

Bridge between Public Relations Education and Culture: The Perspectives of Bahraini Female PR Training Practitioners

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This paper uses a cultural approach to provide rich original qualitative data on the perspectives of female PR training students who newly finished their university degree in public relations in Bahrain. The research analyzes the relationships and stereotypes of these women through bridging PR education to the professional practice of public relations in the cultural context of Bahrain. The researcher adopts a cultural approach to analyze the data using cultural dimensions such as Hofstede (1994) and Hall (1976) in addition to theoretical concepts based on the literature on gender and power. The contribution of this research is that it is the first paper that offers primary data on female public relations education in Bahrain and its impact on the perceptions of female PR practitioners in term of leadership roles, image and power relationships from a cultural angle.

Keywords: Culture, public relations, gender, education, power

Public relations is one of the youngest professions in the Arab countries as it was practiced first in Egypt in the sixties. The late practice of public relations in the Arab countries was due to the late practice of management communication and the few numbers of management development institutes in those countries (Al Bakshongy, 2000). Therefore, the organizations in the Arab countries took some time before recognizing the strategic function of public relations in the corporate world. Nowadays, public relations is viewed in Bahrain as a 'vital part of the marketing mix for many local companies and is known as a far more complex and sophisticated science' (Stensgaard, 2002).

Since 1980s, gender has grown to be a prominent issue in the field of public relations research in the USA, especially with the increasing number of women entering the field and the 'labelling of the field as a feminine one' (Lesly, 1988, 43). Moreover, Reskin and Roots (1999) cited public relations as one of only ten occupations since the 1970s to show a 'disproportionate' increase in female workers (cited in Toth, 2001, p. 240). In other countries, such as Russia, public relations was described as "women job" (Tssetura, 2011). However, most of gender studies in public relations were limited to the Western context and to Western organizational culture. Although women in the Arab countries have started to enter the public life, only few studies related the working Arab women in public relations to cultural context (such as AlSaquer, 2008; Al-Jenaibi, 2011). Therefore, in this study, women were treated as individuals whose 'perceptions, meanings and experiences are appropriate and important data for analysis' (Foss & Foss, 1988, p. 9). Besides, the studies in the literature focused on the women who are working in management roles and who had work

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experience in public relations. The contribution of this research is that it will focus on the perspectives of training PR practitioners who freshly finished their bachelors degree in public relations and analyze their insights, expectations and stereotypes of the work of educated PR Bahraini women in their own cultural context. This focus aims to establish a bridge between public relations education and practice through answering the questions: What roles do the newly graduated PR women expect to practice in the organization? What are the stereotypes and perceptions of these educated women? What are the opportunities and challenges for young educated women related to their cultural context? How can the experience of Bahraini educated women in public relations contribute to the theoretical understanding of “power” in the Western-centered PR literature?

Background about Bahrain and Working Bahraini Women

Bahrain is an archipelago of 33 islands of 665 sq. km, located in the Arab Gulf of the Eastern shore of Saudi Arabia. Possessing minimal oil reserves, Bahrain has turned to petroleum processing and refining, and has transformed into an international banking center. Bahrainis diversified their economy and created some of the region’s best education and health systems. Before discovering petroleum in Bahrain in 1932, sea was the main source of living in Bahrain. Bahraini men used to dive for pearls for long months to gain their hard living, whereas women’s main role was raising children and taking care of their families. After economic and social developments accompanied with the discovery of oil, women established their roles in society. However, they were restricted to limited roles, because the society separated men and women in social life as a part of its old traditions where women should be segregated from men (AlSaqer, 2008).

Although Bahrain has been influenced by globalization and people have been affected by the modern lifestyle, they are still close to their traditions and cultural identity derived from Islamic culture as 70.2 per cent of Bahrain’s population is Muslim (Ministry of Information Affairs, 2018). Although the social status of Bahraini women is defined by Islamic law, people in the Arab Gulf are more restricted to their cultural traditions. Sometimes there is a confusing mixture between Islamic values that give women the right to work and represent themselves in public and the society’s restricted traditions that associate women with restricted roles in society (AlSaqer, 2008).

In 2001, the launch of the Supreme Council of Women in Bahrain has played a significant role in the increase of Bahraini women’s opportunities in the labor force. The Supreme Council for Women was established on August 22, 2001 and directly affiliated to His Majesty the King. It is considered the reference for all official bodies in regards to women affairs. The Council aims to ‘empower Bahraini women and merge their needs in the development programmes to ensure the sustainability of their family stability and familial bond. To consolidate the principle of equal opportunities in order to ensure competitiveness of Bahraini women, continuity of lifelong learning and providing diverse opportunities to Bahraini women in order to enhance the standard of their quality of life within a framework of legislation and supporting policies’ (Supreme Council of Women, 2015).

Women Education in Bahrain

In 2016, Bahraini women managed to achieve a high percentage of education Forty-nine per cent of women completed primary and secondary education; women received 63 per cent of college degrees (Supreme Council of Women, 2015).

Some scholars associated public relations professionalism with the beginning of PR education (L'Etang & Pieczka, 1996) and emphasized the importance of education to enhance the growth of public relations (Newsom, Turk & Kuruckeberg, 1999). As for public relations education in Bahrain, it started in 1997 as a minor subject in the BA of Mass Communication at the University of Bahrain, and then it is developed in 2007 to take a full track as part of the plan. In 2016, the percentage of female PR students at the University of Bahrain is (83.8 per cent) comparing to male PR students. In some PR classes, there is not even a single male student.

This increasing number of educated women in public relations raised the question of the practice, stereotypes and the professionalism of the field in Bahrain. Several studies raised the conflict between the feminization of public relations and the professionalization of the field (Fitch & Third, 2010; Cline et al., 1986). Fitch and Third (2010) claimed that 'the tension between professionalisation and feminisation continues to structure the ways in which both feminised occupations and recognised-but-feminising professions respond to the increase in the number of women in the workforce' (p. 4). However, although the majority of PR graduates in Bahrain are women, no research analyzes the impact of education on the stereotypes and leadership roles of Bahraini women in the Arabic culture.

Public Relations Practice in the Arab World

Several studies in the literature discussed the evolution and practice of public relations in the Arab world (i.e. Kirat, 2006; Barry, 2005; Creedon, Al-Khaja & Kruckeberg, 1995; Al Tamimi, 2014; Badran, Turk & Walters, 2003; Al-Kandari & Gaither, 2011). These studies stressed that culture played a significant role in the practice of public relations in the Arab world. For instance, Al-Kandari and Gaither (2011) used a critical/cultural perspective to examine Arab culture and found that commitment to religion, devotion to the group, resistance to change/attachment to history, and recognition of hierarchal order are key cultural influences on public relations practice in the Arab world. Al Tamimi (2014) argued that there is a consequence mutual impact between culture and public relations within Bahraini society. However, no research has related the concept of "culture" to the concept of "power" in the Arabic public relations scholarship.

Gender and Public Relations Practice

Several research in public relations focused on the glass ceiling women had encountered to achieve management roles because of various obstacles such as the overlapping responsibilities between home and work (Serini, Toth, Wright, & Emig, 1997); the conflicts and internal relationships between women in work (Wrigley, 2005; Pompper, 2012) and the lack of organizational supporting environment (O'Neil, 2003). Place (2012) used a qualitative methodology to examine how female PR practitioners make meaning of power. She suggested that female practitioners 'made meaning of power as influence, relationships, knowledge and information, access, results-based credibility, and empowerment' (Place, 2012, p. 435). The contribution of this paper is that it will study the concept of "power" in relation to the social culture of the participants.

Methodology

Several scholars used a qualitative methodology to study the perspectives of women in different cultures, such as the USA (Wrigley, 2005); Russia (Fitch & Third, 2010; Tsetsura, 2012).

2011); Bahrain (AlSaqer, 2008) & UAE (Al-Jenaibi, 2011). However, all these studies focused on the perspectives of the experienced women in the field. This research aimed to focus on the perspectives of the female PR training students who recently finished their university degrees in public relations in the year 2015-2016. By focusing on this sample, the researcher aims to analyze the relationships and stereotypes of these women through bridging PR education to the professional real practice of public relations in Bahrain using a cultural approach. The contribution of this research is that it is the first paper that analyzes the perceptions of the newly graduated female PR practitioners and how they affect our theoretical understanding of women's "stereotypes" and "power" in the non-western cultural context of Bahrain. The research argues that newly educated women—as new to the workforce - will be more critical in their insights about the practice, opportunities and challenges for educated women in PR. Four key qualitative questions were raised:

RQ1: What are the perceptions and stereotypes of the female newly graduated PR training practitioners and their roles in the organization?

RQ2: What are the challenges and opportunities for educated PR women in the cultural context of Bahrain?

RQ3: How can the experience of Bahraini educated women in public relations contribute to the theoretical understanding of "power" in the Western-centered PR literature?

RQ4: How does the experience of Bahraini educated women in public relations affect the theoretical understanding of the traditional stereotypes of Arab Gulf woman?

To answer these questions, the researcher conducted open, long interviews with 27 female training students who have recently finished their public relations degree and were training in different governmental, private, and PR agencies in Bahrain in the period from January 2016 to January 2017. For the reason of confidentiality, the names of the interviewees were kept anonymous. The researcher conducted the interviews in Arabic because the participants found it difficult to express their opinions in English and it was easier for them to share their feedback using their native language in a spontaneous way. Then, the researcher translated the transcripts of the interviews from Arabic to English. In this process, the researcher quoted key statements and reduced them to key themes after discussing them with the participants. The researcher arranged the participants' opinions and discussions under key themes to conclude key theoretical findings and implications.

Discussion

This paper aims to analyze the stereotypes and challenges that faced educated female PR practitioners in relation to the cultural context of Bahrain through using two of the most cited cultural concepts: Hofstede's individualism/collectivism (1994) and Hall's high/low context cultural model (1976). To introduce these concepts, Hofstede explained that, 'Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family' whereas 'Collectivism pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty' (Hofstede, 1994, p. 51). The choice of this cultural concept is because of the effect of collective culture in the Arabic culture. One of very significant argument about public relations and culture was raised by Sriramesh and Vercic (2009) in their book about global public relations. They argued that both societal and corporate cultures exert influence on the practice of public relations in various countries. AlSaqer (2016) explained that in the Islamic culture, the core system is the

society, not the individual, which is best described by the Islamic notion of “Ummah” that looks to the society as “one body”; if any part of this body, any individual is in pain, then the whole body will suffer (p. 4). The concept of ‘Ummah’ or the unified Muslim community emphasizes collectivism not individualism (AlSaqr, 2016, p. 4). Mowlana explained, ‘The notion of community in Islam makes no sharp distinction between public and private; therefore, what is required of the community at large is likewise required of every individual member’ (Mowlana, 1996, P. 122-123).

Another significant cultural model when studying cultures is Hall’s high/low context cultural model. Hall explained that a high context communication or message is one in which most of the information is already in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicitly transmitted part of the message, while a low context communication uses explicit code (Hall, 1976, p. 91). Several studies used these models to study different organizational contexts because of its relevance to study organizational culture in relation to social culture. The contribution of this study is that it uses qualitative analysis of these cultural concepts in relation to the framework of Geyer (2012) through analyzing three key perspectives of the female training practitioners: leadership, image, and the relationship between culture and power from a cultural angle. Geyer (2012, p. 12) recommended that ‘primary research of students studying the discipline would provide more qualitative data to better understand how students perceive and employ the roles of leadership, image, and culture and power once working in the public relations industry.’

Education as a Source of “Power”

Berkowitz and Hristodoulakis (1999, p. 92) argued that for many organizations, attaining a specialized degree is not a prerequisite for working in this field. Besides, they pointed out, that PR practitioners have received less training and socialization influences (p. 93). The interviewed participants explained that the modules they studied in the university have combined both theoretical and practical contents. They explained that the curriculum they have studied are based on both Arabic and English textbooks where both research and practical projects are important. Several interviewees explained that in PR profession work experience was perceived more important than education. They noted, ‘Educated women can’t get an opportunity to work in PR without having work experience.’ One participant said,

In my training period, I got through very embarrassing situations when one client shouted at me; another one close the phone while I’m talking with him; I learned a lot from the real experience what I never have been taught in the university!

One of the participants explained the conflict between the educated PR woman on one hand and the experienced PR woman on the other hand in the same organization: ‘My female boss has good experience, but she doesn’t have a degree in PR... Sometimes I feel she’s jealous from me! She is afraid that one day I would take her position!’ Another participant stressed,

I think education is not a requirement to get managerial roles in PR... My manager is specialized in Finance, but she had long experience and good communication skills. Sometimes, I feel it’s unfair... I think specialized, educated female practitioners should be given the priority.

On the other hand, it is interesting that several participants talked about education as a source of “power” in the organization. For instance, one participant said, ‘I think education gives me more power, but I still need experience.’ Other participants explained that education can empower women in the organization. ‘I think education makes woman more impactful in the work environment and it gives me the opportunity to be employed in the same organization I had my training in,’ explained an employee. ‘I think education gives women more opportunities to be distinguished and to develop PR roles in relation to their educational background, she said.’ Other participants echoed the same thing, ‘we think educated PR woman is the facilitator between what we studied in the books and what we practiced; now-a-days, education and experience are required in order to get a job in PR, but we think educated woman can add quality to the tasks she is playing’. Most of the participants agreed that both education and experience are important to empower women in the organization: ‘Working in a PR department is different from what we studied theoretically; both education and experience are important.’

These findings stressed that contrary to the traditional stereotypes in the Western-centered literature that Arab women lack education and have less opportunity in the workforce, our research shows that education has “empowered” Bahraini women in public relations. In the Bahraini society, the high percentage of women with degrees has facilitated the women’s opportunities to develop their roles in PR field.

Leadership and Management Roles in Public Relations

This perspective is based on the past research’s conclusion of the role woman has played either as a technician or as a manager (Broom & Dozier, 1986; Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Dozier, 1984, 1992; Lauzen, 1994). Women are marginalized by themselves or by social stereotyping to the role of technician (Cline et al., 1986). AlSaqer’s research (2008) found that the key challenges facing female PR in Bahrain were: cultural perspective, corporate environment and relationship with colleagues, the organization as social domination, and the marginalization of public relations function.

Grunig and Grunig (1992) explained that playing managerial roles in the organization cannot be separated from the organizational decision-making environment. Besides, Berkowitz and Hristodoulakis (1999, p. 93) explained that, ‘Management-oriented public relations departments also conduct research and monitor the impacts of the organization’s actions on a continuing basis. They help set objectives, design short- and long-term organizational philosophies, and even contribute to the budgeting process.’ Based on public relations excellence theory, since women are the majority in PR, they should be offered the opportunity to play strategic managerial roles in the organization. Some participants explained that educated woman can play strategic managerial roles in the organization. A participant stressed that: ‘If PR educated women is given the opportunity, they can conduct the strategic managerial functions of PR such as planning and analyzing.’

Most of the participants noted that women succeeded to acquire managerial positions in the organization they are working in: ‘I think recently both men and women are playing equal roles in the organizations in Bahrain if they acquire experience and qualifications,’ an interviewee said. These findings alter the past theoretical assumptions that Arab women have little opportunities in public jobs. However, in some organizations, there is misunderstanding of the management function where the PR manager has little role in decision making in the organization. This goes along with the survey of female practitioners

that found that they were happiest performing the 'down and dirty' tasks, such as writing, editing, and production of news releases and publications (McGoon, 1993; cited in Berkowitz & Hristodoulakis, 1999, p. 94-95).

In this research, it is interesting that educated women perceived themselves as good in technical communication roles. Our participants told us:

- 'Women are better to represent the organization in radio and TV than men';
- 'Woman working in PR is more open to listen and respect other people, she could do many things in short time... she is more creative in problem solving';
- 'In my department, woman played technical roles mainly such as writing and events organizing.'

Female self-stereotypes might be derived from the society's stereotypes of women who associated themselves to specific tasks related to being 'nice', 'beautiful' and 'good communicator,' which will be explained in more details in the next section.

Moreover, it is the organizational culture that assigned specific roles to female PR practitioners:

- 'I got many bad times with other people -colleagues and consumers- who underestimate my role in PR because I'm a woman'.
- 'Women in the organization I'm training in are involved in the strategic decision making process in addition to communication tasks, such as writing press releases, events organizations and making phone calls to communicate with important stakeholders'.
- 'My female PR manager is practicing both managerial and technical skills. She is doing everything!'

Thus, PR management role and tasks are still not defined clearly in the Arab organizational context.

Women's Image and Stereotypes

Place (2012, p. 448) argued that gender 'affects how public relations practitioners perceive their industry and perform both personal and professional roles.' Therefore, it is significant to analyze how female PR educated participants perceive their roles in PR in the cultural context of Bahrain. This analysis aims to study how the concepts of "stereotype", "power" and "culture" are connected to develop our theoretical understanding of public relations in the non-Western context of Bahrain.

The participants described female PR practitioners relating them to narrow communication roles:

- 'Woman is the beautiful touch of the organization';
- 'What distinguishes woman is that she is a good communicator with the public';
- 'Woman is better in building social relationships than man';
- 'I think woman has a better opportunity to work in PR because of her communicative nature. In my department, I had three female colleagues and only one male participant!'
- 'Sometimes it's difficult for woman to take decision'.
- 'My female boss is taking decision in the department.'

These findings show that the perceptions and stereotypes of women in Bahrain are affected by the hidden, unconscious "power" of traditional culture that "marginalized" women to specific communication jobs.

Some participants related this stereotype to the cultural stereotypes and expectations of women: 'Society sometimes doesn't accept the work of woman in PR because in PR you have to work with men; work long hours until night.' Another participant explained the constant challenge of woman to prove herself in work:

One of the challenges facing woman is related to fighting her physical nature. Personally, I had many difficulties when I was pregnant for the first time and I had to go with my manager in many visits and meetings outside the organization... Sometimes I couldn't make it and when I go out for PR visits I feel so exhausted. I think this limits women's roles sometimes. After two months pregnancy, unfortunately, I lost my baby.

The findings show that Arab woman is always controlled by her internal challenges and conflicts derived from the "power" of cultural traditions. It is not the organization's laws that prevent her from achieving what she wants to achieve, but it is the "power" of culture on her perceptions and stereotypes of herself and her roles. Woman is not "forced" or "marginalized" by the organizational rules to play specific roles, but she is raised up to think, act, and perceive herself in a specific way. The experience of Bahraini women is different from the Western theoretical understanding of the concept of "power" that is limited to self-esteem "power" and organizational "power". Bahraini women talked about the "power" as the influence of unknown others, traditions and cultural limits of what women perceived as accepted or not accepted in the workforce. In the individualistic Western societies, every individual has his/her own choice in relation to the "power" influences in the organizational culture. However, in the Arab culture we cannot separate the individuals from the "power" of the social culture. Bahraini woman has the opportunity to prove herself in public relations, but she has to win her internal battle between what she wants to do and what the society expects her to do. Bahraini culture is a collective culture where individuals are very concerned of the expectations of others. The findings show that Arab woman can win this battle when she trusts her skills and qualifications and utilizes the opportunities she acquires.

Cultural and Organizational Concept of "Power"

Several participants highlighted the challenges and opportunities for female PR practitioners. 'Both men and women have equal opportunities in the organization; it depends on how hard you are working,' explained a participant. Another argued that, 'Many organizations now prefer employing Bahraini women because they represent the other women in the society and they're easier to communicate with.' On the other hand, other women talked about some cultural conflicts they had gone through as women working in public relations:

- 'I think sometimes being a Muslim woman with a veil is a barrier especially in the private sector. In PR, they prefer women who are open and less conservative with men'; 'No one will tell woman what she should do in embarrassing situations, it's her culture and her beliefs that would guide her behavior;'
- 'As a Bahraini PR practitioners, some people think that we're "forced" to wear veil by our family or society... they don't understand that Bahrain is an open culture. As educated women, we "choose" to wear it as part of our beliefs. Other women "choose" not to wear veil. It's unfair to underestimate and judge woman on the way she "chooses"

to wear... we want people to respect women as they are because it's our culture and religion. You can't make Bahraini woman a copy of other women in the world... We have our identity.'

It is interesting in the case of the Bahraini society that the "power" of social traditions and culture is sometimes stronger than the power of organizational culture. This hidden "power" is inside woman and controls unconsciously her choice of what she should do and should not do. It is part of the Bahraini Arab collective society where the unknown "others" can interfere and affect how women should act in different situations. It is the most challenging power agent because it is hidden and affects women's daily attitudes and behavior unconsciously.

Other participants argued that it is easier for female PR practitioners to work in governmental organizations as the environment is more conservative and suitable for Bahraini women: 'I think in governmental organizations, Bahraini women have the same opportunities as men because the work environment adheres to the conservative Bahraini culture.' Added another government employee, 'I don't have any cultural barrier as an Arab Bahraini woman because the organization culture respects the Bahraini social culture.' Furthermore, the participants talked about power relationships and values in the work environment from different angles. Several female participants talked about their relationship with their male colleagues:

- 'Some of my cultural values as a woman are different from my male colleagues in the department';
- 'Some men don't respect women and underestimate their role';
- 'Some people judge a PR woman based on her physical appearance.'

Again, it is the power of social culture that defines the limits of the relationships between men and women in the organization.

Furthermore, Wrigley (2005) explained the effect of social and organizational culture on the role of women in public relations. The participants talked about the positive and negative impact of the organizational culture on their role in the organization: 'I think we have supporting culture in the organization for the work of women as women from many nationalities played managerial and technical tasks in the organization.' One participant explained,

There's a negative cultural aspect relating to the work of women in PR; there's a cultural barrier when woman is working with other men from different nationalities who sometimes don't understand the cultural traditions in our society. In our Islamic traditions, women can't shake hand with men, which can't be avoided when you are working in PR. If you don't shake hand back, you might be misunderstood! So there's this cultural conflict inside woman working in PR all the time between being professional and keeping her cultural values.

This hidden cultural "power" might limit the opportunities of Arab women in public jobs. However, we should raise the question whether it is ethical to ask women to change their cultural beliefs to fit with the nature of public relations, or we should alter our way of looking to Arab women and respect and accept their beliefs and identity. Many participants explained the impact of the management on the role women play in public relations:

- 'We need an encouraging management for women to play PR managerial roles';
- 'One day, my manager criticized the way my female colleague was dressing in an inappropriate way'.

It is interesting that many PR female practitioners explained that they preferred to deal with a male manager as women could be against the other women in many situations, which goes along with past research (Wrigley, 2005). Several participants noted,

- ‘My female manager was jealous from me because she is not educated although she has long experience!’;
- ‘I prefer male boss, because woman is always jealous of other women!’;
- ‘Most of the problems I had are coming from my female colleagues!’;
- ‘Women are competing all the time with each other.’

It is ironic that on one hand the female participants seek managerial roles, and on the other hand they prefer male managers for several reasons:

- ‘I have a male boss and I got on very well with him... I think men have long-run vision and can be more patient under pressure.’;
- ‘My male manager encouraged me and offered me to be employed in the organization I’m training in’;
- ‘I prefer male manager because men are communicating better with women... I think only few female managers have good relations with their female employees!’;

If we analyze these perspectives from a cultural angle deeply, man in the Arab traditional culture should help and protect woman rather than compete with her. Besides, woman unconsciously perceived man as a better manager as part of the social stereotype she is raised up to believe. The participants said indirectly that man can better perform management role than woman. Thus, the conflict woman goes through is an inner conflict related to her cultural stereotypes and expectations and the way she perceives and deals with other PR powerful participants in the organization environment.

Few participants said that female manager is more communicative and understanding different circumstances in relation to her colleagues. A participant argued, ‘For her, it doesn’t matter whether my boss is male or female as far as he/she is fair as we’re all working as a one family in PR department.’ Several female PR practitioners talked about the challenges that are facing women working in public relations:

- ‘In PR, you have to work late, travel, deal with men and some people still think it’s more easier for man to work in PR in our society’;
- ‘You have to work in holidays and overtime which overlaps with women’s other roles’;
- ‘PR work is challenging for married woman because she has to stay late at work and it’s difficult for her to take sick leave if one of her children is sick’;
- ‘People might talk about you behind your back and judge you a lot as a woman.’

To conclude, the findings of this paper bring new theoretical understanding of PR participants in the Arab region. The “power” conflict the woman goes through in Arab societies is not always explicit and direct. In Bahrain, although women have equal labor opportunities, they have their unique cultural expectations, stereotypes, and rules. Bahraini culture is a high-context culture where ‘most of the information is either in the physical context or internalised in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, or transmitted part of the message’ (Hall, 1976, p. 91). As a high-context culture, Bahraini women are not told what they “should do” or “should not do” directly, but it is women themselves who expect what they “should” do according to traditional expectations and roles. In such a high-context culture, cultural rules are not said in words, but they are understood in the culture of communication. The good thing about collective culture is that people are caring about others and helping each other in the organization. Several participants stressed the

concept of working as a “One family”. On the other hand, in collective culture, the society is a key power agent in defining women’s social roles. Therefore, a new cultural model of PR should be developed to analyze the effect of social culture on the practice of public relations in such a collective society.

Recommendations of PR Practitioners in Bahrain

Finally, the interviewed participants provided several recommendations to improve women’s roles in the organization. The first recommendation is to start with women themselves and change the way they look to themselves and be more open to new opportunities:

- ‘Woman has to work harder to get her rights’;
- ‘She has to accept working late and at all times’;
- ‘Education is the women’s weapon, but still she has to acquire training and experience and self-esteem’;
- ‘Experience and education are both crucial for woman’; ‘All women need in PR is strong character and innovation’;
- ‘Woman should be braver and participate in all tasks and roles in the organization’.

The second recommendation is related to create a supportive environment for the work of women:

- ‘Woman needs a supporting management that gives her confidence and opportunity to play managerial roles’;
- ‘Every organization should appreciate and respect woman’s role in PR.’

Implications for the Practice of Public Relations

This paper provides primary rich, qualitative analysis of the perspectives of educated PR women who are taking their professional training in public relations. The contribution of this paper is that it attempts to bridge the gap between public relations education and practice for the Bahraini women through studying their perceptions, expectations, stereotypes, roles and power relationships from a cultural angle. This research finds that women in Bahrain have achieved a higher percentage of education in public relations comparing to men and have equal opportunities to work in different public relations entities. However, there are several social and cultural challenges and conflicts that might impede women from playing management roles in the organizations.

Some findings of this research go along with the past Western literature that many women are standing against other women, which was described by Wrigley (2005) as ‘Queen Bee behaviors.’ Besides, there is a cultural and social stereotype of man to be wiser and better in taking decisions. Another challenge was the conflicts inside many women themselves between work and home which highlighted in other Western research (Pompper, 2012; Serini, Toth, Wright & Emig, 1997).

Another new conflict highlighted by this study is related to the cultural and religious background Bahraini women come from. This conflict is between women’s social traditions and expectations on one hand and the open nature of public relations on the other hand. Besides, sometimes woman becomes the enemy of herself because, on one hand as an educated woman, she believes that she should play a managerial role in the organization, but on the other hand, she limits her PR roles to communication tasks. This conflict

represents how the society perceives women's roles and how women unconsciously assigned themselves to the roles they are raised up to conduct. Besides, it is ironic that women who seek managerial roles are the same women who prefer to work with a male manager than a female manager. Therefore, although some scholars study the concept of power and gender (Place, 2012; Aldoory, Reber, Berger & Toth, 2008; O'Neil 2003; Aldoory & Toth, 2002), all these studies were western-based. The research finds that social culture is one of the key "power" influences when we study the experience of PR in a collective culture. Therefore, future research should highlight empowerment strategies for women in relation to their cultural context and social traditions.

Conclusion: Towards a Cultural Approach of Public Relations Theory

The experience of Bahrain has significant implications on our theoretical understanding of "power" in public relations literature as it looks to PR theory from a cultural angle. The researcher finds that the concept of "power" in Bahraini cultural context is derived not only from the "powerful" figures or rules inside the organization, but it comes also from the "power" of the cultural norms and expectations of the society. In such a collective culture, women can be judged by the way they wear or behave. The research reveals that the "unknown" others have a significant impact on the perceptions and attitudes of female PR practitioners in Bahrain. Therefore, we cannot separate the concepts of "power" and "stereotypes" from the concept of "culture" in such a collective society. A new theory of public relations should take a cultural approach to analyze the concept of "power" in Arabic collective societies. It is culture, social traditions and the way woman is raised up that affects women's organizational attitudes and behavior. One of the key theoretical implications is the need of cultural theory of public relations in the Arab context. As opposite to the Western individualist culture, Bahrain is a collective society where everyone interfere and judge the others based on the social norms including women. Therefore, women's perception of themselves is influenced by what the unknown "others" expect from them.

One of the key practical implications of this research is the importance of public relations education in such a collective culture to develop woman's ability to "choose" and develop her self-awareness of what she wants to achieve. Universities in non-Western cultures should teach modules of "PR & Culture" and encourage students to conduct critical research in this field. Modules of "PR & culture" should be included in the university curriculum to develop both men's and women's critical awareness of their stereotypes of their roles in public relations. Besides, practical workshops should be arranged at the university to train PR students to deal with various common cultural challenges and situations.

Furthermore, the findings of this research challenge the traditional stereotypes of women in the Arab cultural context. Women in this research are not "marginalized" or "discriminated" by the organization as women enjoyed equal education and workforce opportunities like man in Bahrain. In fact, it is the "power" of the collective nature of the Arab culture that guides women's stereotypes of themselves in public relations. We cannot separate the organizational power in Bahrain from the nature of the collective high-context Arab culture. People in this culture do not express what they think of each other explicitly in words, but they observe and judge each other all the time. Women's stereotypes of themselves cannot be separated from the social expectations of women in Bahraini society. The Bahraini culture encourages women's education and work in public jobs, but at the same time women have their internal rules set by social norms in such a collective society.

These social norms and rules are not told explicitly to women, but women are raised up to believe in. To solve this conflict, it is interesting that Bahraini educated women want the “others” to accept them as they are in order to make balance between their cultural traditions and working in public relations. Education has empowered Bahraini female PR practitioners, but at the same time Bahraini women has kept their own cultural identity. This study alters the Western stereotypes of Arab woman from being “weak” and “marginalized” to being a powerful key player of public relations in Bahrain.

As contrary to the traditional stereotypes of Arab woman as a “controlled creature” that needs to be “freed” from cultural traditions in order to be able to work in public jobs, the study revealed that educated PR women in public jobs in Bahrain want the “others” to respect them as they are in order to achieve what they want to achieve. The study shows that Bahraini educated PR woman wanted “the others” to accept her as she is: her style either with veil or without veil and her way of doing things in relation to her cultural context. The experience of Bahraini PR women is not a global copy of the Western PR woman. Bahraini woman does not have to take off her cultural norms to work in public relations as Bahraini culture facilitates the work of woman in public jobs and she has proved that educated woman could work in public jobs such as public relations and at the same time could keep her cultural identity. Female PR practitioners perceive their cultural values as part of their identity that they want the others to respect rather than something that they want to be “freed” from. Therefore, this paper contributes to our theoretical understanding of the experience of women in the non-western context of Bahrain. It enhances the need to develop a cultural theory of the practice of public relations in new cultural contexts in the world.

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