

# Gender Issues in the Diversity and Practice of Public Relations in the UAE Case Study of P.R. Male Managers and Female P.R. Practitioners

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper evaluates the feminization of Public Relations (P.R.) and how that may shape the role of P.R. in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). One goal is to highlight the implications for the unique females' functions between male managers and female P.R. practitioners. Research questions include: What are the common challenges and gender issues in public relations in the UAE? Do P.R. managers encourage the recruitment of female workers and leaders in the P.R. field? Therefore, the findings of the research are based on qualitative primary data derived from semi-structured in-depth interviews with the P.R. managers and P.R. female practitioners. The paper concludes that UAE public relations staff members continue to execute their main roles. Therefore, male and female workers differed significantly in their views about gender fairness in work locations, roles, status, ranks and tasks, responsibilities, and work-life balance.*

*Keywords:* Collaboration, Critical Theory, Gender Roles, Public Relations (P.R.), Women Leadership

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## INTRODUCTION

As the Public Relations field becomes feminized in the Arab world, and particularly in the UAE, female and male practitioners alike must confront the prospect of power and leader or manager issues. The work environments of the genders vary significantly because they learn to hold different kinds of jobs; even in the same

job they are assigned different kinds of responsibilities. This paper presents a comprehensive examination of the current status of women in Public Relations and proposes concrete ways to achieve greater parity in education and practice. The author assimilates the theoretical literature regarding public relations and gender with results of a key longitudinal study of the power of gender in the field, along with illuminating interview data. Topics covered include factors contributing to sex discrimination; how public relations stacks up against other professions on

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gender-related issues; the challenges facing female managers and entrepreneurs; the experiences of ethnic minority professionals; and how to foster solutions on individual, organizational, and societal levels. It is recognized that educating females in Public Relations is one of the most resourceful decisions that society can make in terms of improving its social, economic, and health development. In many countries, such as Arabic countries, cultures that support the education of females find that it leads to a better social environment for themselves, their families, and the society as well (Berrais, 2009). The percentage of women in the Public Relations profession is low in most of the Arab nations compared to their counterparts in other parts of the world, especially those in the west. There are no accurate, updated statistics of the percentage of female P.R. practitioners in most Arab countries (Berrais, 2009). This paper discusses the current situation of women in Public Relations in the Arab world, and outlines the main causes of the low number of women managers in P.R. in some of Arab countries.

Studies about the field of P.R. practitioners regarding feminism are limited in the Arab region.

*No topic is more complex than that of the role of women in Arab societies. And it is made even more complex because of the lack of information about the multiple forces that act on women as they navigate a life path between competing interests in family, school and work (p. 102).*

Consequently, Sigel (1996) agreed that female perceptions of gender relations are complex and often conflicting. While many females see gender bias pervading nearly all social interactions—private as well as public—they do not always feel that they personally have been its victims. Women are torn, according to Sigel (1996), “between the desire to improve their positions relative to men and the desire to avoid open conflict with them... This complex picture of how women, while not always content with the status quo, have chosen to accommodate to the world they must face every day is certain to provoke considerable debate” (p.

3). Studying topics related to the experiences of ethnic minority professionals and learning how to cultivate solutions for individuals and organizations is essential to improve the community research development in the future.

*Authors from a half-dozen countries discuss women's roles in public administration in the context of their overall participation in the labor force. Women and Public Administration presents some astounding results derived from the authors' research into a particular country's government, politics, and the role of women in that country (Bayes, 1989, p. 2).*

In the UAE, gender issues, like assigning females to managerial positions, are rarely discussed. There are few research studies about female Public Relations practitioners in the UAE, since academics regarding women in Public Relations is a new major in the UAE. In 1995, 20 women were admitted into the newly designed Public Relations major program at the United Arab Emirates University in Al-Ain. The program is based on the American model for an undergraduate public relations curriculum (Creedon, Al-Khaja, & Kruckeberg, 1995). Today, more than 300 female students are studying public relations in the UAE University (Noor, personal communication, 2010). So, the increasing number of enrolled women is related to the importance of the field in the UAE. Noor (2010) added that the majority of Mass Communication students are female—there are over 300 female students and 36 male students in 2010. So, female alumni and public relations practitioners are spreading in the UAE faster than male practitioners. Furthermore, this research discusses the female practitioners and their role in the UAE organizations and the common challenges they face in their work. One of the typical stereotypes is that females are not as familiar with technology, such as creating websites, making videos, and using blogs. So, in order to explore the gender aspect and expand dialogue regarding women in the UAE workplace, it is necessary to combine data from library sources, online sources, and

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