



# The Difference Between Professionalism and Professional Women

I don't know what it is about career women, in Lebanon, the Arab world and all over the world in short. Their male colleagues either overrate or underrate them. They themselves do the same and in the same manner. There are the militant career women who will confront the odds. Furthermore, there are those who maintain a distinction between professionalism and professional women as if one is strictly business and the other highlights gender differences. They must rearrange their lives according to the rules of a predominantly male business world while their own role definitions remain unchanged.

To get into the labor market they challenge the traditional norms which prefer to see them safely established in a home rather than wheeling and dealing with men. Once they are on the job they concentrate on doing a good job, maybe even better than men, and in the process avoid addressing issues of discrimination publicly, lest their concern with these issues discredits them as professionals and puts them back in their original place, as 'women'. After all, it is an established belief that a woman's basic role is in the family, and for that purpose, work and career advancement remain secondary and dispensable. Women leave their jobs when they get married and return only after the children have grown up. The law reinforces this pattern by passing different legislation for single and married women, emphasizing the husband's status in the case of the latter.

(work) are two separate worlds, with the private having a priority over the public for women and vice versa for men. The basic issue therefore remains one and the same, for men and women alike: women's ultimate goal is the formation of a family. Employment itself may serve that purpose by providing status and wider exposure for attracting better suitors and earning additional income to sustain the family.

Therefore, if women are to compete they must manage the requirements of both worlds each according to its rules. At home, and single handily most of the time, they are wives, mothers and housekeepers. In the office, they are not women - although the establishment may think so - they are professionals.

Lebanese and Arab women, who are usually portrayed, in the media and the literature mainly in the roles of a homemaker, are entering the race for employment and professional achievement in larger numbers. Although patterns and motives may vary, they are setting new priorities for themselves, like working women all over the world.

At this point in history, it would seem that the priority is to get established and promoted in the market as professionals, which is a long way from the days when they had to convince parents to allow them to get higher education, let alone have a part-time teaching job. As the saying goes "there is safety in numbers" and therefore, women's increasing presence and slow rise to decision making positions in Lebanon

and other Arab countries should reduce the inferiority complex they have about professionalism and professional women.

This issue of Al-Raida presents a series of articles and a variety of topics highlighting the status of Lebanese career women. Lebanese Women's Work and Working Women (p. 3-5) discusses society's perception of work and offers a number of alternatives for an 'equitable' distribution of labor and assistance to working women. Working Women and the Lebanese Legislation (p. 6-7) addresses laws and legal practices which hinder women's advancement and infringe on their rights. The discourse on the Ordination of Women (p. 8-9) and the profile of Dr. Edma 'Abuchdid, the First Woman to Graduate from a Medical School in Lebanon, (p. x) describe the conflicts and struggles women face when threading male dominated fields. Women Managers in Banks (p. 13) illustrates the bias between professionalism and professional women. Women and the Labor Market (p. 14-17) presents empirical data on participation.

The increasing volume of career and working women in Lebanon, the Arab region and the world in general is essential for asserting women's worth and rights to participate in development. Their self perception is just as important for resolving social and psychological ambiguity regarding their role and status •