

Gender Identity: Omani College Students Negotiate Their Cultural Expectations

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Abstract : This study addresses issues of gender identity faced by female and male Omani students studying at educational higher institutions. The study interviewed 16 male and female students to understand how cultural expectations of gender influence these students' communication, and as a result how these students negotiate their gender identity to facilitate communication practices (or not) with the opposite sex. The context, focus, and theoretical underpinnings of the study are presented. Given that the researcher is also an Omani Arab, methodological and ethical challenges (e.g., recruiting and engaging with participants, and conducting semi-structured face-to-face interviews) will be discussed reflexively. The analysis found that students continued to following cultural expectations. They kept minimum interaction with the opposite sex that was illustrated by preferring to work with the same sex in group assignments only, avoiding sitting alone with the opposite sex, and not participating in academic activities. In the social context, the students started negotiating their gender identity and adopted communication practices that facilitated their social communication with the opposite sex. For example, they accepted to work with the opposite sex in different social mixed activities. In conclusion, students desired to maintain their cultural expectations but adopted certain communication practices to interact with the opposite sex.

Keywords : communication, cultural expectations, gender, identity, negotiation

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