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Round Table

The Role of Higher Education in the Empowerment of Arab Women

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Managing Editor

The role of higher education in the empowerment of Arab women was the subject of a round table discussion held at the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World in January 2006. The participants Lara A., Evette G., Yasmine D., Rania G., Dahlia K.S., Maysa H., Zeina M., Josiane M., Myriam S., Marie Jose T. and Rana W. represented several of the major universities in Lebanon. The moderators were Dr. Dima Dabbous-Sensenig and Dr. Jennifer Skulte-Ouais. Due to space constraints, the following are excerpts from the two-hour discussion.

Dima Dabbous-Sensenig: The purpose of this meeting is to get your feedback on the role higher education plays in empowering Arab women. Given that we are preparing an issue of *Al-Raida* on this topic we would like to know: To what extent does getting a higher degree allow you to take leadership and decision-making positions? We are interested in the position of the younger generation, your position, and the problems you are facing in terms of reaching top-ranking decision-making positions. To what extent does higher education help you? We strongly believe that we cannot move forward if we do not identify the problems encountered.... Why did you end up in higher education?

Rana W.: Nowadays, women are more ambitious and education gives them the venue to actualize their dreams. Things have changed and life has developed. Women are refusing to stay at home and be dependent. They are asking to be equal with men.

Lara A.: Going to school and later on to university was a given. I took it for granted. It was not even a choice I had to make.

Marie Jose T.: Education was a must. Ever since I was 16 I was interested in politics and history. I ended up majoring in Political Science at Notre Dame University (NDU) and I currently work at the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

Yasmine D.: Working on a Bachelor's and Master's degree was something I took for granted. This is partially because of my mother who instilled in me the pursuit of knowledge. She is a very intelligent and ambitious woman who wanted to become a doctor. However, she wasn't that lucky because her parents refused that she pursue her higher education for two reasons, namely the war and her choice of major. My grandfather worried that my mother would end up unmarried because studying medicine requires sac-

rificing several years of one's life. Hence, because my mother was prohibited from realizing her dreams, she projected all her ambition onto me. She always encouraged me to pursue my dreams and aim high. This is partly why I decided to work on my higher education.

DDS: So it is revenge for your mother.

YD: Yes, it was partly to avenge my mother. But, to be honest, I believed in my potential and wanted to pursue my education.

Josiane M.: I am very fortunate to have parents who encouraged their children, irrespective of their gender, to pursue their higher education. According to my parents, any degree lower than a Master's was not acceptable. My parents supported me greatly. The reason why I decided to join Saint Joseph University (USJ) and do my Diplôme D'Etudes Approfondies (DEA) after a three-year lapse was because I have a passion for Political Science. Moreover, USJ has one of the best Political Science departments in Lebanon. I knew I was capable of juggling work and studying, so here I am. Once I finish my DEA I am planning to go for a Ph.D.

Rania G.: My situation is the exact opposite. My family and I left war-torn Lebanon and settled in the United States. Since an early age I was really into art and pottery and I wanted to venture into that field and discover the artist in me. I decided to join a non-academic program where I took Art History design workshops. My parents were not pleased. They tried to advise me against such a choice but when they realized that I was adamant they respected my wishes because freedom of choice was respected in my family.

My father was very supportive and he often said: "Let her do whatever she wants to do; she will eventually find her way." After I finished my design certificate we came back to Lebanon where I worked in the fashion industry for four years. After that, design and fashion were completely out of my system. I literally lost interest in them and wanted to explore my options. So I decided to major in Political Science and International Affairs. I was very interested in politics because politics dominates our lives in this part of the world. I joined the Lebanese American University (LAU) and started from scratch. I was admitted as a freshman student. At that time I was 24 years old and had two sons. It was very difficult with a family in tow but I did it and graduated in July 2004 with a GPA of 4.00. After that, I joined the United Nations and worked for the center for women. Along with my job I started working on a Master's degree and will graduate this June.

DDS: Empowerment of women can take place in many

forms; education is one tool. Studies and statistics show that if you do not use this tool you will not be empowered. Many educated women in Lebanon and Syria do not use their education or put it into practice. It is such a waste given that the least education can do is empower women financially.

Evette G.: I finished school when I was 18 and started working as a school teacher. [At that point] the war was raging and I had lost both my parents. I taught for three years then decided I needed to further my education. Hence, I enrolled... at the Université Saint Joseph (USJ) and then worked on my Master's degree. I was working and studying at the same time. After completing my Master's I applied to France for a Ph.D. During that time I met my husband. So I had two options: either to further my education and work on a Ph.D. or get married. I opted for marriage, got children and was busy with them. Twenty years later, I decided to pursue my dream and work on a Ph.D. given that I was no longer busy with my children.

Going back to university was very empowering. Even though I strived to update myself throughout those 20 years by traveling to France to participate in training sessions, I often felt I was lagging behind. I have to admit that my husband helped me a lot and supported me immensely throughout my academic and professional career.

Female students usually perform better than their male counterparts in schools. Yet, when it comes to the workforce women are discriminated against and paid less because it is a patriarchal society and men are considered the breadwinners in a family. Familial relations ought to be egalitarian and if there is equality at home then it makes all the difference. Women should learn how to balance their familial and professional roles. Women ought to be organized.

Zeina M.: My case is very similar to the majority of those present here. Higher education was a taken-for-granted thing to do after school. I completed a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in Sociology then completed a Master's degree while working as a graduate assistant. I sometimes consider applying for a Ph.D. but somehow it seems very far-fetched. Going back to being a student with all the financial burdens and restrictions this period entails is very taxing.

Being a woman is an impediment when you want to pursue higher education. Getting married is an obstacle in itself. Moreover, giving birth to children incapacitates us whether we like it or not. Women will lose out on being appointed to higher positions because of the fact that they are married or have children.



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Even though higher education is always on my mind, it is a matter of priority [to me]: Do I want to pursue a Ph.D. or get married? A lot of female students of my generation went to university to kill time or to catch a husband. They were not really interested in higher education per se; higher education was a means to an end.

Jennifer Skulte-Ouaiss: In the US it is joked about, though less so now, [that a B.A. is really] the “M.R.S.” (i.e., marriage) degree.

MH: I was in the same department as Zeina and I was very frustrated because it was a lousy program. You end up with no skills. I often used to complain and was worried about the future. What was I supposed to do with a degree in sociology when I had no practical experience?

Myriam S.: Education was highly valued by my parents and after I graduated with a B.A., I wanted to work for a year or so before doing my M.A. My parents didn't want me to work. They put a lot of pressure on me to apply to universities and after working for a year I traveled to England to do my Master's. I was the youngest student in the Women's Studies program. Everyone was much older, had several years of experience and knew exactly what they wanted to work on for their M.A. thesis. I, on the other hand, didn't know anything. It was a very interesting experience but I regretted not waiting a couple of years before doing my M.A. At that time, I wasn't ready or equipped for graduate work. My parents advised me not to wait. They often insisted: “If you don't do your Master's now you'll never do it.” I felt very [pressured] and after a year I succumbed to their will.

I was the only Arab in my department. Despite the fact that my colleagues were of very different nationalities I was considered an alien by them simply because they didn't know where to place me. To them I was an Arab woman but I was not veiled. I was an Arab who wore “Western” clothes. The subject that I was working on was: “Virginity and Family Honor” and I remember someone attacking me - saying: “You're talking about virginity? Who talks about virginity?” To her, it was an alien subject. I had a Russian girl telling me: “You're working on 'Virginity and Family Honor.' What is this stupid subject? It's no longer an issue anymore...” and I really had to explain [the importance of this issue] to her and at the same time I felt I was so young.... Everyone knew what they were doing and I felt I didn't know what I was doing there.

JSO: How closely or not do you relate higher education to money in general or to one's earning power?

MH: It is a culture and you learn it from early on. You go into higher education because you want a higher salary.

That was the reason why most of us decided to go for higher education. Of course, it is important that one majors in a field he/she likes because you should enjoy what you are doing. Going for a higher education was the natural thing to do. My parents went out of their way to give us a good education. They spent all their savings to send us to the best schools and universities. When I applied to the American University of Beirut (AUB) I had no idea what I wanted to major in. Given that I was a Math student I didn't have much choice. So I decided to major in Architecture despite the fact that I knew nothing about it. During my second year at university I realized that I needed to shift majors if I wanted to find a job. So I opted for Sociology and did my Master's in Sociology.... While at university I was constantly worried about my career and about finding a job given that I had no practical experience whatsoever. For instance, I taught myself how to type. I learned it by myself at home.

YD: Formal higher education, in my opinion, is associated with expanding one's intellect rather than increasing one's income. Money was never an issue for me; what I was interested in was a higher position. Unmarried women in Lebanon are looked down upon. There is an immense pressure that is put on women to get married or else they are stigmatized as “old-maids.” This is where the gap lies. After a woman graduates she has to find a husband even if she wants to work or further her education; she still has to secure a marriage proposal. Most women who are working nowadays are doing so because of economic need and they are joining the labor force after securing the permission of their husbands. Besides, even if women are allowed to work, rarely do they become decision makers within the household. Very few men are willing to accept that. Many of my colleagues and friends admit that they are very restricted by their husbands. My husband, on the other hand, is very different. Had he not been broadminded I wouldn't have married him.

DDS: To what extent are we able to reconcile our upbringing, our culture, and our role as mothers? Women are often put in situations where they have to choose between motherhood and a career. At the end of the day, when women choose to go for higher education and still be mothers they tend to do everything. Women end up with a triple burden and the load often cripples them and they collapse. So [do] you have any idea how to reconcile the role of motherhood and leadership positions?

RG: I think balancing a career and a family is very hard but it is doable. Of course each and every one of us has a capacity and it is up to us to decide if we are capable of juggling things. Achieving such an arrangement requires the collaboration and support of the husband and of the extended family.

On another level, many factors hinder women from reaching decision-making positions: the culture, the political will, how we fail to view women as capable leaders, ... the undemocratic systems that we have that hinder women — people fail to choose freely. Yet when it comes to ordinary people like us I believe if women want to make it — study, work, and have a family — it is possible because I believe that where there is a will there is a way.

ZM: Most of us would need help or an extra pair of hands if one decides to combine work and motherhood I assume. Otherwise that would be way too much. Domestic help is needed. Most males — no matter how liberated and open-minded they are — still expect women to be responsible for the housework. Given that domestic workers are available makes juggling a lot easier. It is a class issue in my opinion; it boils down to whether one can afford to get extra help.

JM: I have been married for the past two-and-a-half years and both of us do not want kids right now. So whenever I am asked: "When will you have kids?" My answer is "When I finish my DEA." People are outraged that I want to finish my degree before having kids. People don't understand. I am sick of these reactions.

YD: I am refusing to have kids. I have been married for the past six years and I still don't have children. I don't want to have children. I don't really like children. I often give excuses to people, but to be honest I am not planning [on having] kids. The problem is my husband. He wants to have children. For now he is ok with my decision. I don't know what will happen later. I agree that there is this pressure to procreate. Everybody feels entitled to ask about this issue, even the taxi driver on the road.

DDS: I am 40 years old and I have a daughter from a previous marriage and I am still under pressure to have children.

MS: What Yasmine is saying is very daring, but also there are cases where women opt by choice to stay at home and raise their children. They study and earn a degree just for self-satisfaction. I have heard very negative views about stay-in-moms. Another point is that things are definitely changing and women are putting their degree into practice and are joining the labor force. Yet, there is a very important point we have to acknowledge: The fact that cheap domestic labor is available in this country makes things a lot easier. Whether we like it or not the issue of housework is no longer discussed between couples that can afford help. Because domestic workers are available they are expected to do all the housework. Yet, supervising the house help and making sure the household responsibilities are taken care of is a woman's pre-

rogative. Men no longer feel they need to help out simply because they provided their wives with a domestic worker.

YD: The extended family also helps out in terms of raising children. Children of working mothers are often left with their maternal or paternal grandmothers.

ZM: I was raised by a working mother. She is 71 years old and is still working. We had help for a while, yet since I was six I don't recall having a live-in hired help. We had a domestic worker come in once a week to help out with the housework. Given that we are three sisters we used to attend to the household chores after school and then after work. The fact that my mother was widowed at a young age and was left with three daughters to raise was very straining and tiring. My mother would have loved to continue her higher education but it was impossible.

DDS: I would like to raise a point here: We are discussing education, higher education, and women in leadership positions. Why is higher education important for you? Is education a survival thing? How does one use one's education? What are the benefits of education? Are you working on a degree to be intellectually satisfied or does it give you a sense of independence, being part of your society and being able to change it? Why do you want to work? Does education provide you with authority? Please reflect a little bit on this point.

EG: Women who assume a leadership role in society should be very careful when dealing with their husbands. Women should differentiate between assuming a leadership position and having authority. Women ought to know how to use the authority they have. I believe that misusing authority is counterproductive and wrong on both sides.

DDS: Of course this is important, but I also want you to reflect on the issue and question whether this is fair. When a woman reaches a position of power in her workplace this might affect her relationship with her husband. Some husbands feel somehow threatened and fail to accept their wife's success. Is that the case when it is the other way around? I strongly believe that such an issue is raised only when it involves women. Why should that be a problem? I would also like to raise several other questions, namely: Are you planning to use your education to acquire a leadership position? Are you interested in leadership positions? How can one occupy a leadership position when you are not prepared to do so at home? When one doesn't have guidelines one has to create his/her own. Is it easy? Please reflect on your education. Does the university prepare you to assume leadership positions? You may think you are not interested in leadership positions and you believe it is not for you. If so, why is it not for you?



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Dalia KS: I would like to go back to a previous point. The university is not preparing us for a career. All the material we study is so theoretical and dry. The university curricula should be more practical. I studied International Affairs and Diplomacy and all we did at university was read and read theories. When I went to apply for a job I was told I don't have any work experience....

ZM: It is [not necessarily] education that allows one to reach leadership positions but one's work experience. I believe that work experience is very important for reaching leadership positions. It is the struggle I went through: the job, the project, my encounters with people. Probably my Sociology background helped me communicate better with people. My work experience, my mistakes and what I have learned from my mistakes are what made me what I am today and what pushes me to go forward.

When we were at the B.A. level we acquired the theoretical knowledge needed to graduate. However, we weren't even taught how to formulate a proper questionnaire or to conduct proper interviews. I once approached one of my professors for help on an assignment. ... The professor's answer was: "I don't have time to correct your analysis. My eyes are hurting me from reading. I don't want to read anymore." That incident affected me greatly. I will never ever forget it. The professor I am talking about used to make fun of us in class. Instead of teaching us how to better analyze, he used to Xerox our term papers, put them on transparencies and joke about our mistakes. He also preferred "cuties" over serious students — if you were a cutie you got away with murder.

DDS: That is doing the exact opposite of what higher education is supposed to do, namely give you more self-esteem.

JSO: My questions here are the following: Are men and women equally affected by the theoretical [and] unpractical skills that they acquire from the system of higher education adopted in Lebanon? Are men, whether inside or outside higher education circles, taught to make connections [with the working world] and women are not? Let us try and factor gender into the formula.

DKS: Many parents encourage their daughters to opt for majors that will allow them to work and raise children. Women are encouraged to become school teachers. Parents are indirectly destroying one's ambition.

JM: Given that I am a Political Science student, one of the recurrent remarks I used to hear was "don't work in foreign affairs because it does not suit women." Before the

law was amended, employees at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were expected to return to their country after a period of three years. Women were not encouraged to pursue such a career because when they get married how would they drag their husbands with them?

JSO: I got a job at LAU and I dragged my husband to Lebanon.

DDS: Same for me. I dragged my husband too.

MH: Related to the point that you made earlier, namely: Is the university supposed to give you the skills needed to join the labor force? When university started, it was not supposed to do that. Maybe we need to redefine what the university is supposed to give us. To me a university education implied more financial independence.

JSO: I'm not an Arab woman, but I definitely got a higher education degree to gain more financial independence. I looked at my parents and said to myself, "I do not want to struggle the way they have."

DDS: My university education here at LAU had a lot of the problems you mentioned. However, I have to admit that I had good teachers who equipped me to work later on in my field. For me, it made a lot of difference that those teachers were women. Watching my female teachers in action was very empowering. I looked up to them. To me, each one of them was a "super woman."

So it is important to have role models, yet, it is also imperative to have gender sensitive courses. Can you reflect on the courses you took at university and their content? Theoretical and technical experience is important, but please try to reflect on your education in terms of course content, gender sensitivity, and tell me to what extent it has helped you — or not — feel the way you feel about yourself. If you were told, for instance, that you are "nothing but a pretty face," did that make you feel bad about yourself?

JSO: Both of you [Lara A. and Rana W.] are in Elementary Education, which is a female-dominated field, did that affect you?

LA: Unlike what some said, I believe that education implies economic independence. Within the family, a woman's opinion starts to matter and her voice is heard the minute she starts generating money and spending on household expenses. A lot of women are subjugated because they are economically dependent.

DDS: How much is the university preparing you for the future and for you to have an autonomous personality?

RW: We are hardly prepared given that the university is barely surviving. Professors are fed up with the way they are treated so they rarely show up to give their courses. We go home and study on our own. We are not encouraged, and fail to do things from the heart. Had we been in a university that respects us it would have been a totally different story.

DDS: Is there a difference if the professor is a male or a female?

RW: To be honest, there is no difference. It depends on the professor's personality. Dr. Fadia Hteit is very nice, she is very supportive and constantly encourages us. She feels with us and often tells us that we can be a force for change and we can change things if we try. To change things students have to be united and this is not the case; politics and religion come in and we are not a united front so I guess there is nothing we can do.

LA: Given that our department at the Lebanese University is an all-female department, we often think about what we are missing out on. For instance, we often question what it means not to have men [in our department] at the university. As female students we realize how much we need male colleagues and how much we depend on them. When we have a problem at the university, we, as women, are unable to formalize our demands and mobilize our efforts and make our voices heard.

DDS: I don't understand why that is so?

L.A: Because the mere fact that there is no mixing [between sexes] poses a problem. Had the university been a men's university the situation would not have been better. It is not that we as women are unable to do things. We can. But plans materialize when both genders are working together to reach a goal.

It makes all the difference when the university is a mixed one. From the minute you wake up to go to the university everything changes. Going to an all-women's university where there is no interaction between males and females is not healthy. When you are in a mixed environment you express yourself and your opinions differently than when you are in an all-girls' university.

YD: Maybe when a man is present one is more self-conscious.

MH: What she is trying to say is that because they are in an all-women university they are missing out on real-life situations given that they don't interact with men.

DDS: To what extent is your education helping you and

giving you the skills to argue your point and make yourself heard?

JSO: Politics, broadly speaking, infiltrates our everyday life. There is politics at this table. The issue of power dynamics is very important where age, education, background factors, etc., all feature. I just want to raise one point [regarding the current topic]: In the United States [many assert that] female students who are enrolled in single-sex universities are much more self-confident. They are less self-conscious when arguing their position. However, the research available as I understand it is not conclusive.

MS: I had two exchange students from Australia in my class and they were very bothered at LAU because they felt that men were invading their space.

DDS: Please reflect on this issue of politics in the broad sense of the word where you have to share power with men, and where your aim is to change things.

LA: I need to stress a point that might have been misunderstood. When a woman graduates from an all-women's university it does not mean that she will be less self-confident or she will be unable to deal with men in general. We all interact with men outside the university and even within the university when men come to visit us. The problem is when you lack motivation or when you no longer care about things. Let me try and explain myself better: When you attend an all-girls' university and you know that you will be seeing the 29 female colleagues you see everyday you are no longer motivated to take care of your physical appearance. At first you make an effort but then you lose interest and question what the point of dressing up nicely or wearing makeup is. So, you start looking in the mirror less and after a certain point you no longer care. You arrive at the university drained and tired and this lack of motivation becomes contagious. You lose interest in everything — your appearance, voicing your opinion, engaging in discussions, etc.

ZM: What you are trying to say is that the mere fact that there are no male students in the university renders you less interested in taking care of your physical appearance. So you mean there are no gender dynamics here, you are taking the man, not as an equal, but just as the biological opposite sex because this is where the attraction and seduction game comes in, whether consciously or unconsciously.

DDS: The question here is: To what extent is this empowering her as an element in society who is going to move things forward?



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YD: I think that this is setting her role as somebody who wants to please men physically and as somebody who needs the mirror of man. Hence, one's value becomes associated with how men look at you and I don't like that.

RG: I completely identify with what they are saying and feeling. It is a natural feeling. It is important to be empowered but you have to take into consideration this "other" who is the opposite sex. Creating a world here in the university is not reflecting the real world. It's single sex, so you are going to feel different than if you were living in a world that reflects the reality of men and women.

ZM: I think it's a two-way thing. It is the actual presence of the other sex and it is also what comes with it in terms of discussions and debates, particularly in Education if I'm reading you well. If you had male students with you I think maybe they would contribute to the discussions in a different way. This is where the lack of interaction or the lack of interest is reflected.

LA: It's a minor point that reflects many aspects in one's life. Because we opted for Early Child Education (Preschool) and given that all the students who are enrolled in the department are women, we ended up in a single-sex setup. So, in a way, it is our choice of university and specialization that has kept us from interacting with men and not our society.

DDS: Society too is responsible because majoring in Elementary Education is not an appropriate field for men. There is a point I would like to raise here. Unfortunately, women only see themselves through the eyes of the men looking at them; their self-esteem does not come from within and from what they can do, but rather from how men view them. This is a problem, a cross-cultural one. Wherever consumerism is very high in society, the pressure is on women to concentrate on their looks. Hence, as long as I look pretty I feel good about myself.

To what extent is your education neutralizing this pressure? Education tells me that my worth comes from within. Is your education and higher education helping you rid yourself of the pattern [of concentrating on how one looks]? To what extent is this happening in the course content, in the university, the teachers that you see, in your interactions with your friends, etc.?

YD: I think that higher education gives you the self-confidence that a man's admiration would have given you. It provides you with an alternative to being dependent on how men look at you, and it provides you with an internal source of self-confidence. So yes, my education helped me a lot. However, many female students on campus told me that they sometimes felt that some male pro-

fessors failed to see them as anything other than a physical being. I know that because I interviewed many female students while working on an article about sexual harassment at LAU.

Male teachers still look at women from the traditional point of view, namely: Is she beautiful or not? And sometimes one's grading is affected. So higher education is not serving its purpose here because higher education is supposed to give you an internal source of self-confidence and a feeling of self-worth. So, when a teacher tells you that you are the source of your grade and that your physical appearance is the reason why you took the following grade then it defeats the purpose.

MJT: I also think it's a question of attitude: how you react to things, how flexible you are. For example, I was told by one of my university teachers that getting a Master's degree abroad is a waste of money. According to him, because I am a woman I am bound to get married and become a housewife.

We are exposed to such sexist comments all the time and I think it is a question of attitude. It depends on the person and if he/she has the inner strength to fight back. I don't consider such comments impediments; on the contrary, I actually see them as challenges. I often feel I want to fight back and defeat such claims.

My boyfriend often tells me that he sees me as half male, half female because I'm working all the time and I don't have time to see him anymore because I have a lot of work.

DDS: For the rest of you, has your education helped you or is it just related to one's character and personality?...

DKS: The attitude of university professors does influence the performance of students. When teachers encourage you to work hard, you feel motivated. But when teachers don't take their profession seriously it affects you greatly. You become de-motivated.

DDS: This problem applies to both males and females. As females, where are you getting your empowerment from? Is it from education? [Financial and other] problems are common to both male and female students. That's taken for granted. But on top of that, female students face additional problems because they are women. I want to hear more.... Do you think you're being disadvantaged additionally on top of all the problems because you're a woman? ...

JSO: If you could change one thing about higher education so that women would be more empowered in per-

sonal relationships, in public roles, or as politicians, or in their private jobs, what would you change?

RG: It's not something related directly to gender, as [it's] said that the best students are usually women. Excellence — whether by males or females — needs to be better acknowledged. I have two other suggestions regarding higher education. The link to employment, as everyone was saying, also affects women because women don't know how to gain access to employment. So, if higher education can also bridge the gap between graduating and being able to have the network to find employment as well as full graduate scholarships (for example, Marie Jose here got the Fulbright Scholarship). So I mean a challenge like this would really help women and empower them.

MH: I believe that career orientation sessions are also very beneficial and important. However, despite the fact that orientation sessions are taking place they are very market-oriented. They fail to mold you into a better career person. You get a lot of talk about things you can do but nobody follows you up; nobody guides you. You are given a lot of brochures to consult and then you're on your own.

JSO: What about leadership training?

MH: Leadership. I don't think it's an issue for most of the people in this country. There are so many obstacles to face before you worry about whether you're going to need leadership training or not.

JSO: But... leadership, broadly defined, what does it mean to be a leader in the classroom?

MH: Whether you are going to find a job or not and being a woman and

MS: And you have to keep the job as well.

MH: And being a woman there is the worry which kind of job you are going to get.

JSO: For example, in the US, at job interviews they are interested in what kind of leadership skills you have. What can you contribute to make the business more innovative and bigger? What do you think needs to be changed in order to empower women, is there something in higher education that can do this?

DKS: I think not only leadership training but leadership courses [are needed] more than Women's [Studies] courses because there's this culture that teaches women that by default they are not leaders. They are more educators, and so taking classes on leadership would raise, I think, women's goals and make us more ambitious.

JSO: It is interesting that you made the differentiation that educators are not leaders whereas actually in my mind, I link the two directly. But that is an excellent point.

(Talking together)

JM: I think universities should help their graduates secure job opportunities, especially for their female students. I know a lot of universities in the US that do this.

JSO: In the US they now call it the "old girls' network." It used to be the "old boys'." All the men in power went to school together and keep and strengthen those relationships in their personal and business lives. Women have been trying to translate this idea into a network for women so that when, for example, my department is trying to hire a professor in political science, I try to think of all the good women that I know and — not that I'm just discriminating against men — it's just we need to encourage women who might not feel that they have a chance....

YD: Role models are very important. It would be good if the university could hire more female professors and encourage more women — I don't know — make awareness campaigns or something, hire more women leaders.

JSO: Something just came to mind when I was thinking about female workplaces. I have an on-going discussion with my mother about the fact that she doesn't like female bosses. She's in the United States and she doesn't like female bosses and [meanwhile] I've had wonderful female bosses for the most part. Think of role models... especially women.

ZM: I've had very bad experiences with female bosses. It was terrible. They could be harmful and heartless ...

JSO: Do you expect something different of them or do you feel they...?

ZM: I don't know but I think there's so much pressure on women [bosses] to prove themselves that they try to make sure that their positions are secure. So, irrespective of who the person in front of her is, she stops being understanding.

MH: You expect them to be more understanding?

(Talking together).

ZM: I mean I'm not saying understanding. Being human. I'm not saying being lenient or just making exceptions because you're a woman or just giving you a special treatment. I'm just saying being human....