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Title

Together we are not alone!

Raising Omani women's awareness of the gendered Social Media

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To my father, Ali Hamood Al Hajri

Rest in peace.

Abstract

Social Network Sites (SNSs) such as Instagram, Facebook, twitter, YouTube and many others became a very important part of our daily life. Not to mention, the amount of words that evolved as a result of overusing these sites: for instance, YouTuber, a registered word in Oxford dictionary which is being used to call a person who frequently uses YouTube - an evidence of how much time we spend in SNS. These sites are used for self-presentation and self-disclosure; a user can create a profile where different contents are being shared as well as communicating with other users. Particularly, in Oman - as well as in other Gulf Countries - the last five years witnessed a huge rise in using SNS. However, the way women exist in such spaces is constrained and limited. To understand why, I decided to investigate the relationship between these technologies and gender specifically in Oman society; since this relationship is mutable according to the society it is being constructed in. Therefore, there are two main questions that this research seeks to answer:

How do gender relations in Oman shape the Social Network Sites?

How is the individual usage of Social Network Sites in Oman reshaping the gender relations?

This analysis is grounded in technoscience feminism as a hybrid conceptualization that brings theories of gender and theories of technology together. And it focuses on a mutual shaping constructivist approach that emphasizes the coproduction of socially constructed technology alongside gender. Moreover, such an approach defines the technology neither optimistically nor pessimistically, but highlights both sides and tries to help women in realizing the utopian face of technology and encourages them to use that as empowerment. In-depth, semistructured online interviews have been conducted with ten Omani women, using Skype software application and voice recorder by Microsoft as tools to facilitate the procedure. Half of the interviewees are users, who are consciously or unconsciously submissive to the norms, of Social Network Sites; these interviews will help me to investigate the first research question, identifying the dystopian face of technology. While the other half are public figures who see the utopian face of technology and use it to inspire others and to make change in their lives.

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way, when I feel lost. Finally, my father, Ali, who one day told me something. And whenever I have doubts I close my eyes, and I can feel him whispering to me the same thing: “how brave you are”. I know you are so proud of me and I want to tell you, I love you. I miss you. And you are always in my heart and I will always be brave, I promise you. Thank you for being an extraordinary man in my life. May your soul rest in peace.

Writing my first thesis has been very challenging, I must say. I had no idea how to do it since I got used to work with machine writing codes and simple reports only. Honestly, I was amazed that at the end it has come alive, and I still don't know how it happened. Sometimes, I would spend days reading something that was totally not related and other days having no idea how to proceed, yet it is part of the process, I guess. And here I am writing the acknowledgment. Ooooh, I waited for this moment for a very long time! And I can say that I am so proud of myself. The whole journey, being out of my comfort zone for two years, in the challenging Lodz and then incredible Spain was a stunning experience that reshaped my personality in a tremendous way. As my teacher Dorota Golanska once said: “you are not going to be innocent anymore” after having done this program, and she was right! Now, I am not blind anymore to the system of patriarchy, which in the past I was not comfortable with although I could not explain why. Yet, things are now more clear, I know how it works. Definitely, I am not innocent anymore but for sure I am much more stronger.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

First of all, it might be good to provide an explanation of the title I am using for my thesis, *Together we are not alone: Raising Omani women's awareness of the gendered Social Media*, before giving a summary of its structure. The title is a reflection of the contents of the core chapter of my thesis. The first part, “Together we are not alone”, which is covered in chapter three, is inspired by the title of Sherry Turkle’s books, *Alone Together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*, but I used the opposite, *together we are not alone*. Being optimistic that if Omani women accept the differences in how each female uses Social Media without judging each other, then different Social Network Sites can form an empowerment to all women and lead to a change not only in the virtual environment but also in our daily life. While the second part, “Raising Omani women's awareness of the gendered Social Media”, emphasizes that technology is not value-free but is gendered based on specific context. The way technology is being used in a specific society is a reflection of the gender power relations which some women are blind to, in a degree that they even will define them as “normal”. As a result, investigating the way women use Social Media will raise the awareness of the social relations.

The structure of my research starts by providing a theoretical framework in chapter one that guides the thesis. In addition, it includes the methodology used and challenges. Also, in the introduction I will provide some statistics regarding women and technology in the Middle Eastern countries and in Oman specifically. Also, I find it necessary to clarify the concept of gender in the Omani context to give readers, especially those from Western countries, a background and a notion about the meaning of the term and whom it includes. It is important to know the cases this thesis covers. However, the purpose is not to ignore other cases but to make the research more focused and not very general; further studies and research might concentrate on the cases that I did not cover in this research.

In chapter two, I will analyze the different patterns of self-presentation of Omani women which are influenced by the specific context that they are living in. I will start by distinguishing different bodies: absent body, present body and fragmented body. After that, I will focus on the expression of emotions: how they are interpreted and understood, which emotions people avoid to reveal and which ones are accepted. In addition, I will investigate the connection between privacy concerns, self-disclosure and the context.

In chapter three, I will concentrate on the different forms of empowerment that can change the way Omani women are using the Social Network Sites. The purpose is not to deny that technology has two faces: one utopian and one dystopian. However, I will argue that the dystopian face is in itself utopian, in a sense that the Social Media raise the awareness of the way women use technology. Moreover, I mean to assert that what happens in the virtual environment does not stay in it, but also affects the real life – in a similar way as how real life shapes our usage of Social Media. At the end, I will provide a conclusion that summarizes the findings.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

1.1.1 The story

It all started 5 years ago when the Social Network Sites appeared in the society. One application after another was launched with different features. I remember that day, when I was in my second year in the university, my friends and I were gossiping about these Social Media and how much we should be careful with them. Especially with those touch phones technologies; without your intention any picture in your phone might be uploaded by mistake, if you are not setting a lock for your phone. Of course, you don't want to upload a picture that you take of yourself in your private atmosphere to be seen by everyone. Even though most of the people that we will add in our profile will be females, the question "how much do you trust them?" will always pop up in our minds. On the other hand, the few males added to our profile are certainly relatives such as fathers, brothers and cousins. Laughing loudly in the university corridor with my friends, we promised each other that each one of us will sign in and refresh her accounts on different Social Network Sites just to make sure that nothing had been uploaded by mistake. Not to mention the double check for any photo before uploading it into our profiles; making sure that even our reflected or shadow image does not appear in it. In addition, we should think twice about the thoughts, emotions and words shared in our profiles: never too personal, never too much. Even with all these features embedded in these network sites, we have always been limited to use them. And the main question to ask yourself before publishing anything is what are they going to think of me? A fear to be judged or misunderstood by others, something we do ourselves when seeing other people's profiles. Maybe, this is why we never use our real names; we always use nicknames so if we mess up with whatever

we have published, no one can know who is this female who broke the norms by publishing such things. A step back, as an apology for being who we are, is a must. On the other hand, males have more access to Social Network Sites; they never have the worries that we have regarding these sites. This is something that has started to annoy some females who as a result decided to break the roles; they challenge what they are allowed to share by uploading what they want to share. At the beginning they started by posting photos of unknown female bodies as a symbol to define the self. Lots of criticism and judgments were all over the space, but women defended themselves stating that if it is not their bodies, then there is nothing to complain about. Next, the situation evolved into sharing parts of a woman's own body without showing the face; the face was out of the frame. A recognition of the face is a recognition of the female herself which was critical and not accepted. In other words, not showing the face means detaching themselves from their body; no one can know to whom that body belongs with the absence of the face. To some extent, an acceptance and tolerance for such behaviors started to replace the anger that had invaded the community. However, recently a group of women appeared who dare to do things in their own way, not caring about the fingers that are being pointed at them. They are simply being themselves. Women who definitely would love to join the BITCH manifesto suggested by Joreen Freeman. They are Bitches, a name that no one of them will find offensive if they are being called that way simply for being themselves. For them, if being who they are has no definition except 'bitch', then let it be! Those women don't want to negotiate the space, but they want to have a room of their own. If they could not have a real room of their own, they can start by having a virtual room of their own (as Virginia Woolf called it). With the hope that starting in virtual space might change the real space they have. Nowadays, the three levels of using Social Network Sites that were highlighted earlier are still occupied by different Omani women. Some were able to move from one level to another, while other started from an advanced level depending on their context and their intersectionality.

1.1.2 Aim and research questions

This research aims to explore, investigate and understand relationships between Omani women and technology; especially the Social Network Sites such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. There are two main questions, the first one with a conceptual orientation and the second one with a practical orientation, to be investigated throughout this thesis. The questions are:

How do gender relations in Oman shape the Social Network Sites?

How is the individual usage of Social Network Sites in Oman reshaping gender relations?

Since a problem cannot be solved if it is not perceived as such in the first place, therefore by answering the first question I am aiming to make the problem with Social Network Sites visible in Omani society. After raising the consciousness, hopefully the society will be aware of the fact that the way the community uses the technology is never neutral but a reflection of the gender relations and the social structure. From an optimistic point of view, the individual usage of Social Network Sites may be considered as an action to empower women in terms of self-disclosure and self-representation.

My analysis is grounded in technoscience feminism that is, the mutual shaping of technology and gender. “Technology is conceptualized as both a source and consequence of gender relations” (Wajcman 2009, 1). Following a technology-as-culture approach will avoid both technology determinism and gender essentialism.

1.1.3 Technoscience feminism

Different stances to approach technology from feminist perspectives started to develop as a result of the segregation of women from science and technology (Gurumurthy 2004; Wajcman 2007 & 2009; Weber 2006). However, it is important to consider that these stances cannot be separated into different periods of times since they interconnect together. Each one helped to see the lack in the others and attempted to develop them and come up with a better approach. Also, some of them appeared in the same period of time but covered distinct types of technologies. Several years ago, Weber (2006) asserted that these fields were linked to the military which contributed to perceiving them as masculine culture. Consequently, women were not interested in participating in science and technology. However, while addressing other technologies, liberal feminists who demanded to have equal access to technologies as men raised the question “why so few?” Yet, the presence of women in science and technology was either very rare or neglected, not addressed and never taken seriously. Thus, compromises were made to become part of science and technology; the most important one was the forsaking of women’s femininity. The story continues: social and radical feminists where both focused on certain types of technologies. The Marxist approach that was

raised by social feminists focused on microelectronic technologies which appeared in the industrial revolution and capitalism. An anti-technology stance spread as a result of the fear for more segregation and exclusion of women due to men's domination over industry. Yet, both Marxist and liberal approaches failed to question the technology itself. That is to say, science and technology were perceived as neutral and value-free, when in fact they are imbued with male values, an issue that the eco-feminist approach highlighted. Moreover, radical feminists questioned the gendering of technology by focusing on reproductive technologies.

To take a critical stance, gender power relations are observed as embedded in objects and artefacts in a manner that serve men's interests, and seclude and isolate women. As a result, a need for technologies that are based on female values, not male values, was negotiated. Over the past two decades, a contemporary approach, called gendered approach, has evolved that aims to concentrate on the relationship between gender and technology, an approach which allowed people to choose their identities, and reduced the gap between both sexes in their relation with technologies, especially with digital technologies more than industrial technologies. Consequently, digital technologies blurred the body and the hierarchy which serves for women side who always suffered with mind discursion and always categorized below men.

In relation to this, different feminists state that artefacts and objects are defined as sociotechnical products (Faulkner 2001; Wajcman 2007&2009; Åsberg and Lykke 2010). According to Wajcman's definition, sociotechnical products are "a seamless web or network combining artefacts, people, organizations, cultural meanings and knowledge" (2009, 7). Therefore, they are neither merely technical nor merely social. And gender power relations have been embedded in them in different phases starting from the design and including their consumption and usage. However, the social meaning that is being attached to them depends on the interpretations and readings of the individuals who also interpret and perform the gender. The fact that both gender and technology are not fixed, but we make sense of them, gives a space and a capacity to always produce new meanings that empower women. Thus, there is co-construction between technology and gender; both are mutually shaped, which asserts that such an approach is against both technology determinism and gender essentialism. Such an orientation does not neglect the dystopia of technology but focuses on the utopia of technology and science. In the course of these decades, it is obvious that feminists have shown a capability and willingness to shift from

the demonization of technology to a consciousness that these technologies are neither totally patriarchal nor unambiguously liberating.

Furthermore, different names have been used to refer to the field, for instance feminist science studies, feminist cultural studies of science, feminist studies of science and technology, gender and science and feminist technoscience (Åsberg and Lykke 2010, 299). In this research, we will be using a technology-as-culture approach to focus on digital technologies in the consumption phase, specifically Social Network Sites. The investigation of how these technologies are being gendered in a way that they reflect the gender power relations of Oman society is the pessimistic part of the equation. On the other hand, optimistic investigation also shows how individuals' interpretations of gender in their ways of using Social Network Sites are reshaping and changing gender power relations, thus giving women more space for self-representation, self-disclosure and self-expression. We are using technoscience feminism as an approach; we use this specific name of the field to investigate the relationship between technology, science and gender in Oman society. As noted, the term binds technology and science using one word, technoscience, to challenge that there is no difference in both terms in the sense that both are not fully objective and not value-free. Previously, 'big' science referred to science theories, while the practical application of these theories is the 'applied' science: technologies. "There is no such thing as a pure and politically innocent 'basic' science that can be transformed into technological applications to be 'applied' in 'good' or 'bad' ways at a comfortable distance from the 'clean' hands of the researcher engaged in the former." (Åsberg and Lykke 2010, 299).

Thus, negotiating the objectivity of the science leads us to talk about the situated knowledge epistemology which is being used for this research and which suits the technoscience feminist approach that refuses to use the mainstream knowledge that separates itself from its application to hide its failing to detach the researcher who affects the objectivity. However, the researcher cannot be separated; self-reflexivity must be addressed (see the section My Relevance). In this case, the objectivity of the research does not apply to all women but only to 'the subjugated' women; this is called 'partial objectivity'. As a result, the produced knowledge cannot be generalized for the whole society and therefore it is hard to bring about political change, which is not our aim here. Our primary purpose is to make society, at least, aware of the effects of gender power relations in our usage of Social Network Sites and not to take it for granted – which is the predominant situation. If this aim is fulfilled, then seeing the problem is half the solution. In

addition, those who are challenging the norms of sharing via different Social Network Sites cannot be neglected as they can turn the tables. In contrast, future researches can be conducted for political changes.

1.1.4 Social Network Sites

“Social networking sites are applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other” (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, 63). From this definition, it is obvious that Social Network Sites allow, as basic and common features, the following: first, to create a personal profile, second, to connect with other users who are named as “friends”, “followers” or “contacts”, varying from one application to another, but all terms mean that those are connections, third, to view and exchange information with one’s own contacts. In addition, there might be exclusive features associated with each application (Ellison 2007). A variety of applications appeared in the past years, for instance Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and many others that keep appearing, not to mention the updates that occur in the already existing applications, so that new features are being provided in these platforms. In the Gulf region, in the past five years, there has been a huge increase in the percentage of the users of these Social Network Sites. These applications provide a space for self-presentation (Ellison 2007, 1143).

According to the report published in 2016 by Damian Radcliffe, *Social Media in the Middle East: The Story of 2015*, the usage of Social Network Sites increased rapidly after the Arab Spring. Facebook is considered as the most used social network site in the region, with 80 million users, WhatsApp is classified as the preferred application by 41% users in the region, while “Instagram usage had exploded among Arab Nationals, Northwestern University in Qatar revealed, growing from 6% of Internet users in 2013 to 28% in 2015, across their six nation study” (Radcliffe 2016 6). Snapchat as well rapidly grew from 3% to 12% in 2014. “Social Media aside, the 16 country Arab Youth Study revealed the ubiquitous nature of digital technology among this cohort: 82% of young Arabs use the web daily, 77% own a smartphone” (Ibid, 11). Specifically, Oman, with 2,101,302 citizens, is ranked as the fifth country in the Gulf according to the number of Social

Network Sites users, 68.8% of the population are engaged with the Internet (Reyae and Ahmed 2015). Facebook is the most used platform in Oman, followed by Twitter and then YouTube. Even though “Facebook has maintained the top spot for all the three years, but its market share is constantly declining from 89.89% in 2011 to 61.38% in 2012 and 52.79% in 2013. This is due to increase in the market share of Twitter from the mere 2.29 % in 2011 to 14.2% in 2012 and 39.39% in 2013. Facebook has lost almost 37% market share to Twitter since 2011” (Ibid 26). Obviously, the more new applications are being launched, the more it is expected that the previous ones decline. Most of the participants have different accounts but they state that they don’t use some of these applications – Facebook and Twitter, for instance – that much anymore. Now, they are more into Instagram and Snapchat, more recently developed applications. This is why in my interviews I considered, Twitter, Snapchat, Facebook, Blog and Instagram. However, in the analysis it is obvious that some are being highlighted more than others.

1.1.5 Omani Women and Technology

The table below, from the statistical book published in 2015 by the National Center for Statistics and Information of the Sultanate of Oman, provides a summary of the number of students who are studying Information technology specialization by institutions and gender in the year 2013/2014. Women constitute the highest percentage in the field, 68%. This percentage can be interpreted unlike what Judy Wajcman (1991) states in her book, *Feminism confronts Technology*, that Omani women do not seem to attach meanings and values to technology in a manner that makes it only associated with men. That is to say, Omani women do not define the ICT¹ sector as a male-dominated territory, and never feel the fear to be part of it. Also, “research has shown that those women who do enter ICTs excel at maths and science at school and also often come from single-sex schools” which explains the unexpected high percentage for women in technology (Kelan 2007). In other words, it seems that having only females in schools is empowering for Omani women in technology in terms that there are no male colleagues telling them that they are not good enough to engage in ICTs field. In addition, relating this percentage to the feminist question in technology, “why so few?”, it is obvious that the involvement of women in ICT sector, as educators, is not little, they constitute the majority. Yet, this percentage is not enough to decide

¹ ICTs stands for information and communication technologies.

the degree of inclusion of women in technology. We must also take into account the percentage of the employees in the field where it might be the case that the exclusion is in the workforce where women still constitute a very small percentage (Anita Gurumurthy 2004). However, this is hard to figure out since there is no statistics about the involvement of women in ICT field as workers. Including this percentage is important to have a clue about Omani women in relation to technology. Besides that, “the gendering of technologies can then be understood as not only shaped in design, but also shaped or reconfigured at the multiple points of consumption and use” (Gurumurthy 2004, 7). Therefore, I will be focusing in this research on women as consumers of technology, specifically using Social Network Sites. It seems that Omani women are not excluded as designers but perhaps as users. Exploring the divergent streams that women, including me, follow in using Social Network Sites make me curious to understand and investigate deeply how and why we are using SNS in a certain track. For sure, “there is a consensus among researchers that modern communication technology, the Internet in the first place, has opened a new era of communication and interaction among human beings, and indefinite availability of information and knowledge for users. On the other hand, there are fears of the negative effects: physical, psychological, social, cultural effects caused by the over excessive of the Internet” (El Osimy 2010, in Saleh & El-Rawas 2015, 56). Wajcman (1991) claims that the fact that technologies are gendered or mainly can be described as patriarchal technologies should not stop us from using them, nor from asking for technologies that match women’s value. However, we need to work from within, without having to make a totally new culture. The change is possible.

Table 1: Students studying Information Technology Specialization by institution and gender 2014/2013.

Institution	Grand Total		الإحصائي العام		Expatriate			Omani			المؤسسة		
	الإناث (%)	الجملة Total	إناث Female	ذكور Male	الإناث (%)	الجملة Total	إناث Female	ذكور Male	الإناث (%)	الجملة Total		إناث Female	ذكور Male
	No.				No.				No.				
- Sultan Qaboos University	33	673	224	449	50	10	5	5	33	663	219	444	- جامعة السلطان قابوس
- University & Private Colleges	70	8,487	5,912	2,575	48	164	78	86	70	8,323	5,834	2,489	- الجامعات والكليات الخاصة
- Colleges of Applied Sciences	76	2,188	1,672	516	32	19	6	13	77	2,169	1,666	503	- كليات العلوم التطبيقية
- Technical Colleges	66	4,269	2,809	1,460	-	-	-	-	66	4,269	2,809	1,460	- كليات التقنية
Total	68	15,617	10,617	5,000	46	193	89	104	68	15,424	10,528	4,896	الجملة

Source: Statistical Year Book, 2015: 502.

1.1.6 What do I mean by gender?

“To talk of gender is to talk about masculinity and femininity and the ways in which some things in our social worlds are taken to be masculine and some things feminine” (Adam 2005, 6). Adam asserts that gender is a discursive and constructed concept that leads to set norms and stereotypes attached to our sex, where sex can be defined as “the biological characteristics of maleness or femaleness” (Braidotti 2002, 289). We can match this with one of the three dimensions of gender theory by the feminist epistemologist Sandra Harding (1986, 1987, 1991), viz. gender essentialism: “social structures which relegate women and men to different social positions” (Van Zoonen 2002, 14). The second dimension is the “symbolic organization of society in which several dualities like nature/culture, private/public, leisure/work, coincide with female/male” which happens in parallel with a discourse (Ibid, 14). However, “individual identities and experience of what it means to be a woman or a man” as the third dimension of gender theory emphasizes the unnecessarily matching between sex and gender (Ibid, 14). That is to say, gender is interpreted; female biological attributes do not necessarily produce a feminine identity, and male biological attributes do not necessarily produce a masculine identity. Thus, the third dimension might contradict or optimistically negotiate with the first, leading to reconstructing the dualities attached to the sex. That is to say, “Gender being a multi-layered concept, it needs to be investigated on three levels” (Braidotti 2002, 287). Braidotti (2002, 288) emphasizes that “‘sex’/’gender’ figures in a given language has important ideological implications that need to be considered when dealing with these terms” Therefore, in the Omani context, it is important to acknowledge that what is being accepted as a norm is the affirmation of the Gender with the biological characteristics. Being a female or a male resonates respectively with femininity and masculinity; it resonates with the first dimension of the gender theory. Moreover, unexpected orientations can be summarized in the following three cases:

The first case is where a female is accepted to have masculine behavior as part of her identity with the condition that she emphasizes her biological origins. For instance, female driving a jeep wrangler four wheel car was prohibited and not accepted. Today lots of jeep wrangler’s drivers are women. The second case, a male showing a feminine behavior as part of his identity but still asserting his biological origins. For instance, a male putting more effort to take care of his looks by going to salons and consuming cosmetic products was totally feminine behavior, but nowadays, it is not a big issue anymore. In both cases, which resonate with the third dimension of gender theory, perform masculine or feminine behaviors opposite to their sex, as part of the identity, but

they are still accepted since such behaviors do not lead to denying the biological origins. Of course, the consequences cannot be avoided; they may diverge depending on the behavior itself. In other words, a very masculine attitude by a female results into more consequences and vice versa. A third case, rarely found or even acknowledged, where the gender identity denies the biological origins: a female who defines the self as a male and vice versa. However, in this thesis our focus will be on the first two cases which has no intention to ignore and marginalize the third case. In addition, I cannot discuss the third case, if society is still negotiating the first two cases. Hence, gradually discussion of gender issues must be taken into consideration.²

1.1.7 Erving Goffman's conceptual framework

In his book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1978) introduces a dramaturgical theory of the self and society. In this theory, social life in a given community resembles a theater where the flow of interactions construct a play. In this play, individuals are actors who are committed to certain behaviors, roles. Individuals are performing. However, when they are not being watched by an audience, that is, when they are backstage, they behave differently, being more themselves. Hence, they have more space to behave the way they are. However, once they are in the front stage, then the audience, others, can observe them. In other words, the stage where an individual is located affects the performance. Furthermore, the purpose of a performance is to give the actors the chance to give meaning to themselves. The audience receive information and make a meaning and impressions of an actor which confirms identity, impression management. According to Nushrat Tashmin, "impression management is a goal-directed conscious or unconscious process in which people attempt to influence the perceptions of other people about a person, object or event; they do so by regulating and controlling information in social interaction" (2016, 95). The performance of actors might be conscious or unconscious. The role that an actor performs is set in a social context. That is to say, what is allowed for a character in a certain social context might not be allowed in another context. "What is 'true', or what is 'false', or what is

² I must say that, bringing a lot of issues at once will result in confusing the whole idea. Therefore, we should keep in mind the level that the community is willing to listen to, discuss it and analyze it then evolve to the next level. Being an Omani who is part of the society, I am sure that it will not work to discuss gay and lesbian orientation, since it is against the Islamic religion in Oman. At the same time, I do not approve of these sexual orientations. However, we must bring it to the table and discuss it in a scientific way regardless of our religious believes. Hence, ignoring it will not bring any good to the society.

‘honest’ and what is a ‘lie’, are socially defined” (Tashmin, 94). Also there are defensive attributes and practices that the performers should follow to avoid any misrepresentation. Goffman gives three main dramaturgical practices that will minimize mistakes and incidents: loyalty, discipline and circumspection. Misrepresentations are being associated with any role that is not being socially defined and these will lead observers, the audience, to interrupt and try to correct the actor’s behaviors by following some protective practices. Yet, the actor’s reactions differ; he or she might be responsive to the audience or not. In addition, it is important to clarify that using Goffman’s theory I have highlighted the family as an important intermediate level that Goffman did not take into consideration. Yet, in the Omani context one’s own family cannot be neglected. Even though the family is part of the society, it should be distinguished from it. In other words, family tends to take different positions which impact the self, either to the side of the society or to the side of an individual. Also, neutrality of the family is possible but rarely happening.

1.1.8 My relevance

The situated knowledge affirms the importance of the position of the researcher that helps to deeply understand and analyze the participated cases in the research due to the similarities they share. As a researcher, I share the same context with the interviewees in terms of the common factors that all participants share: I am Omani and a user of Social Network Sites. In addition, I share similar experiences with the participants, in how we use and perceive Social Network Sites. Firstly, in telling the story of Omani women in Social Network Sites, at the beginning of the thesis, I was part of the narrative, something I did intentionally to confirm my situatedness with the multiple standpoints of Omani women through Social Network Sites. Secondly, being involved in the GEMMA Program for two years has changed me in the sense that, previously, experiencing such practices in my context was not questioned; instead, things were taken for granted: it is how it works and we cannot change it or do anything about it. That is to say, before, I had been part of these stereotypes, norms and practices connected to SNS, and I still am, and I did not like or sometimes I was angry for their existence in our society but I was never able to know the reasons of my anger. For me, the only explanation at that time for such an uncomfortable position I was in, and partly still am, is that it does not seem right. Now, I can relate these practices to the power relations that are associated with gender and other aspects that come with this power such as hierarchy, dichotomies: male/female, private/public, active/passive and majorities/minorities

which position women in the weak position and entitle men to have the superiority and the control over women; explanations that have to do with misogyny, patriarchy and other factors that gender studies explain and analyze. As a result, the anger and the dissatisfaction that I felt before is shifted for the desire to participate in finding solutions, or at least to make the problem obvious for the society. Thirdly, having a bachelor degree in Computer Science and the knowledge of the various phases which artefacts and objects go through, from the design phase to the consumption phase, helped me in connecting it to the relative literature in technoscience feminism. Hence, it enabled me to better understand and analyze the interdisciplinary fields: technology, science and Gender. In contrast, Doucet and Mauthner (2006, 41-42) argue that the reflexive position of the researcher has a direct link to the accountability of the produced knowledge in the sense that the authority of the knowledge producer may result in marginalizing others and focusing on the researcher's own subject position, something which occurs mainly in the phase of analyzing data. However, the multiple standpoints of the participants have a range of variety, and none of the interviewees does match with my subjectivity, different intersections uniquely form each case, with some common experience in between, which disprove the negative impact of my reflexivity on the produced knowledge. At the same time, we cannot deny that there will always be exclusion, unintentionally, even with different experiences and stories included. That is to say, using situated knowledge epistemology will produce partially objective knowledge that will work for some but not others. Therefore, stating my relevance is important in two opposite ways. On the one hand, it shows respect for those who perceive technology positively and never feel submissive in their engagement with technology. On the other hand, it serves as an apology towards all women who will not find themselves included and addressed in my thesis.

1.2 Methodology

The sources of information in my research are a non-participatory observations and in-depth, semistructured online interviews with nine Omani women who are using different Social Network Sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Blog and YouTube³. Before conducting the interviews,

³ “Non-participatory observations are only possible online, since we can only be present without being seen in online settings” (Svedmark 2016, 28). I had the chance to access different Omani female accounts and observe the contents they post which helped

an interview guide was prepared both in Arabic and English. Moreover, the process started by establishing pre-interview communication with all participants via email; a short description about the research was provided to them. The participants showed enthusiasm and excitement when they learned that such a research is being undertaken about Omani women. Not to mention, some of them welcomed the idea of covering such a subject, which will support and empower Omani women in Social Network Sites. As I, as a researcher, am momentarily living outside of Oman, as well as some women interviewees, the interviews were conducted using WhatsApp voice call and voice recorder. Half of the interviewees are Omani women who are public figures in Social Network Sites. For these public figures, Social Network Sites are part of their daily lives. Precisely, it is an extension of their real lives. Hence, they don't distinguish their existence in these sites from their real lives. On the other hand, the other half are ordinary Omani women who access these sites mainly to explore rather than as a way to express themselves in such networks. The interview questions were open and focused on the interviewees' views on women's usage of Social Network Sites in Oman. Why they are using them? In what ways? Why engagement in these virtual spaces are constrained and limited? And how are they participating in changing the way they are being used? Or oppositely, how are they participating in maintaining gender power relations in the community through such networks? Being Omani women and users of Social Network Sites are the common factors of all interviewees, young or old, abroad or living in Oman, urban or rural citizens, rich or poor, etcetera. Including multiple standpoints will serve to acquire a deep understanding of Omani women who relate to Social Network Sites. The first half will help to assess how individuals' usage of these sites is reshaping the gender relations. While the other half will help to find out how Social Network Sites are being gendered in the Sultanate of Oman. To avoid revealing identities of the participants and to protect them from any harm almost all names used for the interviewees are pseudonyms. Each participant chose her alternative name or a nickname. With two exceptions: the first one is Marwa, a software engineer whose identity is hard to hide since her achievements are the first of their kind. Besides, writing about these achievements as inspiration and empowerment for others could not be avoided. Not to mention, there are several websites that have articles about her accomplishments such as Times of Oman, Fast Company and Big Dream movement. Therefore, I have her permission to expose her real identity which she

me in setting specific questions for each interviewee, in addition to the guideline questions. Moreover, it helped me in investigating the comments and the kind of responses these cases are getting from their followers in different Social Network Sites.

approved. Another participant, Ghaniya, or as she likes to be called Ganoosh, asserts that it is not suitable for a person working as a media presenter to hide her identity nor her opinions. She also emphasizes she has no problem with others knowing her point of view.

One of the difficulties I faced in conducting the interviews is to contact with the participants and set time and a date that are suitable for both me and the interviewees. And that is mainly due to the time difference between Oman and Spain. Also, some of the participants are abroad. Besides, the number of the interviewees was supposed to be twelve, but I had to reduce it to nine females, because some women took a long time to answer my emails; hence, with the limited time I had to submit my thesis I had to reduce the number of interviews to only the nine females who replied to my emails and contacted me back. In addition, it was hard to manage the tools used to do the interviews. At the beginning, my intention was to use Skype as platform, as it provides its users with video call features that facilitate face-to-face interviews; it is more effective to see and listen at the same time to the participants rather than only listen to them. Yet, this application is blocked in Oman, so I had to replace it by doing only voice call interviews.

Chapter 2: Gender shaping Social Media

Considering three main levels, society, the family and the individual, helps to understand the concept of setting the limits in a certain context. It is significant to put in mind the order of these levels since it helps to understand the mechanism of applying rules, norms and stereotypes as well as neglecting them. First, the society, which encompasses the other levels; it may be assumed that all families are willing to follow what has already been set. Second, the family level, where the family and its members might contradict with the society. Thus, what is allowed and what is not is not anymore being set by the society but by the family unit. In that case, family members enjoy more freedom in terms of self-expression. Thus, a person aims to satisfy the family and mainly the parents, the rule-setters, more than satisfying the whole society. Yet, in some families rule-setting is not only associated with parental power but also with male agents (male power) as men are authorized in rules setting. A third level is an individual as the only authorized agent to define rules. Neither the family nor the society make barriers for an individual in terms of self-expression. However, parents could take a neutral or oppositional side but never force family members to follow certain practices. Optimistically, in some situations members might be able to change the opinion of the parents, regarding certain issues, to their side. With time, a big chance for change in the society as a whole is expected. In addition, it is important to clarify that a main factor, according to the cases studied, which contributes to the emergence of these three levels is the fact that either the parents or the family members had the chance to live for a period of time in different countries. Living abroad for a while, either to study or to work, gave the opportunity to reevaluate some norms, practices and stereotypes, and what had been taken for granted. Thus, the self becomes saturated, according to the notion introduced in the *Saturated Self* by Kenneth J. Gergen (1991), when the communication technologies make individuals become parts of each other (in Turkle 2011). Having knowledge of other cultures and relationships with different people from all around the world results in reconstructing the self and what is considered as a norm. To make it clear, I can explain the saturated self using my own experiences: living abroad for the last three years in Egypt, Poland and now Spain has changed me in a sense that what is considered as a norm became negotiated and I started to question things that I had taken for granted. Why did I start questioning things when I was abroad? Simply, because I was in a different context, where I was able to see things from a different angle. And this is due to the fact that the people I was surrounded

with were not sharing the same background as me. Therefore, we became part of each other. I realized that what is a norm for me is not the norm for others. Having this awareness, by its own, enriches your life since you become aware that the power that comes with the word “norm” is relative and empowered by us. Therefore, if we stop giving power to norms that do not make sense to us, then these norms will be less controlling. As Ghaniya states, lots of norms should be updated. Although this is so in reality, the situation is not much different in the virtual world. As a result, the bond that was based on the fear of the majority, whether the society as a whole or the family, was broken.

Knowing that “Social Media are interwoven with our daily lives and activities, as places we share and encounter ourselves and each other . . . with the world through our extended selves living through our personalized digital devices” makes it possible to apply dramaturgical theory online (Svedmark 2016, 4). In addition, different authors (Ellison 2007, Lerner 2010, Paliszkiwicz 2016, Tashmin 2016) emphasize the existence of online performing where “the user was at this time an expanding concept, moving from an organizational-oriented setting to a performing (human) subject living with technology through technology, by technology and of technology in everyday life” (Svedmark 2016, 23). I will link both the three levels (society, family and individuals defined earlier) and a dramaturgical theory to the Omani context and focus on the female performers; in the following section, I will introduce each interviewee in this thesis with a short profile. Also I will be investigating the three attributes, loyalty, discipline and prudence, as well as the protective practices followed by the Omani society, and their emergence to the Social Network Sites (Goffman 1978).

2.1 Interviewee profiles

Aisha:

Aisha is a member of the Omani Women’s football team, traveler and climber of Kilimanjaro Mountain. She spent several years of her life studying abroad, not only to get her bachelor degree from the Netherland, but she also studied at an American High school in the USA. Besides, both of her parents are master degree holders from the United Kingdom. Due to her experience as a football player she became a radio presenter in a football radio channel.

Alshaima:

Alshaima is a romantic poet and a lawyer. She was born and is still living in Muscat, the capital city. Alshaima's parent both studied abroad.

Atheer:

Atheer was born in the United Kingdom where her parents were working for a period of time. Atheer currently lives in Oman, she is married and a mother of one child. She is a chemical engineer and a master degree holder in Process Engineering. In addition, Atheer is a basketball player and a horse rider.

A.S.AIFalahi:

A bachelor software engineer who graduated from Higher College of Technology. Currently living abroad getting her master from the United Kingdom. Interested in photography. Originally not from the capital city, Muscat.

Ghaniya:

Or Ganoosh. A passionate girl, who did not wait for the opportunity but created her own, motivated by her love for the media. As I stated above (Methodology, see page 22) Ghaniya is not an adopted, but her real name. She is a brave woman, bold, with critical opinions, who does not fear to be a norm breaker. In her broadcasting online channel she discusses a lot of controversial topics in Oman.

KMH:

KMH is a fourth year student at Sultan Qaboos University, SQU, studying English literature and active in different societies at SQU. KMH is interested in reading: she uses a "to read" list, a list of books as part of her annual goals. In addition, in her private Instagram accounts she posts a lot of photos and videos taken by her, she is interested in photography and video editing.

Marwa:

The second interviewee using her real name (see page 21, above). A software engineer who graduated from Higher College of Technology. Working as smart application developer in Diwan of Royal Court. She is an influencer in the technology field who participated in different international events and changed the misconception about Arab women in Technology (see page 46, below). Recently, Marwa got married, and she is expecting her first child.

Moosha:

A second year student at the College of Art at Sultan Qaboos University. Moosha is originally from the countryside. Therefore, she travels almost on a weekly basis between her hometown and Muscat, where the university is located. Moosha has a humorous personality that can be observed in the contents she shares in Social Network Sites, especially her Snapchat account where it is more obvious.

Rayhanah:

An artist and a teacher who graduated from Sultan Qaboos University, College of Art. She finds herself in Conceptual Art which is based on an idea that helps to think out of the box and aims to positively change the society, as she defines it. Rayhanah participated in different exhibitions and presented some of her work, which aims to change the way society perceives women. She is living in Muscat but prefers the countryside life style. Her uneducated parents are her supporters, especially her mother, who only studied till the grade of five.

2.2 Dramaturgical loyalty

“It is apparent that if a team is to sustain the line it has taken, the team-mates must act as if they have accepted certain moral obligations” (Goffman 1978, 135). As illustrated by the next section, which introduces Moosha and her experience with Snapchat.

Moosha is a second year student at Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat, the capital city, who lives in a rural area and has to travel at weekends to visit her family. Moosha is addicted to Snapchat, which she considers as a platform to contact with her other school friends who did not join the same university she is studying in. With time, Moosha started to use Snapchat to discuss social issues that concern the students in the university in a humorous way. She asserts that discussing serious issues in a funny way is more effective, when you can make others laugh and more willing to consider your arguments, being so serious lead to resistance to the message you want to deliver. Lots of her friends compliment on her snapchats content. However, “It is a pity that the audience I can reach is limited. And this is due to the fact that I am a female”, she comments. Moosha does “accept minor parts with good grace and perform enthusiastically whenever, wherever, and for whomsoever the team as a whole chooses” (Goffman 1978, 135).

On the other hand, Moosha emphasizes that her family is more tolerant than the society, but still it would be crucial for the family to show a disagreement to the society. “If I show a desire to complete what I am doing without limiting my audience, I might be asked by my family to change my way or customize it that I will not have to physically show myself to the public”, she added. Goffman asserts that performers “must be taken in by their own performance to the degree that it is necessary to prevent them from sounding hollow and false to the audience” (Ibid, 135). Which is what Moosha’s family is trying to avoid, not to have a false behavior which the audience might observe.

On the other hand, it is hard to reach to the total loyalty. Therefore, a disloyalty by some family and their members is possible. In such situations, the family “offers each performer a place and a source of moral support regardless of whether or not he is successful in maintaining his front before the audience, to that degree it would seem that performers can protect themselves from doubt and guilt and practise any kind of deception” (Ibid, 136)

Alshaima has similar experience in using Social Network Sites. Her family have different point of view regarding some issues that do not necessarily meet the expectations of the audience, the society. Alshaima is privileged to post her own photos on Instagram as well as write poems basically about love, which both are questioned and negotiated issues. A woman's face should be out of the picture’s frame (a further explanation to the self and the body will be illustrated in the next chapters). Also, love is not appropriate to be expressed explicitly by women. Hence, it gives an impression that a woman has been through some relationships and has experienced love

previously. A zero experience to love should be shown, even if it is not the case, by a woman since a man would not desire to get marry to a woman who has previous experience in love. A woman who writes poems is a woman who has experienced love. A controversial hobby that Alshaima defines as part of her identity where her family provides her with solidarity and a space regardless of the society. Surprisingly, KMH is opposite to Alshaima, where her family allows her to have more space but KMH finds it very hard to do something against the society even if the family agrees; after all, the society is much bigger than the family. She asserts “self-disclosure must not be against the community we are living in” Turkle establishes a comparison with Bentham’s Panopticon: “The social philosopher Jeremy Bentham, best known for his espousal of utilitarianism, proposed a device called the Panopticon, which enabled a prison guard to see all prisoners without being seen. At any given moment, any one prisoner was perhaps being observed, perhaps not. Prisoners would have to assume they were being observed and would therefore behave according to the norms that the guard would impose. If watching, individuals learn to look at themselves through the eyes of the prison guard” (Turkle 2011, 247-248). Accordingly, it means that KMH feels that she is a prisoner, even if her family liberated her from this prison by giving her the permission to do what she desires, but she cannot ignore the existence of the audience (the prison guard). She looks at herself through the eyes of the society rather than of her family.

Furthermore, disloyalty might be directly condemned by the performers themselves. The teammate, the family, in that case is more likely to be against the family member, on the side of the society. Yet, the performer is strong enough to let the family change their opinion. The next section presents the story of Aisha.

Aisha is a radio presenter who got high school education from USA and Bachelor and Master's Degrees from the Netherlands. Aisha comments as following:

“Lots of things I do I had to fight for, not only the society but even my own family. Underestimations with what I can achieve as a woman and as a veiled woman had been always an issue! My grandfather had been always trying to convince me that I cannot do hiking especially with my veil which always will limit me to a certain tasks. I took it as a challenge to prove to him that I can do whatever I want in whatever I am wearing. Veil is never a limitation to anything.”

Aisha climbed Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa and the tallest freestanding mountain on earth. She added, “Now my grandfather collects all the magazines that had interviewed me, and shows them with pride to everyone. “ With laughter she said, “My grandfather now is to my side.” With a tone of victory she added, “I changed his mind.”

2.3 Dramaturgical discipline

“A performer who is disciplined, dramaturgically speaking, is someone who remembers his part and does not commit unmeant gestures or faux pas in performing it” (Goffman 1978, 137). Such a behavior is expected by families. In this case, a family is “ ‘presence of mind’ who can cover up on the spur of the moment for inappropriate behavior on the part of his team-mates” (Ibid, 137). Therefore, if any member of the family condemns such behavior, rapid intervention by other members must be made, as illustrated by the next section, which introduces Ghaniya.

Ghaniya is a bachelor degree holder in Tourism Marketing. In 2009, she started to present some kids shows on the TV and the radio which was accepted at the beginning by her family. However, growing older she realized that presenting in media is part of her, a thing that she wants to proceed as a career. Yet, her brother had other expectation for her where he wanted her to join to business sector. He could not accept his little sister, who is turning to be a woman, being talked about in public spheres. “What other people will say about us!” as he claimed, she commented. As a result, she missed a lot of opportunities since he refused all the offers she got. The unmeant gesture had been controlled.

Going back to Moosha’s case, who has been loyal to the society, unconsciously sometimes she applies discipline to any disloyal members. Thus, she posts some snapchats to critique other females’ behavior in the University. The humorous manner she is using is to let others willing to listen to it and to not be serious which will make people resist it. What Moosha is doing fits with Goffman's description of the discretion of the discipline performer who “will be prepared to offer a plausible reason for discounting the disruptive event, a joking manner to remove its importance, or deep apology and self-abasement to reinstate those held responsible for it”(Ibid, 137).

Furthermore, self-control and the suppression of the spontaneous feelings are two other features for the discipline performer (Ibid, 138). The next section introduces KMH, a fourth year

student in Sultan Qaboos University. An active student in different university groups and events. Blogging is one of the Social Network Sites that she is using. Yet, KMH does not let anyone have access to her blogs, she is the only one who can read them. She justifies such a behavior by assuring that the society we are living in is conservative. Not all ideas and beliefs should be shared. Lots of what she writes do not fit with the society context. “I have to write my emotions and thoughts to feel relief but I cannot share them with others.”

KMH is a very transparent person who considered as challenge for her to integrate with university groups. Lots of times she had to retreat from some groups since it is hard to be spontaneous, which might be misunderstood. However, “a better communication with other male agents by Social Network Sites facilitates the process”, she emphasized.

2.4 Dramaturgical circumspection

“Prudence must be exercised” (Goffman 1978, 139). A notion that has always been associated with the usage of Social Network Sites by following certain forms. As a result, most of the interviewees show their hesitation and fear to engage in these applications, directly after being launched. With A.S.AlFalahi exercising prudence, she commented:

“It takes me time to join Facebook once it is established. Because you need time to trust these applications. You need to hear about others’ experiences that might or might not encourage you to join. The possible benefits and consequences.”

After creating a profile in a certain platform, the circumspection actor will select and limit who can have access to the profile by setting the privacy. The existence of such feature in each application does not only serve as a controller of a user’s followers or friends, but also reflect the circumspection and prudence exercises that society has in real life. Moreover, society relies on such a user as a loyal and disciplined user. Thus, the integration of family members serve as a guarantee to perform as predicted. Different female participants use the argument that they don’t mind adding their parents and their brothers, privileged controller agents, in their accounts as an evidence to their loyalty. Hence, exclusion of one’s own family members is an indicator of the intention on their part to condemn disloyal behaviors.

Furthermore, the chosen audience will not contradict with the kind of the performance that is going to be held by a user in an attempt to avoid being detected as a disloyal performer or to avoid performing undesired performance (Goffman 1978). Which resonates with the Artist Rayhanah, who at the beginning of using Instagram was limiting her audience to only those with artistic background. In an attempt to avoid others who might misunderstand her art.

That is to say, being prudent performer has two sides, either to prove your loyalty or to detach yourself from practicing unwanted performance, disloyalty.

2.5 The body

To reach self-subjectivity is important to be able to express both body and mind. Yet, sharing photos of one's self online is always negotiated. And more than that is the exposing of the face, which is received as a crucial act.⁴ In addition, the images that are being shared in Social Media are not abstract. That is to say, they cannot be detached from the real user who is using the account. They are a way to find a space for self-subjectivity and present narratives which are being excluded and neglected (Ehlin 2015, 44). Therefore, this section is an attempt to explore the kind of experiences that Omani women have regarding images they post or they don't. Three main types, inspired by Eva Svedmark's work *Becoming Together and Apart (2016)* where she also distinguishes between different types of bodies in Social Network Sites, have been detected: the present body, the fragmented body and the absent body.⁵

2.5.1 The present body:

The present body represents the minority in Social Network Sites in Oman. Therefore, those who choose to be in this category are those who have to fight for it and definitely face some circumstances such as hate, irony, cursing and objectification. Similar to what Eva Svedmark

⁴ It is important to clarify that when I talk about exposing a face, I refer to the face of a veiled woman. In Oman there are two types of veiled women, first, women who wear the veil that basically covers their hair only but not their faces. Second type, which represents the minority, is women who are wearing different types of veil (i.e. called with different names, depending on the area it comes from and the part it covers, such as Niqab, Ghashwa or Burqa) which not only covers the hair but part of the face or all.

⁵ I must say that the types of bodies that I am discussing in this thesis are totally different to the types that Svedmark had developed. Yet, I find it very powerful and inspiring to group the bodies expressed on the Internet in different categories.

(2016) asserts, “at times the audience may turn against the sharer, becoming cold, ironic and/or hateful, creating a hostile atmosphere in order to do harm or expose the narrative as exaggerated or fake”(7). The comments that these females receive are an evidence of how hard it is to reveal their bodies. However, there are certain conditions that must be taken to reduce such circumstances. First, the occasion of sharing one’s own photo. People might respect and tolerate a female for posting her photo, achievement, business or professional photo, where she is physically in it. On the other hand, they don’t tolerate sharing spontaneous moments. For instance, posting a photo of a female in her graduation is valued higher than a selfie with friends in a trip that has no purpose or meaning as the audience might argue⁶. Hence, selfie is being interpreted implicitly as “look at me”, inappropriate behavior for a female. Second, the position of the displayed body must be from a distance in a way that does not show closely the appearance of a female.

On the other hand, there is group of females that don’t even consider these conditions. That is to say, when posting in Social Media, they show no hesitations or surrenders to the pressure received by others, by posting selfies, casual, professional and whatever kind of photos that express them.

Therefore, some females have concerns regarding the shared photos, which can be illustrated with the case of Ghaniya, a media presenter who exposes her body online, but critiques those who did as well but without a good reason to do it unlike her. She said, “When you don’t have something valuable to introduce then you start to overexpose your body” - which is being interpreted with sexual intentions. “It is the easiest and the fastest way to gain fame”, she added. Moreover, those females who condemn this attitude made it so hard for other women to ground their feet in Social Network Sites as respected agents. She disagrees with generalization of bad manners. “Bad and good manners should not be generalized but represent one person not a group”, she added. As a result, any female who is planning to use Social Media already puts in her mind there are certain prejudgments which make it necessary and strenuous to prove your subjectivity if you decide to expose both body and mind.

⁶ A selfie is a photo of oneself where she/he is at the same time the one holding the camera.

2.5.2 The absent body

Lots of female users detach the body from the mind. In other words, they exist on different Social Media platforms only as a mind but not as a body. The next section introduces KMH's experience regarding posting her own pictures on Instagram.

KMH is a reader who loves to read a lot of books and gives her feedback about them by posting a photo of a book with its review, for instance. Or, sometimes she just posts quotes from these books. After exploring her account, obviously her mind is present in her posts. Yet, you cannot find one picture where KMH is physically part of it. KMH's body is absent. However, there is a painting posted by her, that she has drawn herself, which shows a little girl with no face appearance. KMH, commented as following:

“This little girl is me, everything in her is beautiful, my mom always made sure that my hair is well combed. Never forgot to add a ribbon. Wearing a lovely dress. Everything is beautiful. But the little girl had to grow up. The older she gets the more her face appearance is disappearing”.

KMH thinks it is inappropriate in the society to make your body present, even on Instagram, it is there but not present.

In other cases, a female body is being replaced by other female bodies, which is accepted to some extent. These bodies could be related to celebrities or not, paintings of one's self or others. In addition, the replacement could be similar, in appearance, to the user, as being noticed by others, or not. Such replacements serve as a confirmation that a given user does exist.

Moreover, it cannot be ignored that we are living in a judgmental society. Some of the participants feel uncomfortable to be in Social Media where others are gazing at them. As a result they prefer to detach themselves as bodies and only exist as mind. In contrast, some cases are absent by choice. For instance, for A.S.AlFalahi, a photographer, who does not mind to be present as a body but “prefers to be the one who holds the camera not the one in the frame”.

In addition, in everyday life the majority of Omani women are not covering their faces, they only wear the veil that cover the hair but not the face. Such practice, of covering also the face, is associated with certain regions in Oman. Different regions have different traditions and customs, which explains why these women remove the face cover and only keep the hair covered when

shifting from their original areas to the urban area, such as the capital city Muscat, in order to study or work. Therefore, it makes sense, in terms that what had been already practised is also shifting to Social Network Sites, for those who also cover their faces to not do so in Social Network Sites. Contradictory, the majority who can show their faces in everyday life cannot show them in Social Network Sites, a limitation which contradicts everyday practice that is being justified using different arguments: First, everyday life activities are a one-day lasting, while everyday online posted activities on the Internet are forever lasting, timeless. A notion contradicts with Jakobsson (2006) who states that time does not matter anymore. Yet, this feature is negatively seen by Omani women. That is to say, whoever will see you on the street or in a mall or wherever you are during your day will have a limited time to see and notice your appearance. But a person exploring your profile, in any application you use, can retrieve all your photo, giving the privilege to see and concentrate on your appearance is considered as a violation to your privacy. Second, you cannot trust how others might use your photos. “Self-disclosed information on the Internet is therefore persistent, replicable, scalable, searchable and shareable” (Taddicken 2016, 250). Lots of the interviewees showed concerns of the usage of their photos since “it is possible for third parties to pass on personal information and, in doing so, transfer it into other contexts” (Ibid, 250).

Such concerns are a result of the consequences that other women had faced for using their photos in pornography, where a photo can be modified using different Photoshop programs and tools. Or, simply, a male user might use a photo of a female to threaten her by pretending that he got her pictures because she is in a relationship with him. Such claim will result in a conflict with her family, if these photos had been sent to them. This can be explained by what Mohammed Baobaid (2006) states about the Yemen context, which is similar to what we share, as the Gulf Countries, in terms of mentality regarding women in society: “men have the responsibility of protecting female members and the family as a whole. Women, on the other hand, are defined by their role as keepers of the family honour. Yet, while women represent the family's honour publicly, men exercise control over the content and definition of honour” (162). Accordingly, a woman is considered as a person who brought shame to the family and a punishment is certain. Obviously, at the beginning of the Social Media evolvement, the privilege to have the access to female photos was considered very private. Not everyone can have your photos, and if anyone does, it means that you know him/her on a personal level. If a male having your photos is a non-relative, it is a negotiated issue since it means that there is a relationship. Relationships between

opposite sexes, whether friendship or love, in Omani context is not explicit. They might exist but not openly talked about. Such stereotypes are a result of the traditions which describe a lot of activities, which are not associated with women, as “Aeeb”, which means improper. A term that, once being used, a female automatically will feel shame and hesitations, starting to question her attitude and mostly will lead her to stop a certain action. Similarly, “the husband and male relatives make decisions on what women may or may not do, and on what is deemed proper or improper” (Baobaid 2006, 162).

Marwa, a software engineer, asserts the following:

“Lots of activities did not exist in the past. Which cannot be defined as wrong but the fact that they did not exist before build some kind of resistance for them. And this is the case of Social Media applications and how we are allowed to use them. All what it takes is time to change our way of perceiving them. Which is already happening. If you compare between our usage of Social Network Sites now and eight years ago, you will be amazed how things have changed. What have been negotiated is now not a big deal anymore. All what we need is time.”

There are two factors that also need to be considered regarding bodies in Social Network Sites. First, the privacy settings cannot be avoided when talking about self-exposure, which tremendously affects whether a female is going to share her own photos with her followers.⁷ For some, it does not matter if your account is private or public, they will never share their photos. Where others are allowed to share them if they adjust the privacy settings in a way that assure that they only have trusted followers, while others don't mind to publish their photos regardless of who is following them. Second, the platform that is being used which determines to what degree you are present in Social Media. Thus, it might not be accepted to present your body on Instagram, but it is accepted to do so on Snapchat. The design of Snapchat justifies why women can express themselves more freely using it more than any other application. On Snapchat, users are capable to specify the period of time, maximum 10 seconds, that followers can see the onetime viewed direct snaps. Not to mention, followers can view a user's story only in 24 hours, after this period of time snaps are deleted. Furthermore, for each snap you can adjust who can see it.

⁷ I will discuss and clarify the concept of privacy in more detail later in this chapter / section 2.8

2.5.3 The fragmented body

Between the absent and the present bodies, there are the fragmented bodies, which belong to restricted females. Yet, these females neither accept what has already been set for them nor can cross the line. Therefore, parts of the body are being posted, such as hands or feet, except the face. In that way, the owner of the body cannot be recognized. Thus, a female cannot be known, but the existence of her body in the frame of the image, even if not as a whole, is a confirmation of her existence. Some of them follow such a way as a preface to reveal the photos of their bodies in Social Network Sites, a transition stage, a gradual preparation for their audience, either their family or the society. Accordingly, participants who currently exist in Social Network Sites not only as mind but also as bodies were previously presenting their bodies as fragments only, not as a whole. Some of them will be trapped in this stage but still define it as their way to challenge the existing norms, while those who were in this category and then become absent disappeared because their manner had been discovered by their family members, who are against it. Therefore, either their photos are going to disappear or their whole accounts.

2.6 Emotions

Expressing emotions in Social Network Sites is very negotiated and problematic. Some state that Social Media provide an opportunity for expressing emotions, while others find it very personal to express their emotions. The first group claims that it is much easier to write about your emotions rather than having to explain them to someone in a face-to-face conversation. Not to mention, they assert that people are busy with their own problems, even if they are close, they will not be willing to listen all the time and definitely will not be available whenever you need them, unlike these platforms that always there for you at any time. In addition, in an attempt to manage the impressions that others will make about you, sometimes writing your emotions down is for one's own self but not for sharing "where you can express the anger, love, annoyance or any feelings you are going through without being judged by others", according to KMH talking about her usage of Blogger. She sets the privacy that she is the only reader, and then she is free to write, which helps her to release certain feelings. "You can retrieve these blogs and judge yourself and your feelings and how did you change with time after going through some experiences." "Blog can be a very good friend", as described by Aisha. For the other group, different Social Media platforms

are being used in a very professional way with no expression of emotions. Both Ghaniya and Marwa serve as a good illustration for this group, where both show a very careful attitude in what they post on their Instagram accounts. They define their accounts as a curriculum vitae so it does not make sense to share emotions in their accounts. Moreover, Ghaniya will keep modifying already published posts between time and another as anyone does with their curriculum vitae. More specifically, love emotions are very problematic, since love feelings to the opposite sex are not being expressed explicitly. Revealing love emotions not necessary relates to the opposite sex but is always interpreted as such. As a result, a hesitation of sharing emotions is apparent by some of the interviewees. Therefore, an object should exist as a substitute to a lover, which will prevent the audience from misunderstanding what is being shared. Atheer, a horse rider, uses the horse as an object to write about love. Asserting that writing about love does not mean there is a lover. “But you have to justify yourself, and to avoid that, I use my horse as an alternative for the lover”, she added. Similarly, exploring Alshaima’s account on Instagram, the Poet, she uses the coffee in a lot of the pictures she published to write about love emotions. However, Alshaima at the same time denies the problematic of revealing love emotions, and confirms that she is able to write about love in her poems and post them on her account. At the same time, she emphasizes that she deleted some of her poems directly after posting them because she was afraid of others’ misconception. Then, using coffee as a substitute and her hesitance contradict with her ease in expressing love emotions, and are evidence of the problematic of sharing love emotions.

On the other hand, expressing emotions in general or love emotions in particular is not problematic for Aisha, who studied and lived abroad for a long period of time. Aisha states her awareness of this issue and emphasizes that it is a matter of time that obviously is changing. Now, many people openly speak about their emotions in Social Network Sites, more than when these sites were launched. Aisha started using a blog to talk about her emotions when she was studying abroad since it was hard for her to have daily talks with someone of her family members to share her experiences. Furthermore, she does not show any hesitation and will never delete something she already shared no matter what kind of comments she will get. Aisha has an account on Instagram where she writes some poems in English. Most of her followers and interactions are her friends from outside Oman, mainly English speakers. The context that she has lived in and her using of the English language give more space to Aisha to express her emotions. Yet, she asserts that if she had the skill to write in Arabic the way she writes in English then she would publish her

writing as well. Moreover, the degree of acceptance of revealing emotions is affected by different factors, such as age and marriage status. The older you are the more space you have: for example, a girl in school speaking about love would be received as very bold. Also, a married woman can speak about love since her husband is expected by her audience to be the meant one, she does not have to give justifications.

2.7 Protective practices

The audience usually are observers of a performance and they will follow certain protective practices, in a form of comments or direct messages, which are directed to those who are considered as norm-breakers. Users who have public accounts with sensitive information usually are the ones who face protective practices by their audience, who they might not know in person. The ambiguity of the audience's identity entitles them to have space and the right to correct others. While those who have a private account already limited their audience and only accept those who they know will not be against the content they share. Four out of five females of the interviewees who have a public account face a guiding audience. Where the last female did not face this kind of audience because she is very careful regarding the shared content, prudent. The rest of the participants, as observers, confirm the existence of such practices. Moreover, they assert the importance to have a very strong personality to be able to face such an audience which justifies as well why they set their accounts as private. Ghaniya, who is considered as a norm-breaker, emphasizes that "whatever I post is not private anymore and therefore I should be ready to face the audience's reactions to it, either positive or negative". In an event that Ghaniya participated in and shared in her account she got a very negative comment by one of her followers saying to her "your place is in the kitchen". Another example is Atheer in a photo where she was riding a horse; the photo was attacked by lots of men who were trying to correct her inappropriate behavior. Hence, horse riding is socially constructed to be classified as a male activity. In addition, the reactions to these protective practices differ from one person to another. "Some maybe irresponsive to audience's reactions while others actively respond to audience reactions in order to elicit positive results" (Tashmin 2016, 95). Therefore, in an attempt to change certain stereotypes some will respond to the negative comments they got. Yet, the more they face contradictions with their audience the more likely to become irresponsive to certain types of audience. The following is Alshaima's comment on her relationship with her audience:

“I feel that I reached to a level that I don’t care what others think. I am not going to explain myself to everyone. People will always look at you even if you are just walking on the street like there is something wrong with you. Most of the people will look at you with a judgmental look.”

Besides that, some claim that it is easier to handle the audience in Social Network Sites rather than in face-to-face conversation, they assert that lots of times they will not take seriously the offensive comments they get.

Again, the design of a certain application defines different ways to respond to others: for instance, blocking certain users, disabling the comments and direct messages using privacy setting or reporting as inappropriate. Furthermore, participants notice, that women try to correct other women’s behaviors as much as men are doing, if not more. Some of the participants claim that obviously the solidarity that we have to each other as women is very fragile. Aisha notices her female followers’ attitude towards her posts on Instagram. She is being perceived as an arrogant person who is not dressed properly and is always being asked to change her behavior to the ‘right’ one. She claims that this is due to the fear of a strong, independent woman. “Such a woman gives the society a notion that she is not obeying, which is true. Sometimes, I had to disobey my family to be the person I am today”, she added.

2.8 Self-disclosure and the privacy concern

In the previous section I explained how the stereotypes and norms in the society are embedded and embodied in relation to our usage of Social Network Sites. The different types of bodies and emotions are results of the gender essentialism that already defined the limits of each individual. In return, it affects privacy concerns. Having specific notions and norms that originally started in certain social contexts will shape the notion regarding what is considered as private or not. This may affect what we share and with whom we share it. “The level of personal information one is disclosing depends on the communication partners as well as the specific communication situation. Therefore, a social-situational perspective on self-disclosure has to be taken into account” (Taddicken 2014, 252). In other words, the self-discloser is determined by the privacy concerns which have been also shaped by the stereotypes and norms of a particular society, which this section will focus on. In this analysis I will concentrate on Instagram particularly and this is

because most of the participants in this research are more active recently on it. Facebook, Twitter, and Blog are less used by them or have almost become inactive, while Snapchat is being defined by the participants as very private, therefore it would be hard to investigate the degree of self-disclosure on it.

There are two dimensions that specify the degree of self-disclosure. First, the quality and the depth of the information being shared, whether it is basic or sensitive information. Information like gender, age and hobbies is considered as personal facts, while personal photos and feelings are more intimate forms of information. Second, the accessibility of this information that is adjusted by the privacy settings, either private or public. From these dimensions, four levels of self-disclosure evolve. This resonates with Teddicken's findings, "self-disclosure of personal facts, self-disclosure of sensitive information, self-disclosure with access to the public, and self-disclosure with access to specific groups" (Ibid, 251). Three of the covered cases represent the self-disclosure of sensitive information with access to a specific group. The profiles of these cases are private where they share their own photos and feelings. All the three cases are related to women who are originally from urban areas, which can be defined as more conservative. More credit is given to the surrounding environment and the traditions and customs than to the self. Therefore, the background they come from suits with the mechanism of self-disclosure they follow. One case fits with the self-disclosure of personal facts with access to the public. Two other cases match with the third type, self-disclosure of sensitive information to the public. In these two cases the sensitive information that is being shared is not defined as such. As Teddicken asserts "how sensitive information is perceived is a highly subjective assessment and varies from person to person" (Ibid, 251). This assessment is affected by the experiences each person has been through. Aisha, who lived and studied abroad, has different norms which go against the Omani context she is living in. Therefore, her face for her is not private and needs not to be disclosed, and also she is open in sharing her feelings. On the other hand, Ghaniya defines the privacy in a very different way. She states that the experiences which help in shaping her personality and make her stronger will always be shared to motivate others and empower them. Therefore, she speaks about what others define as private and intimate information in an open way.

In addition, there is a special type where other three cases are following from. I call this the two-account strategy, meaning that participants have two accounts; one is private and another is public. Each account has a different audience; certainly the private account is where only

trustworthy people are being added, mostly female and some male relatives. The private account provides more space for self-disclosure. No matter whether the account is private or public, in both cases it contains sensitive information. However, there are different degrees of sensitivity that the participants define. For instance, photos of one's own self can be found in both accounts, but the type of photos is different. More casual and personal photos are being posted in the private account while only professional photos in the public account. This again can be connected to the design of the application itself: Instagram is not designed to select the audience of each post, which could be one of the reasons that lead the users to follow the two account strategy.

Chapter 3: Social Media reshaping gender

3.1 Pushing boundaries

The fact that Social Network Sites are being used by some female users as a back stage where the audience is being treated as if they are imaginary, regardless if they are or not, helps in pushing the boundaries. That is to say, there are indirect benefits to challenging the norms of sharing online. The group which exists in the frontstage turns out to have more flexible roles to play. Hence, what was forbidden became negotiated, and what was negotiated became allowed. The space for a female in Social Network Sites has incredibly expanded, and continues to expand, in the past seven years. To clarify the situation, I will assume that a European female is travelling to the east where she is revealing parts of her body, which in Eastern culture is defined as inappropriate. Definitely, at the beginning she will notice that some are staring at her. She might feel annoyed, therefore she will most likely be irresponsive to them. With time she will either stop caring that there is someone staring or the people who are staring at her will get used to her, they will adapt and see her the way she is. Similarly, at the beginning the extraordinary cases are being perceived as bold, the context they are in does not represent them, from their audience's point of view. Sooner or later, they are being accepted. Alshaima asserts that a "couple of years ago, I might judge those who will post their own pictures. But now, not at all." A.S.AlFalahi also emphasizes that the response from the male agents in her family is changing as well, they interact more positively with the content she posts. Of course, the consequences cannot be ignored, but someone has to face the consequences to change the destiny of others. These brave women assign themselves this role. Some of them explicitly state that they are doing it not only for themselves but also for others. "At least some of the people [must] reach out through that screen and affect each other's lives" (Rheingold 1993, in Turkle 2011, 246). On the other hand, some confirm that they are doing it just for themselves. In both cases, it definitely changes the space of females in SNS. Moreover, it should be taken into consideration that the young generation influences the norms of sharing. "Young women in particular are orienting and experiencing themselves in relation to new media technologies, differently from previous generations" (Wajcman 2004, 75). For instance, they reveal their real names and their photos and show no fear to connect their real self with the virtual self. They are "becoming 'reflexive aware', taking responsibility for their own biographies and 'choosing' life-style and identity" (Ibid, 105). Unlike the older generation, who will always keep in mind the

social context. Thus, the young generation is stretching the online boundaries for the older generation. Other females, the restricted females, are beneficiaries of boundaries pushing in a sense that the contents they are sharing are being compared to the extreme cases where the chance for the contents they share to pass as normal is very high. That is to say, this comparison is what defines them as beneficiary. This fact is realized by different females who were, at the beginning, and some still are now, showing some resistance but now provide more solidarity. Furthermore, a reflection in everyday life is detected. Different participants emphasize that the Social Network Sites make it possible to acknowledge the achievements of women. For instance, at a political level, women have used Social Network Sites to establish a stable base for themselves before becoming a candidate in politics. As a result, people who are following them in their accounts already knew about those females' thoughts, beliefs and personalities, which makes them trustworthy. That is to say, more inclusion for females, not only in SNS but also in everyday life, is detected.

3.2 The logic of compensation and the logic of resistance

“The logic of compensation suggests that the goal of virtual experience is to feel better, the logic of resistance suggests that it is political empowerment” (Turkle 2011, 242). All the same, performing leads the virtual experience of many users, but definitely performing in Social Network Sites is much easier than in everyday life. Not being present physically in Social Network Sites makes it possible to skip the consequences that might emerge of a particular performance. This fact results in making different users engage online even more than in face-to-face conversation.

To ignore the fact that they cannot do certain things in reality, they escape to virtuality which makes it possible. This can justify the attitude of lots of individuals who are not “mentally present” in the moment, even with some people surrounding them, because they are busy sharing the moment with their audience in different Social Network Sites that they are involved in. The likes and comments a person can get online make the person feel valuable, appreciated and worthy. Self-subjectivity is more expressed and present online they compensate what has been lost in their real life. On the other hand, some show a desire to not use the Social Network Sites as a substitute for what they don't have in their life. Thus, they follow the second logic: the logic of resistance. Their aim is to make political change. The resistance is very clear by a group of participants who

were asked if they preferred to use Social Network Sites that guarantee the separation of females from males since sex-separated platforms might provide them more empowerment in terms of self-presentation.

There were some responses that described such empowerment as a negative empowerment. Negative in a sense that this kind of empowerment will be unrecognized, it is an illusion. For example, Ghaniya says, “I don’t prefer the segregation of both sex in SNSs because even if we are separated in the virtual environment, we are not in the reality.” She adds, “if we aim to make a change, we need both women and men to be part of SNSs.” It is important to take into consideration the degree of resistance. Mostly, all the interviewees claim that it is preferred not to apply resistance explicitly which will result also in a reverse resistance by the audience leading to nothing but a situation of loss: probably, more exclusion for females who condemn such a behavior. Similarly, Aisha shares the same point of view as Ghaniya when she confirms that “at the end of the day, you will clash with the patriarchy of the society that you were trying to avoid.” On the other hand, some defined such sex separated platforms as empowerment. Obviously, the first group distinguishes between reality and virtuality. However, the second group considers both as reality. “People are doing the best that they can from their own level of consciousness” (Chopra 2008, 309).

3.3 Virtuality as transitional space

Therefore, regardless of the followed logic, it forms an empowerment to each group to a certain extent, because, with time, the way a person uses a virtual space positively reflects, if not consciously then unconsciously, in their experience towards their reality. Therefore, virtuality can be perceived as a transitional space. In her book, *Life on Screen*, Sherry Turkle comments the following:

Virtuality need not be a prison. It can be the raft, the ladder, the transitional space, the moratorium, that is discarded after reaching greater freedom. We don’t have to reject life on the screen, but we don’t have to treat it as an alternative life either. We can use it as a space for growth. Having literally written our online personae into existence, we are in a position to be more aware of what we project into everyday life. (2011, 263)

The power of Social Network Sites lies in seeing it as a transitional space which is already happening in the Omani context. The norms of sharing have dramatically changed in the last seven years. A greater freedom is already detected. Virtuality is an extension for reality, and reality is reshaped by virtuality. Parts of each individual are more obvious in reality and other parts are more obvious in virtuality. Such awareness will result in combining the many selves each individual has. In return, a better understanding and expression of the self is more likely to succeed. Virtual space might results in personal transformation (Turkle 2011). An evidence to the personal transformation is detected by a group of participants themselves who make sure between time and another to retrieve their oldest posts and compare how much they have positively changed. Such action is empowering for a lot of them where they consider their profiles as a recorder for their achievements and a motivation for much more. Also, being aware that the virtual environment is not only a transitional space, but it also accelerates the process to make a change. That is to say, what takes long period of time to change in reality, takes less in virtuality and this is because the change is tangible and can be observed, unlike in reality, where a female might think that she is alone in this battle, which might discourage her to be resistant to some practices in the first place.

3.4 Empowerment in networking:

‘Network’, the middle term of SNS illustrates that the power gained from these sites lies in the fact that they provide a user with networks with different people who might change a person’s life and help her/him to make lots of achievements in her/his life. “Online SNSs support both the maintenance of existing social ties and the formation of new connections” (Ellison 2007, 1144). Marwa, a twenty-seven year-old software engineer, realized this fact and used it the best she could to add lots of experiences to her life. Marwa claims the following:

“Facebook gathers all categories; females and males, professors and experts where you can contact them and learn from them. It is about networking. I got a lot of invitations on Facebook to participate in different computing and technology events and competitions for free.”

It all started by participating with two other female colleagues in Microsoft Imagine Cup in Russia in 2013, after winning the first place out of 400 participants at a country level. Even though Marwa’s team did not win in the competition, which included 300 students from 71 nations, the

gain was much more significant than the cup. They were able to change the misconception about Arab women. Marwa was surprised that many people have stereotypes about Arab women as subordinated and handicapped. Not to mention, being there as females who are skilled in the technology field was an evidence that a lot are wrong about Arab women. As a result, Marwa's team was interviewed by Fast Company magazine⁸ to share their experience. Moreover, Marwa was part of the Big Dream documentary film, which follows the story of seven women in STEM⁹ field. The purpose is to encourage women to be part of the field. Furthermore, Marwa, with her female colleague, were the first to attend Grace Hopper's Celebration of Women in Computing, the world's largest gathering for women technologists. And in 2014, she was awarded with Almar'a Excellence award in technology. Marwa adds: "Most of my achievements were not going to be possible in this small period of time without being part of SNS."

3.5 Empowerment in creating your own opportunity:

"I promised to make my own opportunity rather than searching for one", this is what Ghaniya wrote as a caption in a picture that she posted on Instagram. She talks about how hard it was for her to build a career in the media, where she was interviewed many times and never accepted. Therefore, she established her own online broadcasting channel which was very successful. In her channel she discusses a lot of issues which includes gender essentialism, stereotypes and general issues that specifically concern Omani citizens. This was very hard to realize in real life so Ghaniya thought to start everything in a virtual place, and that was extended to the real life. Ghaniya uses her accounts in different platforms to advertise her channel where she is capable to make others see her achievements and to prove her competence. She proudly says: "now, rather than looking for opportunity, the opportunity looks for me." This is not only one female story, definitely there are lots of women who were lost in real life and they are starting to have a future in different fields they are good at using online spaces. For instance, in reality to establish your own business you need a physical place to display your products. Yet, in virtuality, all you need is

⁸ "Fast Company is the world's leading progressive business media brand, with a unique editorial focus on innovation in technology, leadership, world changing ideas, and design" (<https://www.fastcompany.com/about-us>).

⁹ STEM is an acronym for the fields of science, technology, engineering and math.

to create an account where your account is your shop, no physical place is needed and lots of money is being saved. Social Network Sites provide a financial support for lots of females.

3.6 Empowerment in solidarity:

The reasons why male culture is gaining superiority are illustrated by Michael Kimmel (2008) in his book *GuyLand*, where he defines three cultures -- culture of entitlement, culture of silence, and culture of protection -- where males provide solidarity to each other. These cultures could be the key if women apply them to their side. However, it is hard to apply the first culture to women's side since it is hard to convince females, regardless of their context that they are entitled to do what they want; women in general are made to believe that men are superior. Yet, it is possible to establish a similar solidarity with respect to the other two cultures: culture of silence and culture of protection. Culture of silence refers to implicit solidarity, while the culture of protection is explicit solidarity. I mentioned earlier that the solidarity between women is fragile and this is because those who cannot be explicitly supporting fail to be implicitly supporting by keeping silent. Yet, keeping silent is the minimum level of solidarity for those who were capable to be themselves and to break the norms. In contrast, those females who attack other females are applying the culture of entitlement, but not to their side but to the male side where they entitle them to define not only for themselves but for all women. Therefore, solidarity lies first in stopping to entitle males to decide on females' behalf. And second, in supporting other women, if not explicitly then implicitly. In previous sections I mentioned that the solidarity between females is fragile, according to the experiences of some participants, where some tend to judge each other and discourage the chance for a female to make her own choices regarding expression of the self. On the other hand, other participants confirm that we can achieve what we want, if only women support each other. KMH, for example, dedicates her account to post positive quotes between time and another believing that there might be a woman behind the screen who needs some support. She says: "These words can influence and support others".

Conclusion

At the beginning of this conclusion, I want to state that my thesis is an extension of the work which already started two decades ago by different feminists in the west. Yet, a limited research has been in the Eastern context, this is why I call it an extension. And since the context is different, it definitely will yield different results. Therefore, what the feminists have already started must be examined in the Eastern context. Besides, I have chosen this topic because I am curious to know, as an Omani female and a user of Social Media, the common factors that I share with the participants in this thesis, the kind of experiences of Omani women with Social Media. Do we share some similarities? And to what extent do our experiences differ? How much awareness do Omani women have of the fact that technology is gendered and not value-neutral? And if there is any awareness, is it positive or negative in the way it is being used? In addition, how does this change not only in the virtual environment but also in real life and our daily practices. Moreover, I am not innocent any more, as I mentioned in my acknowledgment, and I hope that other Omani women will become the same. Yes, it may sound bad not to be innocent and I will not say the opposite because it is, in a sense that it will make a lot of Omani women question many things that were defined as a norm, the same thing it did to me, at the beginning of my master program. To be honest, it might make an Omani woman, feel angry and feel like she hits a wall. However, I assure that the anger can pass and change into a positive reaction. This hope is my motive to conduct this research.

Therefore, the first chapter of my research mainly focused on two main research questions to answer all these questions in my mind. Both research questions investigate the mutual shaping, which was dealt with in chapter two and three, of gender and technology in the Omani context based on theoretical and methodological approaches. My aim is to analyze the interaction between technoscience, subjectivity and social structure in the Omani context. Thus, I used a technofeminism framework in parallel with Erving Goffman's conceptual framework to investigate the coproduction of technology and gender in terms of self presentation. Moreover, I have developed a qualitative research based on interviews with nine Omani women. As a researcher, I have chosen as factors that the interviewees should have in common: that they were Omani women as well as users of different Social Media platforms. Yet, the participants have lots of diversities such as: students/workers, married/ single, urban/rural, living in Oman/abroad. Yet,

it is important to state that we cannot generalize the results to all Omani women, similar research can be conducted with different participants and lead to different results. However, they do not only represent these nine women either; a lot of women can identify their situation as similar to that of the participants in this thesis.

In the second chapter, I proposed an analysis of the self-presentation that the women interviewed follow to present themselves in different Social Media; this analysis was inspired by Erving Goffman's conceptual framework. I have argued that self-presentation is likened to theater where the self is guided by gender essentialism that the Omani social structure already defined. Hence, the self is not free to be expressed but bonded to certain roles which are reflected in Social Media. The roles are hard to escape from, which explains the emergence of these roles in the virtual environment. Thus, digital technology is not value-free but a reflection of a specific context. However, once someone does escape from them, which commonly happens by those who do not confirm to the notion of gender essentialism, it results in changing the kind of tasks and roles each individual can perform. Following the testimonies of the participants, I have identified specific patterns regarding expressing the female body and emotions. There are three categories for female body in Social Media: the absent body, the present body and the fragmented body. On the other hand, there are no specific categories for expressing emotions. Some find the Social Media is a better space to express their emotions while others prefer to hide their emotions. Yet, the most problematic feeling to be revealed is the emotion of love towards the opposite sex. Age and whether a woman is married or not affect how others perceive and accept it. In some cases, using a substitute might give more space for expressing love and be tolerated by the audience. In addition, I have also focused on the audience as a controller of women's behavior in different Social Media applications by highlighting the protective practices that the audience follow and the responses of a woman to such practices. I also highlighted the privacy concerns and how they are affected by the context which in return shape the degree of self-disclosure. In short, chapter two attempted to explain the non-neutrality of technology, and how it forms a reflection of gender power relations, which most interviewees affirm, in the Omani context.

Moreover, following the participants' explanations, I identified three levels of awareness. First, those who are 'blind' (no awareness); they defined a lot of practices as normal because they were told so. Although there are specific groups which are blind to the system, they are uncomfortable or angry with it, as they wouldn't know why. Simply because they are not aware

that such a system exists. Second, there are those who are not blind and they know that it is a patriarchal system but they keep silent (negative awareness). In other words, some are submissive to the system. Yet, it makes them angry. Third, there are feminists, few but they are on the increase, who are not blind and want to make a change (positive awareness). In the process to know the level of awareness, this thesis contributes to raising the awareness, by asking the interviewees different questions that had never come to their minds. Raising the issue leads to reveal the mask of the gender power relations and makes the patriarchal system obvious.

As we have seen in the third chapter, some Omani women defined Social Network Sites as an empowerment. The empowerment lies in the variety that exists in Social Network Sites, in a sense that the content published by different female users is seen by a huge audience which makes it possible and easier to push already defined boundaries. The self can observe different and varied other selves which encourages the self-presentation. Hence, the greater the difference that is being observed by society, the more this society becomes tolerant and accepting to different selves that do not necessarily fit into the 'norm'. In addition, I argued that no matter the logic, compensation or resistance which I defined as passive and active respectively, that is being followed by women in obtaining self-subjectivity, both are empowerment, in a sense that it gives more space for the self-presentation regardless of the level of awareness these women have. Moreover, I have claimed that virtual space is a transitional space which cannot be separated from real life and here lies its power. In other words, the gender can be reproduced by Social Network Sites. By creating one's own opportunity, networking also contributes to some of the empowerment that Social Media provides to its users. I end the chapter by emphasizing the importance of the solidarity women should provide to each other. And being aware that this does not have to be an individual battle but a battle based on solidarity among all Omani women.

In this sense, I hope that I contributed to addressing the mutual shaping of technology and gender in the Omani context. I attempted to be neither very optimistic nor too pessimistic while investigating the coproduction of gender and technology. Yet, I really find highlighting the pessimistic face in itself optimistic since it makes the system obvious and raises the awareness of Omani women; that is the first step to make a change. To give a voice to the unheard, silenced stories. To speak about the unspoken things. And thus, optimistically, we can make change.

Well, it seems that this thesis has come to an end. Yet, this is not the end, it is just the beginning for Omani women to start making a change. Because “to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from” (Sarker 2000, 154).

So, here we go...

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