



**FIVE CASE STUDIES OF EMIRATI  
WORKING WOMEN IN DUBAI – THEIR  
PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AND  
INSIGHTS**

**A Dissertation submitted by**

**Monica Gallant, B.Comm., C.A., M. Ed. Tech.**

**In partial fulfillment of the award of**

**Doctor of Education**

**Faculty of Education, University of Southern Queensland**

**April 2006**

## *Abstract*

This ethnographic case study explored the insights and experiences of a small selection of working graduates from Dubai Women's College. Based on a literature review and a preliminary study, the following themes were identified and employed as stimuli for discussion: the balance between work and family responsibilities, gender issues in the workplace, issues of power relationships for women, coping with restrictions in an Arabic Islamic environment, reasons for work, and sources of influence and satisfaction. The research utilized feminist post-structural theory to collect the data and then analyze and interpret the comments made by the women. Self-reflexivity and transparency of the positionality of the researcher were critical in this research that relied on an unstructured personal interview approach. The research resulted in a rich description of the thoughts and concerns of five diverse women. Through discourse analysis, the dominant socio-cultural discourses in the areas of gender, marriage, kinship, ethnicity, meritocracy, materialism and religion that women interact with in this cultural environment were identified. The extent to which the women take up, disrupt and challenge these discourses was also explored with a view to suggest ways to 'better' women's lives. Implications of this study include an agenda for increased emancipation of women by greater freedom of choice through self awareness and the development of potential strategies to support empowerment.

## **CERTIFICATION OF DISSERTATION**

I certify that the ideas, results, analyses and conclusions reported in this dissertation are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Candidate

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### ENDORSEMENT

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## *Acknowledgements*

I would like to thank the administrators of Dubai Women's College who approved the use of their graduates and for the faculty members who recommended such excellent participants. Of course, my deepest gratitude extends to the participants themselves who so willingly shared their time and experiences with me despite their extremely busy lives. This study would not have been possible without their generous and genuine contributions.

I would also like to thank my academic supervisors and my family for their unflagging support throughout my studies.

# Contents

<b>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY .....	1
1.2 CONTEXT OF THE THESIS: BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT DUBAI AND DUBAI WOMEN’S COLLEGE.....	8
1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	12
1.4 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS .....	13
<b>CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1 GENDER .....	15
2.2 MARRIAGE .....	22
2.3 KINSHIP.....	24
2.4 LEADERSHIP, MERITOCRACY AND INDIVIDUALISM .....	26
2.5 RELIGION .....	29
2.6 EMPLOYMENT .....	32
2.6.1 Legislation facilities and attitudes.....	32
2.6.2 Education and skill .....	34
2.6.3 Recognition of Need.....	35
2.7 FEMINISM.....	39
<b>CHAPTER 3 THE RESEARCH PROCESS .....</b>	<b>47</b>
3.1 PRELIMINARY STUDY .....	49
3.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	50
3.2.1 Feminism and Emancipation .....	50
3.3.2 Poststructuralist theory .....	52
3.3 METHODOLOGY.....	55
3.3.1 Case Study Ethnographic Approach.....	55
3.3.2 Selection of Participants.....	56
3.3.3 Position of the Researcher.....	57
3.4 DATA COLLECTION .....	61
3.5 DATA AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS.....	63
3. 6 INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS .....	67
3.6.1 Alia .....	68
3.6.2 Amna.....	68
3.6.3 Fatma.....	69
3.6.4 Laila.....	70
3.6.5 Nada .....	71
<b>CHAPTER 4 THE RESEARCH STORY .....</b>	<b>73</b>
4.1 ALIA’S STORY .....	74

4.2 AMNA’S STORY .....	81
4.3 FATMA’S STORY .....	89
4.4 LAILA’S STORY .....	99
4.5 NADA’S STORY .....	106
<b>CHAPTER 5 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION .....</b>	<b>116</b>
SECTION 5.1 KEY DISCOURSES .....	116
5.1.1 Gender discourses .....	116
5.1.2. Marriage discourses .....	121
5.1.3. Kinship and ethnicity .....	129
5.1.4. Meritocracy and individualism .....	134
5.1.5. Materialism .....	137
5.1.6. Religious discourses .....	140
SECTION 5.2 INTERACTION WITH DISCOURSES .....	143
5.2.1 Alia .....	144
5.2.2 Amna .....	146
5.2.3 Fatma .....	147
5.2.4 Laila .....	149
5.2.5 Nada .....	151
<b>CHAPTER 6 IMPLICATIONS .....</b>	<b>156</b>
6.1 FOR WORKING WOMEN .....	157
6.2 FOR FEMALE JOB SEEKERS .....	163
6.3 FOR EDUCATORS IN GENERAL AND THE COLLEGE IN PARTICULAR .....	165
6.4 FOR POLICY MAKERS AND EMPLOYERS .....	171
6.5 FOR THE RESEARCH COMMUNITY .....	176
<b>LIST OF REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>178</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY .....</b>	<b>190</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....</b>	<b>191</b>