of residence in the first fifteen to twenty years of her life and its relation with women’s responses on the importance of autonomy.

Women’s responses on the importance of autonomy in their lives	Women’s city/country of residence in the first fifteen to twenty years of her life					
	Cairo	Other governorates in Egypt	Cairo with continuous visits abroad	Abroad in some Arab country	N/A	Total
Autonomy is important	11	1	4	3	1	20
Autonomy is somewhat important	1					1
Autonomy should be limited	2	1				3
Autonomy cannot be achieved	1					1
Total	15	2	4	3	1	25

Table 14: Women’s city/country of residence in the first fifteen to twenty years of her life and its relation with women’s responses on whether or not autonomy is restrained.

Women’s responses on whether or not autonomy is restrained	Women’s city/country of residence in the first fifteen to twenty years of her life					
	Cairo	Other governorates in Egypt	Cairo with continuous visits abroad	Abroad in some Arab country	N/A	Total
Autonomy is restrained	11	2	4	2	1	20
Autonomy’s restraints are relevant from one woman to another	3			1		4
Autonomy cannot exist	1					1
Total	15	2	4	3	1	25

Table 15: Women’s city/country of residence in the first fifteen to twenty years of her life and its relation with women’s responses on how women see themselves compared to their mothers as married women.

	Women’s city/country of residence in the first fifteen to twenty years of her life					
	Cairo	Other governorates in Egypt	Cairo with continuous visits abroad	Abroad in some Arab country	N/A	Total
Women’s responses on how they see themselves compared to their mothers as married women						
Completely similar	3					3
Completely different	9		3	2	1	15
Similar in some aspects and different in other aspects	2	1	1	1		5
N/A	1	1				2
Total	15	2	4	3	1	25

Table 16: Women's city/country of residence in the first fifteen to twenty years of her life and its relation with women's responses on whether or not women's situation in the family impacts their children.

	Women's city/country of residence in the first fifteen to twenty years of her life					
	Cairo	Other governorates in Egypt	Cairo with continuous visits abroad	Abroad in some Arab country	N/A	Total
Women's responses on whether or not their situation in the family impacts their children						
Agreement on the general impact of the mother on children whether positively or negatively	6	2	1	2		11
Awareness of the mother's responsibility, image and autonomy on shaping children's developing identities	5		2	1	1	9
Disregard of the impact of the mother on the children (especially during early childhood)	1					1
Emphasis on the mother's crucial role toward keeping the image of the father as the head of the household	1					1
N/A	2		1			3
Total	15	2	4	3	1	25

Table 17: Women’s employment status and its relation with women’s responses on the importance of autonomy.

Women’s responses on the importance of autonomy in their lives	Women’s employment status			
	Work outside of the house	Don’t work outside of the house	Freelancing	Total
Autonomy is important	7	13		20
Autonomy is somewhat important			1	1
Autonomy should be limited	3			3
Autonomy cannot be achieved		1		1
Total	10	14	1	25

Table 18: Women’s employment status and its relation with women’s responses on whether or not autonomy is restrained.

Women’s responses on whether or not autonomy is restrained	Women’s employment status			
	Work outside of the house	Don’t work outside of the house	Freelancing	Total
Autonomy is restrained	9	11		20
Autonomy’s restraints are relevant from one woman to another	1	2	1	4
Autonomy cannot exist		1		1
Total	10	14	1	25

Table 19: Women’s employment status and its relation with women’s responses on how women see themselves compared to their mothers as married women.

	Women’s employment status			
	Work outside of the house	Don’t work outside of the house	Freelancing	Total
Women’s responses on how they see themselves compared to their mothers as married women				
Completely similar	2	1		3
Completely different	5	9	1	15
Similar in some aspects and different in other aspects	1	4		5
N/A	2			2
Total	10	14	1	25

Table 20: Women’s employment status and its relation with women’s responses on whether or not women’s situation in the family impacts their children.

Women’s responses on whether or not their situation in the family impacts their children	Women’s employment status			
	Work outside of the house	Don’t work outside of the house	Freelancing	Total
Agreement on the general impact of the mother on children whether positively or negatively	2	8	1	11
Awareness of the mother’s responsibility, image and autonomy on shaping children’s developing identities	6	3		9
Disregard of the impact of the mother on the children (especially during early childhood)	1			1
Emphasis on the mother’s crucial role toward keeping the image of the father as the head of the household	1			1
N/A		3		3
Total	10	14	1	25

Table 21: Women’s financial (in)dependence and its relation with women’s responses on the importance of autonomy.

Women’s responses on the importance of autonomy in their lives	Women’s financial (in)dependence					
	Depend entirely on the husband	Depend on the husband and own salary	Depend on husband and other resources	Depend on own salary alone	Depend on other resources alone	Total
Autonomy is important	5	5	7	2	1	20
Autonomy is somewhat important		1				1
Autonomy should be limited		3				3
Autonomy cannot be achieved	1					1
Total	6	9	7	2	1	25

Table 22: Women’s financial (in)dependence and its relation with women’s responses on whether or not autonomy is restrained.

Women’s responses on whether or not autonomy is restrained	Women’s financial (in)dependence					
	Depend entirely on the husband	Depend on the husband and own salary	Depend on husband and other resources	Depend on own salary alone	Depend on other resources alone	Total
Autonomy is restrained	3	7	7	2	1	20
Autonomy’s restraints are relevant from one woman to another	2	2				4
Autonomy cannot exist	1					1
Total	6	9	7	2	1	25

Table 23: Women’s financial (in)dependence and its relation with women’s responses on how women see themselves compared to their mothers as married women.

Women’s responses on how they see themselves compared to their mothers as married women	Women’s financial (in)dependence					Total
	Depend entirely on the husband	Depend on the husband and own salary	Depend on husband and other resources	Depend on own salary alone	Depend on other resources alone	
Completely similar	1	2				3
Completely different	3	5	5	1	1	15
Similar in some aspects and different in other aspects	2		2	1		5
N/A		2				2
Total	6	9	7	2	1	25

Table 24: Women’s financial (in)dependence and its relation with women’s responses on whether or not women’s situation in the family impacts their children.

Women’s responses on whether or not their situation in the family impacts their children	Women’s financial (in)dependence					Total
	Depend entirely on the husband	Depend on the husband and own salary	Depend on husband and other resources	Depend on own salary alone	Depend on other resources alone	
Agreement on the general impact of the mother on children whether positively or negatively	5	3	3			11
Awareness of the mother’s responsibility, image and autonomy on shaping children’s developing identities		4	3	2		9
Disregard of the impact of the mother on the children (especially during early childhood)		1				1
Emphasis on the mother’s crucial role toward keeping the image of the father as the head of the household		1				1
N/A	1		1		1	3
Total	6	9	7	2	1	25

Table 25: Having children and its relation with women’s responses on the importance of autonomy.

	Having children		
Women’s responses on the importance of autonomy in their lives	Have children	Don’t have children	Total
Autonomy is important	17	3	20
Autonomy is somewhat important	1		1
Autonomy should be limited	3		3
Autonomy cannot be achieved	1		1
Total	22	3	25

Table 26: Having children and its relation with women’s responses on whether or not autonomy is restrained.

	Having children		
Women’s responses on whether or not autonomy is restrained	Have children	Don’t have children	Total
Autonomy is restrained	18	2	20
Autonomy’s restraints are relevant from one woman to another	3	1	4
Autonomy cannot exist	1		1
Total	22	3	25

Table 27: Having children and its relation with women’s responses on how women see themselves compared to their mothers as married women.

	Having children		
	Have children	Don't have children	Total
Women's responses on how they see themselves compared to their mothers as married women			
Completely similar	3		3
Completely different	13	2	15
Similar in some aspects and different in other aspects	4	1	5
N/A	2		2
Total	22	3	25

Table 28: Having children and its relation with women’s responses on whether or not women’s situation in the family impacts their children.

	Having children		
	Have children	Don't have children	Total
Women's responses on whether or not their situation in the family impacts their children			
Agreement on the general impact of the mother on children whether positively or negatively	11		11
Awareness of the mother's responsibility, image and autonomy on shaping children's developing identities	9		9
Disregard of the impact of the mother on the children (especially during early childhood)	1		1
Emphasis on the mother's crucial role toward keeping the image of the father as the head of the household	1		1
N/A		3	3
Total	22	3	25

APPENDIX D

Married women's definitions of autonomy

Name	Age	Education	Husband's educational background	Employment Status	Financial (In)-dependence	City/ Country of residence during the first 15-20 years in a woman's life	Having children	Definition of Autonomy
Amany	Late 30s	University Degree	Master of Arts	Non-working	Depends on the husband	Cairo	No	Autonomy is having a life apart from the husband and family in which the woman would have her own world and her own friends and she can keep up with the world.
Amina	46	University Degree	University degree	Non-working	Depends on the husband	Libya	Yes	Autonomy is a woman's freedom to seek whatever she desires until she achieves it. She must take her own decisions herself, and nothing should jeopardize her pride.

Arwa	26	Masters of Arts	PhD	Non-working	Depends both on the husband and her own resources	Cairo with visits abroad	No	Autonomy is the woman's independence and freedom in terms of work and not being fully dependent on her husband neither financially nor socially; she must have a life of her own.
Dalia	25	Master of Arts	University degree	Non-working	Depends both on the husband and her own resources	Cairo with visits abroad then residence in the States	Yes	Autonomy is a woman's ability to be the leader of her own life. The woman is a personality and intellect, she needs to be independent and must make her own decisions in relation to her life and work (the husband's opinion needs to be taken in consideration but it must be her own decision).

Esraa	26	Master of Arts	PhD	Non-working	Depends on her husband	Kuwait and Cairo	Yes	Autonomy is the state where the woman is not taken for granted; while all decisions within the family should be the outcome of the discussion between the husband and wife, my husband can make me do all he wishes without making me feel obliged to do it.
Farida	Early 30s	University Degree	University degree	Non-working	Depends on her husband	Cairo with visits abroad	Yes	A woman's autonomy is almost impossible; it needs to be achieved early on during marriage and the woman should strive to remain autonomous, or else autonomy will never be attained, noting that harmony is something ideal as opposed to real.

Ghada	36	Institute of Secretariat	University degree	Non-working	Depends on her husband	Damietta, Egypt	Yes	Autonomy is the woman's ability to have a life of her own apart from her family's. An external center of interest such as friends is very important in a woman's life.
Hanaa	28	University Degree	High school diploma	Working	Depends both on the husband and her own salary	Cairo	Yes	Autonomy is the woman's ability to have opinions and contributions, but she is not like the man, who can be inflexible about the decision making process.
Hend	30	High school diploma	High school diploma	working	Depends both on the husband and her own salary	Cairo	Yes	Autonomy is knowing what's right from what's wrong. But women's autonomy needs to be limited.
Laila	39	University degree	University degree	Non-working	Depends on her husband	Cairo	Yes	There is no such thing as a married woman's autonomy. The part mixes with the whole and blends into it.

Lydia	29	University degree	University degree	Working	Depends both on the husband and her own salary	Cairo	Yes	Autonomy is the woman's ability to feel achieved whether through her work, her home, or through raising up her children. Without such sense of achievement, she will not be positive in her approach to her life.
Manar	39	University degree	University degree	Non-working	Depends both on the husband and her own resources	Cairo	Yes	An autonomous woman is a strong independent character who makes her own decisions (despite the fact that regarding her family, the husband is the main pillar and if his decisions are more righteous, they are to be followed).

Nadine	26	Master of Arts	Master of Science	Non-working	Depends on her own resources	Cairo	No	Autonomy is the woman's ability to make decisions on her own and be responsible for herself apart from her family, noting that the woman's responsibility as a wife should not negatively affect her decisions, since such responsibility can only constitute a frame for her decision making and her interactions, as opposed to driving her entire life.
Nora	47	University degree	University degree	Retired	Depends both on the husband and her own resources	Cairo	Yes	An autonomous woman has a strong personality and is able to make her decisions on her own; it is very important that such woman is financially independent from her husband.
Ola	35	University degree	University degree	Non-working	Depends both on the husband and her	N/A	Yes	A woman's autonomy is represented in her financial

					own resources			independence from the husband, which gives the woman self confidence and a say in the decision making process. Such autonomy must be established early on during marriage, or else, it will be difficult to attain.
Radwa	33	University degree	University degree	Working	Depends both on the husband and her own salary	Cairo	Yes	Woman's autonomy means independence and it is not practical, because a woman's children are the most valuable thing in her life. A woman cannot impose her opinion on the husband; the husband's authority is both socially and religiously based and he is more knowledgeable than the woman on life matters.

Rana	36	University degree	University degree	Non-working	Depends both on the husband and her own resources	Cairo	Yes	An autonomous woman is the cultured one who has self confidence.
Randa	26	University degree	High school diploma	Working	Depends both on the husband and her own resources	Cairo	Yes	The woman is either an introvert if she is a housewife or an extrovert if she works outside of the house. To have a share in the family responsibility is very important especially that the woman is knowledgeable about the family's needs.
Sama	Early 30s	University drop-out	University degree	Working	Depends on her own salary	United Arab Emirates	Yes	An autonomous woman can think and express her ideas as well as express herself.
Samira	40	University degree	University degree	Working	Depends on her own salary	Cairo	Yes	Autonomy has several representations amongst which the woman's ability to do several things at the same time and balance between her home and work responsibilities, since

								work provides the woman with the psychological stability that makes her feel desired by the society on the condition that it is not on the expense of her family and household responsibility.
Sayyeda	27	Illiterate	Preliminary education	Working	Depends both on the husband and her own salary	Fayoum	Yes	A woman's autonomy is limited, as the woman is under the auspices of her husband.
Sherifa	35	Master of Arts	PhD	working	Depends both on the husband and her own salary	Cairo	Yes	Autonomy is the woman's ability to have sound opinions that are effective either directly or indirectly.
Soha	30	Master of Business Administration	University degree	Non-paid leave	Depends both on the husband and her own resources	Cairo	Yes	Autonomy means having independent thinking and not being easily affected by others' opinions. A woman's autonomy is represented in her areas of expertise such as her household

								and family responsibility, where she has more authority than the husband does.
Yasmeen	33	University degree	PhD	Working	Depends both on the husband and her own salary	N/A	Yes	A woman's autonomy lies in her continuous attempt to be up to date with the world around her. The woman's ability to adapt to her life is necessary for the survival of the family.
Yosra	50	University degree	University degree	Working	Depends both on the husband and her own salary	Cairo	Yes	Autonomy is the woman's ability to affect herself and her children. Independence may not be a plus because family comes first.