

Traditionalism and Workplace Preferences among Arab and Jewish Israeli Women

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Introduction

Research on Americans suggests that women prefer workplaces that complement female gender roles (e.g., focusing on interpersonal relationships) over those that complement masculine gender roles (e.g., focusing on entrepreneurship; Konrad et al, 2000; Diekman et al., 2010). However, the extent to which these preferences apply cross-culturally is unclear. We focused on Arab Israeli women who are relative newcomers to the skilled labor force, and Jewish Israeli women who have been characterized as more Western in nature (Abu Baker, 2003).

We also examined the role of traditionalism, which has been associated with greater gender role differentiation (Eastwick et al., 2006) and defined negatively (e.g., opposing feminism; Kerr & Holden, 1999) by some scholars. However, some ethnographic research suggests that in Arab Israeli culture, which is highly traditional and patriarchal (Abu Baker, 2003), traditionalism may facilitate non-traditional career choices (Weiner-Levy, 2006). Further, some female Arab students (Cinamon et al., 2016) and managers (Arar & Shapira, 2016) view traditionalism as a resource.

We had three primary hypotheses:

- H1: Participants will prefer an organization that emphasizes relationships to one that emphasizes entrepreneurship.
- H2: Arab women will endorse traditionalism more than will Jewish women.
- H3: Traditionalism will influence women's workplace preferences in one of two ways:
 - H3a: Consistent with Western literature, traditionalism will be more strongly associated with a preference for a relationship-focused organization.
 - H3b: Consistent with ethnographic research on Arab women, traditionalism will be *less* strongly associated with a preference for a relationship focused organization, especially among Arab women

Method

Participants. Female participants ($N = 157$) were recruited from two colleges in northern Israel for a study on workplace preferences. Most participants were Arab ($n = 118$) —a group that included 73 Muslims, 28 Druze, and 17 Christians; 39 were Jewish. Of these, 117 (85 Arab, 31 Jewish) participants provided the data required for tests of our primary hypotheses.

Translation. The questionnaire was developed in English, translated into Hebrew, and back translated into English by independent translators.

Procedure. Participants completed an online questionnaire including a measure of traditionalism and a within-subjects manipulation of organizational type.

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Table 1. Mean Perceived Fit Ratings

	Arab ($n = 85$)	Jewish ($n = 31$)
Relationship Focus		
<i>M</i>	5.83	6.27
<i>SD</i>	1.38	0.87
Entrepreneurial Focus		
<i>M</i>	4.85	4.91
<i>SD</i>	1.63	1.66

Table 2. Mixed Model ANCOVA Results

Effect	<i>F</i>	η^2
Traditionalism	2.61	.03
Culture	2.93	.01
Organization Type	31.39***	.27
Organization X Culture	0.01	.00
Organization X Traditionalism	4.24*	.03

Note. Degrees of freedom are 1 and 113. Culture is coded Arab = +1 Jews = -1.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.



Figure 1. Two-way interaction between Traditionalism and Organization Type.

Measure. Traditionalism (adapted from Duckitt et al., 2010): e.g., “It is important to preserve our traditional values and moral standards.” (5 items; $\alpha = .78$)

Manipulation. Participants read vignettes about a relationship-focused business and a entrepreneurial business (counterbalanced). A filler vignette about an advertising business appeared between the two. After each vignette, participants rated the extent to which they perceived themselves as fitting in at the organization (4 items each; $\alpha = .96$ and $.94$ for the relationship and entrepreneurial organizations, respectively).

Results

Consistent with H2, Arab participants ($M = 5.09$) endorsed traditionalism more than did Jewish participants ($M = 3.83$), $F(1, 155) = 31.68$, $\eta^2 = .16$.

Perceived fit was analyzed in a 2 (Organization Type) X 2 (Arab vs. Jewish) mixed model ANCOVA with repeated measures on the first factor and traditionalism treated as a centered continuous predictor (See Table 1 for condition means and Table 2 for results).

- Consistent with H1, participants preferred the relationship-focused organization to the entrepreneurial organization.
- More consistent with ethnographic research on Arab women (H3b) than with Western research on traditionalism (H3a), collapsing across cultural group, greater traditionalism was associated with greater perceived fit in the entrepreneurial organization, $p = .012$, but not at the relationship-focused organization, $p = .936$ (See Figure 1).

Discussion

Consistent with American psychological research (e.g., Diekman et al., 2010), women preferred relationship-focused environments to entrepreneurially-focused environments. Furthermore, more consistent with ethnographic research (e.g., Weiner-Levy, 2006), women who more strongly endorsed traditionalism showed a stronger preference for the entrepreneurially-focused but not the relationship-focused organization

These results suggest the need for a more nuanced treatment of the role of traditionalism in women's workplace choices. Traditionalism is not necessary negative and gender role traditionalism may be distinct from broader cultural traditionalism. For example, an Arab principal told researchers, “...in my opinion liberalism does not oblige me to adopt Western values or a foreign culture” (Arar & Shapira, 2016, p. 860). Indeed, it may be possible for women from more traditional cultures to find equality within their own cultural contexts, on their own terms.

